GOD & MAN IN SALVATION

Calvinism, Arminianism, and the Five Points

paper by

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JOHN CALVIN a preeminent theologian of the 16th-century Reformation, taught and pastored in protestant Geneva, Switzerland. A highly respected preacher of the Word, Calvin is best remembered for compiling reformed doctrine into a series of books: *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1536).


John Calvin (1509-1564)

Calvin's *Institutes* circulated throughout Europe and were quickly recognized as the definitive work on Reformation theology. The *Institutes* explained the reformed doctrines of the church, the sacraments, salvation, the Godhead, Scripture, and numerous other heads of Christian teaching. Because Calvin's *Institutes* proved to be the most comprehensive collection of reformed doctrine, reformed theology commonly came to be known as *Calvinism*.

One of the young men Calvin discipled at Geneva was Theodore Beza. Beza carried on the ministry in Geneva after Calvin died, and he continued to train pastors and teachers in theology. One of those Beza trained was a Dutch student named James (or Jacobus) Arminius.

JAMES ARMINIUS was a promising young theologian whose "life and learning both," wrote Beza, "have so approved themselves to us, that we hope the best of him in every respect.…"[1] After completing his training in Geneva, Arminius distinguished himself as a pastor and later a professor at the University of Leiden, Holland.
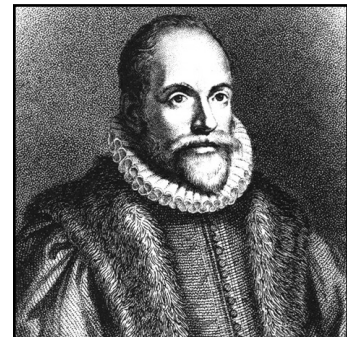
James Arminius (1560-1609)

Throughout his life, Arminius viewed himself as a reformed theologian. He leaned heavily on Calvin's writings in his classes. "I exhort [my students]," he wrote in a letter, "to read the Commentaries of Calvin.… For I tell them, that he is incomparable in the interpretation of Scripture; and that his Commentaries ought to be held in greater estimation, than all that is delivered to us in the writings of the Ancient Christian Fathers."[2] Considering the scope of theology articulated by Calvin, Arminius counted himself a Calvinist — with but a few, provocative exceptions.

Arminius believed there were a few, serious points of error within reformed theology, particularly in the doctrine of salvation. Arminius began to teach his divergent views in his Leiden University classroom. By the end of his life, Arminius' teachings were being debated throughout Holland. After the Leiden professor's death in 1609, his students organized Arminius' teachings on salvation into a system addressing the following five points:

1. The Depravity of the Sinner
2. The Election of the Father
3. The Atonement of Christ
4. The Grace of the Spirit
5. The Perseverance of the Saint

Arminius' students published their understanding on these five points in a protest known as the *Remonstrance of 1610.* The Dutch Government and the National Church called a Synod to address these five points of remonstrance. The Synod met in November, 1618, in the city of Dort (or Dordrecht), and published its conclusions in April, 1619, in the *Canons of Dort.*

Four hundred years have passed since the Synod of Dort, yet its conclusions are relevant today. Because the focus of that Synod was understanding salvation, the issues raised are of vital importance, not only for theologians then, but for all who trust Christ for salvation in every age.

Depravity: How Much Damage Did Sin Do?

Of the five points addressed at the Synod of Dort, the doctrine of human depravity was the only point on which both parties agreed.

John Calvin taught that Adam's original sin caused "a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused *into all parts* of the soul…."[3] In other words, the entire human nature has been spoiled by sin. This understanding is often called *total* depravity, and the consequence of total depravity is a loss of human ability even to desire what is good. Calvin wrote,

> … Whatever is in man, from the understanding to the will, from the soul even to the flesh, has been defiled and crammed with this concupiscence…. Man is so held captive by the yoke of sin that he can of his own nature neither aspire to good through resolve nor struggle after it through effort.[4]

James Arminius shared this understanding of total depravity.[5] In a hearing before the States of Holland near the end of his life, Arminius testified,

> This is my opinion concerning the Free-will of man:… Man is not capable, of and by himself, either to think, to will, or to do that which is really good; but it is necessary for him to be regenerated and renewed in his intellect, affections or will, and in all his powers by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.…[6]

