

Arminian Universalism

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Arminianism Prevalent in Protestantism

Widespread among so-called evangelicals or fundamentalists is the view that the atonement is universal in its divine design but limited in its actual accomplishment. God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as the Holy Spirit, are said to have purposed the salvation of all men by the Saviour's death, and yet not all are saved in the end. For this discrepancy between the design and the accomplishment of the atonement men are accountable, for, although by virtue of the common or sufficient grace of God all are said to have the ability to believe, many refuse to receive the benefits of the atonement in faith.

That view of the design of the atonement is commonly denominated Arminian because in substance it was taught early in the seventeenth century at the University of Leyden by Jacobus Arminius. It seems not to be generally known that there are five points of Arminianism as well as five points of Calvinism. The fact is that the latter were drawn up in opposition to the former. In 1610, the year following the death of Arminius, those who shared his views drew up a so-called Remonstrance which they presented to the Dutch government. In the positive part of that document, which came to be known as "The Five Articles of Arminianism," they confessed as their belief: "That . . . Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all, by his death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys the forgiveness of sins, except the believer, according to the word of the Gospel of John 3:16 — 'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life'; and in the First Epistle of John 2:2 — 'And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.'¹

Arminianism has been widely held by Protestant churches and theologians and is by no means confined to such avowedly Arminian communions as the Methodist churches. Many Lutherans have welcomed Arminianism as a relief from the strict particularism of Augustinianism and Calvinism. The Latitudinarians in the Church of England at the time of the Restoration were Arminians. In the eighteenth

¹ Article II.

century Arminianism was advocated by such leading writers of Great Britain as Tillotson, Jeremy Taylor, Chillingworth, Whitby, John Taylor and Samuel Clarke. It is no exaggeration to assert that Arminianism has thoroughly leavened the Christian thought of America. Even so conservative a Lutheran body as the Missouri Synod is essentially Arminian in its teaching of the design of the atonement. C. A. Beckwith is responsible for the pertinent and true statement: "A sign of the times is, that theological schools confessedly Arminian educate young men for Churches which are traditionally Calvinistic, and ministers holding Arminian views are received by such churches as thoroughly 'orthodox.'"² Evidently, Baptist William Owen Carver was under the spell of Arminianism when he concluded his article "Atonement" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* with the indiscriminating paragraph: "Another question over which the theologians have sorely vexed themselves and each other concerns the extent of the Atonement, whether it is available for all men or only for certain particular, elect ones. That controversy may now be passed by. It is no longer possible to read the Bible and suppose that God relates himself sympathetically with only a part of the race. All segregated passages of Scripture formerly employed in support of such a view have now taken their place in the progressive self-interpretation of God to men through Christ who is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). No man cometh unto the Father but by Him (John 14:6); but whosoever does thus call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21)." It is clear that the historical situation demands the serious consideration of the design of the atonement according to Arminianism.

Arminianism, and the Universalistic Passages of Scripture

Those Arminians who would be known as evangelicals claim to take the Bible seriously, and the sincerity of this claim cannot be disputed. They like to refer to themselves as "Bible-believing and Bible-loving Christians," and they certainly mean to be that. To be sure, it does not necessarily follow that their understanding of Scripture is either thorough or precise, but it does follow that those passages of Scripture which they are wont to recite in support of their view must be carefully considered.