In the Remonstrance of 1610, the followers of Arminius echoed this conviction. This is the only article of the Remonstrance which the Synod did not reject. Instead, the Synod affirmed it with strong warnings not to veer from this fundamental teaching of Scripture.[7]

This shared ground between Arminians and Calvinists did not continue in common, however. Later generations of Arminian leaders took a different position on depravity (and took the name of Arminianism with them).[8] A subsequent remonstrant declaration defined the new Arminian position thus: sinful men "retain still after the fall a power of believing and of repentance."[9] The revised position of Arminianism held that human nature is *not* totally corrupted by sin, but that the human will retains enough purity to desire God and to repent by one's own moral sensibility. Contemporary Arminianism generally holds to this modification. This was not, however, the position of James Arminius and original Arminianism.

Election: Whom Does God Save?

Of all the doctrines taught by John Calvin, *election* (or predestination) is the doctrine for which he is best known. Arminius and Calvin both agreed that the Bible teaches election: that God chose, even before creation, whom He would save. After all, the Apostle Paul wrote that God "chose us in [Christ], before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). But Calvin, Arminius, and their respective followers at Dort had opposing ideas about *how* God decided whom to save.

Calvin taught that God's election is *unconditional* — that the only basis whereby God decided whom He would save was His own glory.[10] There is nothing in any person that makes him more worthy to be saved than anyone else. After a survey of Scripture on this matter, Calvin concluded,

> As Scripture, then, clearly shows, we say that God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction.[11]

God elected from before creation whom He would and whom He would not save; but God has not set conditions by which He made those choices. To try to figure out *why* God chose to save one person and not another is, according to Calvin, like men trying to discover "why they are men rather than oxen…. Although it was in God's power to make them dogs, he formed them to his own image."[12] It is beyond us to comprehend why God chooses whom He does.

James Arminius, however, disagreed with unconditional election. In fact, he so strongly disagreed that he called this doctrine, "the first and most important article in Religion on which I have to offer my views."[13] Arminius sought to explain why God chooses whom He does by interpreting from Scripture *two* different kinds of election. Arminius wrote,

> … I use the word "Election" in two senses: (i.) For the decree by which God resolves to justify believers and to condemn unbelievers … (ii.) And for the decree by which He resolves to elect these or those nations or men….[14]

According to Arminius, God made *two* elections: a *general* election and a *particular* election. In general election, God chose what kind of people He would save: "those who repent and believe."[15] After deciding upon faith as the condition for salvation, God then looked ahead into history and selected *particular* individuals for salvation *based on this condition* of belief:

> God decreed to save and damn certain particular persons. This decree has its foundation in the foreknowledge of God, by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who would, through his preventing grace, believe….[16]

Calvin taught that election was *unconditional* — God looked among all the unworthy sinners of the human race and elected to save certain ones of them. Arminius taught that election was *conditional* — God looked among all the sinners of the human race and seeing that some would believe, He elected to save those who would believe. Arminius articulated the difference in these positions this way: "'Do we believe, *because we have been elected?'* [Calvin's position] Or, 'Are we elected, *because we believe?'* [Arminius' position]"[17]

This grammatically slight but theologically profound distinction came to a head at the Synod of Dort. The students of Arminius insisted: "God has not decided to elect anyone to eternal life, or to reject anyone from the same ... without giving consideration of preceding obedience or disobedience."[18] After deliberation, the Synod Commissioners rejected this article of Arminian teaching. Believing from Scripture that God does, indeed, unconditionally elect *even some of the most unwilling* sinners, the Commissioners wrote,

> That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God's eternal decree.... He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe; while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment.... Herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men equally involved in ruin.[19]

<u>Atonement</u>: For Whom Did Jesus Die?

Of the five points debated at Dort, the *extent of the atonement* was, undoubtedly, the most controversial: Did Jesus die for all men or just for the elect? Even the Calvinist Synod delegates were initially divided on this issue. In fact, so heated was the argument that, at one point, one of the commissioners challenged another to a duel![20] Despite their differences, the commissioners recognized the importance of resolving the question, not just agreeing to disagree.[21] They continued to examine Scripture and to deliberate week after week until they finally came to a unanimous statement, Biblically defining the extent of Christ's atonement.[22]

The matter in question in this doctrine is not the *worthiness* of Jesus' sacrifice. Arminians and Calvinists all agreed that Jesus' sacrifice was costly enough to *deserve* forgiveness for all; but, according to Scripture, not everyone is forgiven. Does this mean that Jesus' sacrifice was only intended for particular people? Or did Jesus go to the cross *intending* to die for everyone?