Arminianism teaches that God designed to save every individual through the atonement, but that not every individual is saved. The second part of that teaching rests squarely on Holy Scripture. At this point Arminian universalism is completely at odds with outright universalism and in perfect agreement with Calvinistic particularism. While unrestricted universalism teaches that all men are saved in the end, both Arminianism and Calvinism hold that not all will be saved. They also agree on the question who will be saved. Those will be, and only those, who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. That this teaching is thoroughly Scriptural hardly requires proof. It is taught as unequivocally in the Bible as a

² The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, New York and London, 1908, article "Arminius."

whole as in the Biblical dictum: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). Both the Calvinist and the Arminian insist that only believers will enter through the gates into the city, and they so insist because the Word of God does.³

But what of the tenet that God designed to save every individual by the atonement? Is that also the teaching of Holy Writ? In their answer to that question Calvinism and Arminianism differ sharply. There are in Scripture a large number of passages that ascribe to the atonement a universal intent. They are commonly, and not incorrectly, called universalistic passages. Arminianism is certain that these passages teach that God designed by the death of His Son to save every single human being; Calvinism is just as positive that they teach no such thing.

In a number of places Scripture ascribes to God an unmistakably restricted design in the atonement. It is said, for instance, that Christ gave His life for His people, His sheep, His church, His elect. Such passages will be considered subsequently under the head of Scriptural Particularism. But already at this point in the discussion it may be remarked that in the light of such particularistic statements the great principle of Biblical hermeneutics that Scripture cannot contradict itself and is therefore its own infallible interpreter constrains the Calvinist to look for another than the Arminian interpretation of the universalistic passages. At the same time he is fully aware that his theology must be the product of unprejudiced exegesis of Holy Writ, and he is on his guard against the sinful procedure of wresting Scripture in the interest of a preconceived dogma.

Not all the universalistic passages are capable of the same interpretation. There does not exist a single pattern of interpretation that is applicable to all of them. On the contrary, exegetically they fall into several categories.

(1) In some of the passages which teach that the atonement was for "all," for "the world," or for "every man," the meaning of these terms is restricted by the context. As in popular parlance such terms are not always intended to be taken absolutely and the context in which they occur indicates this, so also in the Bible. To use an old illustration, when Lord Nelson said: "England expects every man this day to do his duty," he evidently did not refer to every man in the world, not even to every Englishman, but only to every Englishman who was about to take part in the battle of Trafalgar. When Jesus predicted: "Ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" (Matt. 10:22), He surely did not mean that His disciples would be hated by every single man, woman, and child in the world, but only that

³ It hardly needs to be said that it may not be thought that this teaching leaves no room for the salvation of infants. The emphatic and sweeping statement of Jesus: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3) applies to infants as well as adults, but it is precisely in regeneration that the seed of saving faith is planted in the human heart. Regenerated infants certainly are not capable of exercising active faith, but they do possess the habitus of faith.

worldly people, constituting the great majority of men, would hate them. When Paul said: "My manner of life from my youth . . . know all the Jews" (Acts 26:4), he cannot have meant that there was not a Jew in the world who did not know the story of his life. And when the Pharisees commented on Jesus' great popularity after the resurrection of Lazarus: "Behold, the world is gone after him" (John 11:19), they were obviously using the term 'world' in a much restricted sense. A similar mode of interpretation is applicable to many of the universalistic passages. A few examples follow.

In Hebrews 2:9 it is said that God purposed that Christ "by the grace of God should taste death for every man." What is the precise meaning of the expression "every man"? In his monumental work on this epistle John Owen comments: "'Every man'... is put for 'all men' by an enallage of number, the singular for the plural, for all men; that is, all those many sons which God by his death intended to bring unto glory, verse 10; those sanctified by him, whom he calls his brethren, verses 11, 12, and children given him by God, verse 13; whom by death he delivers from the fear of death, verses 14, 15; even all the seed of Abraham, verse 16."⁴ F. W. Grosheide, too, holds that the meaning of "every man" is restricted by the context. Says this distinguished New Testament exegete: "The meaning of 'every man' is not that all men without distinction will reap the fruits of Jesus' death. To assume such a universalism here would contradict 'many sons,' verse 10; 'seed of Abraham,' verse 16; and 'the people,' verse 17. 'Every man' is merely the general term that is placed in the foreground and is to be defined subsequently."⁵

Another passage in which Christ is said to have died for all but in which the meaning of "all" is restricted by the context is II Corinthians 5:15, "For the love of Christ constraineth us: because we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead." In a sermon on this verse and the next that great New Testament scholar J. Gresham Machen asks what Paul meant by "all" and then proceeds to reply: "Well, I suppose our Christian brethren in other churches, our Christian brethren who are opposed to the Reformed Faith might be tempted to make the word 'all' mean, in this passage, 'all men'... They might be tempted to interpret the words 'Christ died for all men everywhere whether Christians or not.' But if they are tempted to make it mean that, they ought to resist the temptation, since this passage is really a very dangerous passage for them to lay stress on in support of their view. In the first place, the context is dead against it... All through this passage Paul is speaking not of the relation of Christ to all men, but of the relation of Christ to the Church. In the second place, the view that 'Christ died for all' means 'Christ died for all men' proves too much. The things that Paul says in this passage about those for whom Christ died do not fit those who merely have the gospel offered to them; they fit only those who accept the gospel for the salvation of their souls. Can it be said of all men, including those who reject the gospel or have never heard it, that they died when Christ died on the cross; can it

⁴ The Works of John Owen, Philadelphia, 1869, XII, loc. cit.

⁵ Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament, Amsterdam, 1927, XII, loc. cit.

be said of them that they no longer live unto themselves but unto Christ who died for them? Surely these things cannot be said of all men, and therefore the word 'all' does not mean all men."⁶

John 3:16 reads: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It may well be doubted whether there exists a more satisfying exposition of this great text than that given by Warfield in one of his sermons. He rejects every quantitative interpretation of the term "world" as it occurs here and chooses definitely for a qualitative interpretation. John 3:16 tells us that God loves the world of sinful humanity. Speaking of "the measure by which we are invited to measure the greatness of the love of God," Warfield says: "It is not that it is so great that it is able to extend over the whole of a big world: it is so great that it is able to prevail over the Holy God's hatred and abhorrence of sin."⁷ In particular does he reject the prevalent interpretation of "world" in this verse as referring to every individual in the world. He says: "The distribution of the term 'world' in our text into 'each and every man' in the world . . . begins with the obvious misstep of directing our attention at once rather to the greatness of the world than to the greatness of God's love."⁸

(2) A great many of the universalistic passages, instead of teaching that Christ died for each and every individual, set forth the truth, which is so exceedingly prominent in the New Testament, that salvation is for gentiles as well as Jews. For us who live in the twentieth century after Christ it is difficult, if not impossible, to grasp the novelty of that truth for the Jews of the first century of the Christian era. It impressed them as being exceedingly radical. So deeply was the fact that God showed His word unto Jacob, His statutes and His judgments unto Israel, and that He dealt thus with no other nation (Ps. 147:19f.) ingrained into the very fibre of the Jewish soul, that it rebelled violently against the notion that the middle wall of partition between Jew and gentile had been broken down and that peace was to be preached to them that were afar off as well as to them that were nigh (Eph. 2:14, 17). The Jews of that day were almost totally blind to what appears to us to be, and really is, the plain and emphatic teaching of the Old Testament: that the national church would one day blossom forth into a universal church.⁹ In spite of the fact that the Master had on numerous occasions commanded the disciples to be His witnesses to the utmost parts of the earth,¹⁰ it required a vision and a voice from heaven to convince the apostle Peter of the propriety of preaching the gospel to a Roman.¹¹ Small wonder that the emphasis which the New Testament places on this aspect of universalism is nothing short of tremendous.

⁶ God Transcendent and Other Sermons, edited by N. B. Stonehouse, Grand Rapids, 1949, pp. 134f

⁷ The Saviour of the World, Hodder and Stoughton, London, New York, Toronto, 1913, p. 120.

⁸ Ibid., p. 108.

⁹ E.g., Gen. 12:3; Ps. 72:8-10; Ps. 86:9; Ps. 87; Dan. 2:44.