John Calvin never explicitly addressed this question in his writings; it was a question which arose after his time. Nevertheless, theologians are generally agreed that "definite atonement fits better than universal grace into the total pattern of Calvin's teaching."[23] Theodore Beza (Calvin's

student and successor at Geneva) taught that Christ, "with one only offering and sacrifice of himself should sanctifie all *the elect*...."[24]

The accepted Calvinist position was that Jesus' atonement was *particular:* He died for the elect alone, not for all mankind. Among the Scriptures cited to teach particular atonement is the High Priestly Prayer in John 17. In this prayer, Christ Himself states His intent on going to the cross:

> Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that *to all whom Thou hast given Him,* He may give eternal life.... I do not ask on behalf of the world, *but of those whom Thou hast given Me....* (Jn. 17:2–9)

Pierre DuMoulin, a French pastor and Calvinist theologian in the early 17th century, summarized the dangers of abandoning this position in a letter he addressed to the Synod. In his letter, DuMoulin warned: If we teach that Jesus bore the sins of *every* sinner on the cross, then *no one* can justly be condemned to hell. To condemn a sinner for whom Christ died, God would be punishing the same sins twice (once in Christ's sufferings on the cross and again in the sinner's eternal sufferings in hell). Jesus' sacrifice, DuMoulin argued, must have been particular, or else His substitutionary suffering is meaningless.[25]

James Arminius taught differently. He believed that Scripture does teach universal atonement. "Christ has merited … remission of sins," explained Arminius' followers at Dort, "for all men and for every man." Recognizing, however, that not all men receive forgiveness, the Arminians went on to say that no "sins [are] forgiven to sinning men before they actually and truly believe in Christ."[26] Thus the Arminians made a distinction between Christ's death (which made forgiveness *possible*) and man's faith (which makes forgiveness *actual*).

The Calvinist commissioners at Dort opposed any teaching that regarded Christ's death as only making forgiveness *possible*. According to Scriptures like Hebrews 9:12, Jesus *finished* the work of forgiveness: "… Through His own blood, He entered the holy place *once for all,* having *obtained* eternal redemption." To say that forgiveness is available to all but applied by man's own faith is to credit man with completing what Christ began. This, the commissioners perceived, as a

subtle form of salvation by human effort and clearly to be rejected. But that was only half of the controversy.

The greater part of the contention — and the difficulty which nearly split the Calvinist camp — was the apparent contradiction in Scripture raised by the Arminians. Arguing against the particular atonement Scriptures (such as John 17) used by the Calvinists, the Arminians cited passages which speak of Jesus dying for "the whole world" as teaching universal atonement. The Synod commissioners struggled to reconcile Scripture on either side of the argument. One Scripture at the center of the debate was John 3:16, as noted in the following record of one of the commissioners:

> My Lord Bishop of late hath taken some pains with Martinius of Breme, to bring him from his opinion of Universal Grace. By chance I came to see his Letter written to Martinius in which he expounded that place in the third of John, *God so loved <u>the World</u>, that he gave his only begotten Son etc.* which is the strongest ground upon which Martinius rests himself.[27]

I John 2:2 was another Scripture cited as a basis for understanding universal atonement: "He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those *of the whole world*." How is such "whole world" language to be reconciled with Christ who Himself said that His intercession was "*not … on behalf of the world,* but of those whom Thou hast given Me"?

There are two ways in which such statements are usually interpreted. On one hand, it could be understood that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world in a mathematically all-inclusive sense. This is the Arminian interpretation. The other possible meaning, and the meaning finally adopted in the Canons of Dort, is that Scripture's use of "whole world" terminology is to emphasize the international character of the church. John 3:16, I John 2:2, and other similar passages were penned by the Apostles as the Covenant of Grace was being taken for the first time to the Gentiles. This was a difficult idea for Jewish believers to accept — even Peter struggled with the inclusion of the Gentiles. Therefore it needed repeated emphasis that the Gospel was no longer for one nation alone, but for the whole world.[28]

It was in the spirit of this understanding that the Commissioners of Dort came to final unanimity

on the international but particular nature of Christ's atonement:

> … it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the
> new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language,
> all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by
> the Father.…[29]

<u>Grace</u>: Can a Person Resist the Spirit's Work?

The fourth doctrine at issue at Dort was the doctrine of *grace*. Having previously considered the

total depravity of man (that is, man's inability to seek God unless God first draws him), it remains

to be asked whether *every* man whom God draws actually repents and comes to faith. Do some

who are called by God resist, or is God's call of grace irresistible?

Although he never actually used the term, John Calvin taught that saving grace is *irresistible*.

According to Calvin, when the Spirit begins His work in a person, the Spirit will never fail to

finish that work, bringing the sinner to full faith and repentance. Calvin, quoting the Early

Church Father, Augustine, wrote:

> "This grace, therefore, which is secretly bestowed on human hearts … is given for this
> purpose: that hardness of heart may first be taken away. When, therefore, the Father is
> heard within … he takes away the heart of stone and gives a heart of flesh [Ez. 11:19; 36:26].…"[30]

According to Calvin (and Augustine), the very reason God imparts grace to sinners is to remove

their resistance. God's grace is irresistible, not in the sense that people are compelled, kicking

and screaming, into the Kingdom. Rather, God's grace is irresistible in the sense that it is

effective — it softens the hardened heart so that the sinner is no longer resistant: he willingly

repents and joyfully believes.

James Arminius, however, believed that the Spirit's work of grace can be resisted. In fact,

Arminius taught that *every* person receives grace, not just the elect. Only some are actually

saved, however, because many resist the Spirit and turn back to their sin.[31] Arminius wrote,

> The whole controversy reduces itself to the solution of this question, "is the grace of God
> a certain, irresistible force?"… I believe, according to the scriptures, that many persons
> resist the Holy Spirit and reject the grace that is offered.[32]

In particular, the Arminians cited Acts 7:51 as demonstrating the ability of men to resist the Holy Spirit's grace: "You men … are always resisting the Holy Spirit."

The Calvinists recognized that men can and indeed do resist the Scriptures (which are the words of the Holy Spirit). However, they understood Scripture as making a distinction between this *external* call of the Gospel and the *internal* work of grace by the Spirit. In Hebrews 4:2, for example, it is said, "For indeed we have had good news preached to us [ie: externally], just as they also; but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith [ie: internally] in those who heard." From such Scriptures, the Reformers drew a distinction between the *external call* of the Gospel (which can be resisted), and the *internal call* of the Spirit. It is this internal work of grace that insures that the sinner will irresistibly respond to external preaching. Calvin wrote,

> … There are two kinds of call. There is the general call, by which God invites all equally to himself through the outward preaching of the word.… The other kind of call is special … [so that] by the inward illumination of his Spirit he causes the preached Word to dwell in their hearts.[33]

The commissioners at Dort upheld this distinction in answering the Arminians. "Some," the commissioners wrote, "… when called, regardless of their danger, reject the Word of life."[34] The external call of the Gospel is a real call to salvation which men reject to their own destruction. However, where the Spirit applies His grace to soften the heart of the sinner, "all in whose heart God works in this marvellous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe."[35]

Perseverance: Can a Christian Fall Away?

The fifth and last point of the controversy at Dort dealt with the question of *perseverance*. Prior to his death, Arminius raised the question this way:

> Is it possible for true believers to fall away totally and finally?… The opinion which denies, "that true believers … do fall away…," was never … accounted by the church as a catholic verity: Neither has that which affirms the contrary ever been reckoned as an heretical opinion; nay, that which affirms it possible for believers to fall away from the faith, has

always had more supporters in the church of Christ, than that which denies its possibility or its actually occurring.[36]

Arminius avoided pronouncement of a final opinion on this question; but it is evident from his writings that he accepted the possibility of Christians losing their salvation.[37] After Arminius' death, his followers continued to ask this same question. In the Remonstrance of 1610, the Arminian party stated their conviction that no *outside* force can snatch a believer from Christ, "but," they insisted, "whether they can through negligence fall away … must first be more carefully determined from the Holy Scriptures.…"[38]

By the time of the Synod of Dort, eight years later, the Arminian Remonstrants were ready to state their position with more certainty: "True believers are able to fall through their own fault into shameful and atrocious deeds, to persevere and to die in them; and therefore finally to fall and to perish."[39]