¹⁰ E.g., Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8.

¹¹ Acts 10.

John 12:32 affords a most interesting and clear instance of a universalistic passage of this type. Said Jesus: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." The next verse tells us that, in saying this, He was referring to His impending death on the cross. Did the Lord mean to say that as the crucified One He would draw to Himself in a saving way every individual in the human race? The context demands quite another interpretation. Jesus was at Jerusalem. The Passover was being celebrated. "There were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast" (v. 20). These Hellenes were proselytes, not Greek Jews or Hellenists, but gentiles.¹² To Philip of Bethsaida in Galilee they addressed the request: "Sir, we would see Jesus" (v. 21). Philip and Andrew conveyed this request to Jesus. Jesus was deeply moved. He envisaged the glorious salvation of the gentiles but also its prerequisite, His death on the accursed cross. He saw Himself at once as the crucified One and as the Saviour of the world. Therefore He said: "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name." A voice from heaven replied: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again" (vv. 23-28). Turning to those about Him, Jesus said: "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (w. 31,32). In effect He declared: "My death on the cross will mark, on the one hand, the judgment of God-opposing humanity and the defeat of Satan, its prince, and, on the other hand, the supplanting of Satan's rule by My own dominion, which will extend over the whole of humanity, embracing the gentile world as well as Jewry."

In the conclusion of the well-known story of the Samaritan woman it is said that many of her people believed on Christ because of her testimony that He had told her all that ever she did; but there is added: "Many more believed because of his own words and said unto the woman, Now we believe not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42). Significantly these Samaritans denominated Jesus "the Saviour of the world." On the lips of Samaritans, who were deeply conscious of the gulf fixed between them and the Jews, this name must have signified that they held Jesus to be the Saviour, not only of Jewry, His own nation, but of the Samaritan people as well, and by implication of all the nations of the earth. In one other place in the New Testament is Jesus called "the Saviour of the world." It, too, occurs in the writings of John. Here the apostle himself declares: "And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world" (I John 4:14). It is much more than likely that the implications of the name in this passage are identical with its implications in the former.

John the Baptist pointed out Jesus to his disciples as "the Lamb of God which

¹² See Meyer's Commentary on the New Testament, loc. cit.

taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Whether one holds with Luther, Bengel, Olshausen and Hengstenberg that John in calling Jesus “the Lamb of God” thought of Him as the antitype of the Jewish Paschal lamb, or with Meyer that he conceived of Him as the fulfillment of such Hebrew prophecies as Isaiah 53:7, describing the Messiah as a lamb silent when led to the slaughter, or with Godet that he regarded Him in both those capacities at once, in any case it is remarkable that the Baptist asserted that this Lamb was to take away the sin of the *world*. The juxtaposition of “lamb” and “world” is striking, if indeed not surprising. In view of the fact that the Passover was an exclusively Israelitish institution and the fact that Isaiah 53 spoke of the Messiah specifically as the Saviour of “my people” (v. 8), one would have expected the Baptist to say that the Lamb of God would take away the sin of the Jewish nation. The fact is that he went much farther. He declared that this Lamb would take away the sin of the *world*. According to Meyer we have here “an extension of the earlier prophet representation of atonement for the *people*, Isaiah 53, to all *mankind*.”¹³ And Calvin remarks: “When he says, the sin of the *world*, he extends this favor indiscriminately to the whole human race, that the Jews might not think that he had been sent to them alone.”¹⁴

Beyond all doubt, Romans 11:32, “For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, in order that he might have mercy on all,” must also be interpreted as referring to both Jews and gentiles rather than to all individuals constituting the human race. The entire context points unmistakably in that direction. Nothing could be clearer than that the reference of the twofold “all” is exhausted by the two classes, Jews and gentiles, discussed in the immediate context. In the words of Warfield, “they are not to be taken individualistically but, so to speak, racially.”¹⁵