This doctrine, that believers can lose their faith and perish apart from God, was in opposition to the teachings of the early Reformers. John Calvin wrote extensively on this subject, saying at one place in his *Institutes,*

> … those rooted in God can never be pulled up from salvation.… There is no doubt, when Christ prays for all the elect [Romans 8:34], that he implores for them the same thing as he did for Peter, that their faith may never fail [Luke 22:32].… What did Christ wish to have us learn from this but to trust that we shall ever remain safe because we have been made his once for all?[40]

By drawing attention to Jesus' prayer for Peter, Calvin emphasized that Jesus prays for the perseverance of the believer's *faith*. Believers may, and often do, fall into sin; and their faith may seem weak at times. However, as Peter denied Jesus three times yet repented and returned when Christ sought and called him, so the Doctrine of Perseverance teaches that those truly converted will never fall totally and finally from faith. Calvin wrote,

> The apostle tells the Philippians he is confident "that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" [Philippians 1:6].… God begins his good work in us, therefore, by arousing love and desire and zeal for righteousness in our hearts.… He completes his work, moreover, by confirming us to perseverance.[41]

The Commissioners at Dort rejected the Arminian teaching that believers can lose their faith, since faith is the gift of and is sustained by the Spirit's irresistible grace:

> … Because of the temptations of the world and of Satan, those who are converted could not persevere in that grace if left to their own strength. But God is faithful, who, having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end.[42]

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Four hundred years have passed since the Synod of Dort, yet many Christians still question what the significance of that debate really was — at least on a practical level. What is the practical outworking of this highly interpretive controversy?

The Canons of Dort were composed with great sensitivity to their practical implications. Recognizing that these issues are of importance, not only for the theologian in his study, but especially for the layman at home, the Synod commissioners deliberately avoided intricate theological abstractions and wrote the Canons for public usefulness.

Perhaps the chief practical concern of one contemplating these issues is the assurance of his own salvation. On this matter, the distinction between Arminius and the Dort commissioners was most pronounced.

Arminius insisted that it was healthy for a person to have a sense of uncertainty about his salvation. To teach that God will assuredly and irresistibly save His elect "contributes to engender security," Arminius wrote, "a thing directly opposed to that most salutary fear with which we are commanded to work out our salvation."[43] According to Arminius, it is a person's sense that salvation depends on his own faithfulness that motivates obedience.

The commissioners at Dort rejected Arminius' idea that uncertainty is the basis of Christian obedience. In their final publication, the Synod delegates included words of encouragement (and practical instruction) for those struggling with fears of uncertainty:

> Those in whom a living faith in Christ, an assured confidence of soul, peace of conscience, an earnest endeavor after filial obedience … is not as yet strongly felt, and who

nevertheless make use of the means which God has appointed for working these graces in us [ie: preaching, prayer, Scripture, and the sacraments], ought not to be alarmed at the mention of reprobation, nor to rank themselves among the reprobate, but diligently to persevere in the use of [these] means, and with ardent desires devoutly and humbly to wait for a season of richer grace.[44]

According to Calvinism, the assurance of salvation is not rooted in *ones own* faithfulness, but in *God's* faithfulness to fully save all those He calls. The proper motivation for Christian obedience is not uncertainty, but the loving gratitude inspired by the *certainty* of election:

> The sense and certainty of this election afford to the children of God additional matter for daily humiliation before Him, for adoring the depth of His mercies, for cleansing themselves, and rendering grateful returns of ardent love to Him who first manifested so great love towards them.[45]

The five points of the Arminian/Calvinist controversy are profound and highly theological, but they are also exceedingly practical. The questions addressed in this dialog center on the Biblical doctrine of salvation which is nothing less than the very meeting place between God and man: there is nothing more profound and more practical.

The reformers left the Roman Catholic Church because Roman Catholicism taught the necessity of religious works as a basis for salvation. In Arminianism, the Reformers saw a subtle return to the same philosophy: that salvation is given by God based on human-achieved faith. Calvinists insist with the Apostle Paul that *faith itself* is "not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9).

Indeed, in the Calvinist doctrines of total human depravity, unconditional election, particular atonement, irresistible grace, and certain perseverance, there is no room for human boasting, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Php. 2:12).

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Endnotes

1. Letter from Theodore Beza to the burgomasters of Amsterdam, June 3, 1585 (autograph in the Musée de la Reformation, Geneva), quoted by Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abbingdon, 1971), p. 73.

2. Letter from James Arminius to Sebastian Egberts (a principal Senator in the Amsterdam government), May 3, 1607, quoted in *The Works of James Arminius,* trans. James Nichols and William Nichols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 1.295.

3. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* Library of Christian Classics, vol. 20, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 2.1.8, emphasis added.

4. Calvin, 2.1.8; 2.4.1.

5. Although Arminius appears to have maintained a belief in total depravity, he did allow room for some discussion whether Adam's original sin actually communicated guilt to the whole human race, or just lost original righteousness: "[In Adam] all men … became obnoxious to death temporal and death eternal, and devoid of … original righteousness: This punishment usually receives the appellation of … 'original sin.' But we permit this question to be made a subject of discussion: Must some contrary quality, beside the absence of original righteousness, be constituted as another part of original sin?; though we think it much more probable, that this absence of original righteousness only is original sin itself, as being that which alone is sufficient to commit and produce any actual sins whatsoever." (*Works of Arminius,* 2.375)

6. *Works of Arminius,* 1.659.

7. For the remonstrant position, see the "The Remonstrance of 1610," article 3, in Philip Schaff, ed., *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966), 3.546. For the Synod affirmation and warnings, see the "The Canons of the Synod of Dort," sec. 3/4, art. 3, in *ibid.,* 3.588.

8. Historian William Cunningham notes, "Arminius himself does not seem — so far as his views were ever fully developed — to have gone further in deviating from scriptural truth than to deny the Calvinistic doctrines of election, particular redemption, efficacious and irresistible grace in conversion, and to doubt, if not to deny the perseverance of the saints. But his followers, and particularly Episcopius and Curcelaeus, very soon introduced further corruptions of scriptural truth, especially in regard to original sin, the work of the Spirit, and justification; and made near approaches, upon these and kindred topics, to Pelagian or Socinian views." (William Cunningham, *Historical Theology* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960], 2.375–376.)

9. John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism* (Edmonton, AB: Still Waters, 1989), p. 129.

10. See Calvin, 3.13.1–2; also Eph. 1:6.

11. Calvin, 3.21.7.

12. *ibid.,* 3.22.1.

13. *Works of Arminius,* 1.613.

14. *ibid.,* 2.53.

15. *ibid.,* 1.653.

16. *ibid.,* 1.653.

17. *ibid.,* 1.643, footnote.

18. "The Opinions of the Remonstrants," art. A.1, in Peter Y. De Jong, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), p. 222.

19. "Canons of Dort," sec. 1, art. 6, in Schaff, p. 582.

20. Stephen Strehle, "The Extent of the Atonement and the Synod of Dort," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51, no. 1 (spring 1989): 19.

21. While the Arminian/Calvinist controversy was, on the surface, a debate over the doctrines of salvation, underneath it was really a debate over the validity of a confessional church. The Arminians really never wanted their *doctrines* to become the subject of a national synod. The goal of Arminius and his followers was to press the validity of their controversy with what they considered *details* of the Dutch confessions while simultaneously showing their *harmony* with the general structure of reformed religion. It was thereby hoped that they could show the confessions to be too restrictive on conscientious preaching of genuinely reformed ministers. The motivating purpose of Arminius and his followers was to see a church system in which ministers would be completely free to teach their doctrinal variations without being held accountable to a detailed national confession. Such an abandonment of confessionalism (under the guise of an "agree to disagree" attitude), however, would weaken the unity of the church. It was this "agree to disagree" attitude which the Synod commissioners could not afford to endorse, neither in their pronouncement nor in their own methods. They earnestly desired to hold the church together as a unified body united around Scriptural confessions. (See Strehle, p. 5, for further discussion and references on this point.)