(3) Closely related to, and sometimes hardly distinguishable from, those universalistic passages which teach that God designed the atonement for the salvation of gentiles as well as Jews are the passages which teach that Christ by His death became the Saviour of the world as a whole, although not of everybody and everything in it, and of humanity collectively although not distributively. Scripture teaches emphatically that, while many in the world will perish, yet the world as such will be saved, and that, while not nearly every⁷ individual of the human race will be saved, those who are saved will constitute humanity. Warfield has well said: “When the Scriptures say that Christ came to save the world, that he does save the world, and that the world shall be saved by him, they do not mean that there is no human being whom he did not come to save, whom he does not save, who is not saved by him. They mean that he came to save and does save the human race; and that the human race is being led by God into a racial salvation: that in the age-long development of the race of men, it will attain at last to a complete salvation, and our eyes will be greeted with the glorious

¹³ Ibid., loc. cit.

¹⁴ Commentary on the Gospel according to John, transl. by William Pringle, Edinburgh, 1847, loc. cit.

¹⁵ “Predestination” in Biblical Doctrines, Oxford University Press, New York, 1929, p. 52.

spectacle of a saved world.”¹⁶

Perhaps as striking an instance as any of this type of universalistic passage is afforded by I John 2:2: “And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.” John is writing to Christians, members of Christ’s church of his day. He tells them that Christ is the propitiation for their sins. Beyond the church of that day, and for that matter of any other day before the consummation of Christ’s kingdom, is the world. Does Christ’s propitiatory work have any bearing on it”? John says it does. He asserts that Christ is the propitiation for the whole world. No doubt, B. F. Westcott is correct in saying: “The supposition that ‘for the whole world’ is an elliptical expression for ‘for the sins of the whole world’ is not justified by usage, and weakens the force of the whole passage.”¹⁷ And Meyer is obviously right when he says: “It is incorrect to understand by ‘we’ the Jews, and by ‘world’ the Gentiles,”¹⁸ for those to whom John was writing were by no means exclusively Jews. It is worthy of note that the apostle does not say that Christ is the propitiation for every human being in the world. He says nothing even remotely resembling that. He is not speaking of the world of men distributively. Rather, he speaks of the world in a comprehensive, a collective, a global way, and the adjective “whole” emphasizes that fact. S. Greydanus is of the opinion that the reference of “the whole world” even goes beyond the world of men. Says he: “Not all creatures and men belonging to the world have without exception propitiation for their sins in Him, but the Lord Christ has effected propitiation not merely for a part of the world, namely for that part which is constituted by the world of men, but also for the rest of the world and thus for the world in its totality, in its entire structure, in its fullness. The thought is the same as that of Ephesians 1:10 and Colossians 1:20.”¹⁹ Be that as it may, the very least that I John 2:2 teaches is that Christ is the propitiation for mankind collectively. The same truth was stated pointedly by the apostle Paul when he said: “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself” (II Cor. 5:19). One day the whole world will be saved. In that day the church will be the world.

(4) In perusing the universalistic passages of Scripture one may never forget that certain fruits of the atonement, short of salvation, accrue to men indiscriminately and, of course, were designed by God thus to accrue. Prominent among these fruits is the so-called universal and sincere offer of salvation. A great many of the universalistic passages teach that God makes a perfectly sincere offer of eternal life to all to whom the gospel comes. To quote a few of them, Ezekiel cried: “Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways and live?” (18:23), and again: “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked should turn from his ways and live” (33:11). Speaking of I Timothy 2:4, which says that God “will have all men to be saved and to come unto the

¹⁶ The Plan of Salvation, p. 131.

¹⁷ The Epistles of St. John, London, 1909, p. 45.

¹⁸ Meyer’s Commentary on the New Testament, loc. cit.

¹⁹ Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament, XIII, Amsterdam, 1929, loc. cit.

knowledge of the truth,” Machen expressed as his opinion that the teaching of this passage is identical with that of the Ezekiel passages just quoted.²⁰ And II Peter 3:9 assures us that the Lord “is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Arminians have argued that this sincere divine offer of salvation to all to whom the gospel comes presupposes the divine design to save all men through the atonement. Under the head *Scriptural Universalism* that argumentation will be considered more fully, but even now it may be said to find no support in Scripture. The Synod of Dort, 1618 and 1619, weighed it and found it wanting. That famous assembly of Reformed theologians, which drew up the five points of Calvinism, including the particular atonement, in opposition to Arminianism, did indeed uphold unqualifiedly the universal and sincere offer of salvation, but insisted that this offer is not a revelation of the secret counsel of God, specifically of divine predestination and of God’s design in giving His Son as an atonement for sin. It is rather a revelation of God’s will of complacency. This is a most pertinent distinction. “As many as are called by the gospel,” say the Canons of Dort, “are unfeignedly called. For God has most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what is acceptable to Him: namely, that those who are called should come unto Him.”²¹ In perfect harmony with this declaration is the statement of the famous Swiss Calvinist Francis Turretin: “God delights in the conversion and eternal life of the sinner as a thing pleasing in itself and congruous with his infinitely compassionate nature.”²² The universal and sincere offer of salvation does indeed presuppose the universal love of God, which is unmistakably taught in Scripture, but it does not presuppose that God purposed the salvation of all men by the death of His Son, which is nowhere taught in Scripture.

While Scripture contains many passages which are justly denominated universalistic, there are also certain passages on which Arminians impose a universalistic interpretation. Prominent among these are the parallel passages Romans 14:15 and I Corinthians 8:11. In the context of both the apostle Paul is warning against an abuse of Christian liberty. He admonishes his readers to exercise charity toward the weaker brethren in the use of so-called indifferent things and to give them no offense, lest some “for whom Christ died” be destroyed and perish. It has been argued that these passages imply that Christ purposed by His death to save also those who perish in the end. It is clear, however, that these passages cannot possibly be said to teach that Christ by His death designed to save all who perish; the very most that can possibly be claimed for them is that they teach that Christ designed to save some that perish. But not even that interpretation is at all plausible. Paul is warning in strong language against the offending of weak brethren. In doing that he presents, in the words of Shedd, “a supposition, for the sake of argument, of something that does

²⁰ The Christian View of Man, The Macmillan Co., New York, 1937, pp. 74f. See also A. C. De Jong, The Well-Meant Gospel Offer, T. Wever Franeker, 1954, pp. 171B

²¹ The Canons of Dort, Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine, 8.

²² Opera, Edinburgh, 1867-68, IV, xvii, 33.

not and cannot happen.”²³ Another instance of this mode of argumentation is found in Galatians 1:8, where Paul envisages the impossibility of the preaching of a false gospel by an angel from heaven. Mention may also be made here of such a passage as II Peter 2:1, which warns against false teachers “denying the Lord that bought them.” According to L. Berkhof, the most plausible explanation of this passage is “that given by Smeaton. as the interpretation of Piscator and the Dutch annotations, namely, ‘that these false teachers are described according to their profession and the judgment of charity. They gave themselves out as redeemed men, and were so accounted in the judgment of the Church while they abode in her communion.’”²⁴ Hebrews 10:29, which speaks of the sure damnation of him who “hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unclean thing,” must be interpreted in like fashion.

Arminianism and the Scriptural System of Doctrine

Not only is the negative conclusion warranted that the universalistic passages of Scripture do not teach that God designed by the atonement to save each and every individual or that Christ purposed by His death to save each and every individual; in the light of the system of doctrine that is taught in Holy Writ many weighty objections must be brought against the Arminian doctrine of the divine design of the atonement. It goes without saying that the Scriptural proofs for the particularistic view of the design of the atonement, several of which will be considered presently, are so many arguments against inconsistent universalism. But even at this point some serious difficulties besetting the Arminian view may be named.