22. The Synod's unanimity passing the article on the atonement was certainly the most significant achievement of Dort, and one which required significant compromises between conservative and moderate parties. Notably, the resulting article of the Canons (art. 2) is the shortest of all the articles, as it went through rigorous refining in order to insure that it contained only what was necessary and what the commissioners were able to agree to unanimously. W. Robert Godfrey, in the conclusion of his doctoral dissertation on this subject, observed of the commissioners, "They demonstrated in the final form of the Canons their ability to compromise by defining what was held in common and by remaining silent on what was not." (p. 268) This amazing feat is not to say, however, that there were not still differences and even hard feelings between some of the parties involved in the deliberations. Dort is a demonstration of the Ephesians 4 principle of the church growing in unity by insisting that differences be addressed and the truth confessed, in contrast with the Arminian philosophy (see footnote 21 above) of agreeing to let differences go unaddressed. (See W. Robert Godfrey, "Tensions Within International Calvinism: The Debate on the Atonement at the Synod of Dort, 1618–1619," Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1974, [Ann Arbor: University Microfilms].)

23. Roger Nicole, "Moyse Amyraut (1596–1664) and the Controversy on Universal Grace, First Phase (1634–1637)," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1966, p. 21, quoted by Godfrey, p. 80.

24. Theodore Beza, *A Briefe Declaration of the Chief Poyntes of Christian Religion set forth in a Table* (London, 1575), ch. 4, quoted by Godfrey, p. 82.

25. Godfrey, p. 223.

26. "Opinions of the Remonstrants," art. B.3, in De Jong, p. 225.

27. Letter from John Hales, January 19, 1619, in John Hales, *Golden Remains of the ever Memorable Mr. John Hales of Eton College* (London, 1659), p. 76, quoted by Godfrey, p. 154. Underline added. Italics original.

28. The new, international character of the covenant community is a prominent feature throughout the Apostolic writings. Paul indicated that this is one of the major themes of the New Testament, saying, "By revelation there was made known to me the mystery … which in other generations was not made known … that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body …" (Eph. 3:3–6). Note the significant role this theme takes in the Apostolic writings (e.g. Romans 9–11, Galatians 2, Ephesians 2–3). The struggle which the Jewish believers (including Peter and the Apostles) had with this shift toward international inclusion is recorded in Acts 10–11.

29. "Canons of Dort," sec. 2, art. 8, in Schaff, p. 587. Note the similarity between the wording of this article and the words of the Apostle John in Revelation 5:9, in which passage John states explicitly that the international character of Christ's atonement is a drawing out from all different people groups.

30. Calvin, 3.24.1.

31. *Works of Arminius,* 2.53.

32. James Arminius quoted in Herman Hanko, Homer Hoeksema, and Gise Van Baren, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Protestant Reformed Churches in America), pp. 74–75.

33. Calvin, 3.24.8.

34. "Canons of Dort," sec. 3/4, art. 8–9, in Schaff, p. 589.

35. "Canons of Dort," sec. 3/4, art. 11–12, in *ibid.,* p. 590. Despite the certainty of the Spirit's work, the Synod commissioners did not overlook the real struggle which many men experience in the process of coming under conviction and responding to the Gospel. As they wrote in sec. 3/4, art. 16 of the Canons, "This grace of regeneration does not treat men as senseless stocks and blocks, nor take away their will and its properties … but spiritually quickens, heals, corrects, and at the same time sweetly and powerfully bends it, that where carnal rebellion and resistance formerly prevailed a ready and sincere spiritual obedience begins to reign.…"

36. *Works of Arminius,* 2.725.

37. Although Arminius always framed his position on the doctrine of perseverance in the form of a question, thereby inferring that he had not yet settled his mind on the matter, he gave 17 pages to discussing his thoughts on the topic in a rebuttal he penned against William Perkins' position. In that discussion, Arminius clearly *defends* the possibility of a Christian, through his own neglect, losing his faith and perishing apart from God. (*Works of Arminius,* 3.454–470.)

38. "Remonstrance of 1610," art. 5, in Schaff, p. 548.

39. "Opinions of the Remonstrants," art. D.4, in De Jong, p. 228.

40. Calvin, 3.24.6.

41. *ibid.,* 2.3.6.

42. "Canons of Dort," sec. 5, art. 3, in Schaff, p. 593.

43. *Works of Arminius,* 2.726. Note Arminius' allusion to Paul's instruction, "work out your salvation with fear and trembling," without quoting the rest of Paul's sentence: "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Php. 2:12–13).

44. "Canons of Dort," sec. 1, art. 16, in Schaff, p. 584–585.

45. "Canons of Dort," sec. 1, art. 13, in *ibid.,* p. 584.

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