Nothing is taught more emphatically in Scripture than that God is God indeed. The doctrine of the sovereignty of God lies at the very heart of Holy Writ. Isaiah declared: “Jehovah of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.... For Jehovah of hosts hath purposed, and who shall annul it? and his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?” (Isa. 14:24, 27) No less majestic is the divine asseveration: “I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all ray pleasure.... I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed, I will also do it” (Isa. 46:9-11). And the Psalmist sang: “Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he pleased” (Ps. 115:3). To make the God of the Bible dependent on man, as does the Arminian doctrine of the design of the atonement, is to deny Him. To suppose that God is “struggling along, as it were, with the human race doing the best He can but unable to accomplish His purposes” is sacrilege. “The Arminian idea which assumes that the serious intentions of God may in some cases be defeated, and that man, who is not only a creature but a sinful creature,

²³ Dogmatic Theology, New York, 1889, II, 481.

²⁴ Systematic Theology, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids. 1946, p. 397.

can exercise veto power over the plans of the Almighty Cod, is in striking contrast with the Biblical idea of His immeasurable greatness and exaltation by which He is removed from all the weakness of humanity.”²⁵

To say that the truth of the sovereignty of God lies at the heart of Scripture is identical with asserting that the doctrine of salvation by grace constitutes the very core of special revelation. Salvation by the sovereign grace of God is the central theme of Holy Writ. Salvation by grace is salvation by God. “Salvation belongeth unto the Lord” (Ps. 3:8). “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy” (Rom. 9:16). “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph. 2:8). Even when the regenerate co-operate with God in the process of their salvation, as they most certainly must, they do so only through the grace of God that keeps operating within them. Hence the apostolic exhortation: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh²⁶ in you both to will and to do” (Phil. 2:12, 13). To this cardinal doctrine of the Word of God Arminian universalism does great violence, for it teaches that God did no more than make salvation possible through the death of His Son, and that it is for the sinner to make his salvation actual by the acceptance of Christ in faith of his own free volition. Thus the realization of salvation is made to depend on the will of man, not the will of God. Man becomes his own saviour. Salvation is no longer “of God that showeth mercy” but “of him that willeth.”

The objection has often been brought against Arminian universalism that, if the atonement did not make the salvation of any certain, but merely rendered the salvation of all possible, the actual salvation of each individual being contingent on the free exercise of faith by him, then, conceivably no one might be saved, and Christ might have died in vain. But that is far too weak a statement. The error of this type of universalism is much more serious. Arminianism teaches that God made the salvation of all possible by the atonement, but that it is for each man to make his salvation real by the act of accepting Christ of his own free volition as Saviour. But Scripture teaches unmistakably that apart from the grace of regeneration no man can or will exercise saving faith of his own free will. To be sure, Arminianism, prevalent Wesleyan Arminianism in particular, denies this. It tells us that every human being, unregenerate man as well as regenerate, has sufficient grace, or gracious ability, to receive Christ in faith. However, that teaching flies in the face of many plain statements of Holy Writ. Jesus, having equated coming to Him with believing on Him when He said: “He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst,” went on to affirm: “No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John 6:35, 44). Lydia responded in faith to the preaching of Paul at Philippi. Significantly Scripture accounts for this fact by telling us, not that she opened her heart, but that the Lord opened her heart (Acts 16:14). Paul told the Ephesian

²⁵ Loraine Boettner, *Studies in Theology*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1947, p. 319.

²⁶ The present participle *energon* denotes progressing divine activity and implies the continuous dependence of the regenerate on that activity.

Christians: "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). Whether the antecedent of "it" is "faith" or the broader concept of salvation by grace through faith, in either case God is credited here with being the author of faith. The same apostle congratulated the disciples at Philippi on its having been "given" unto them "in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer with him" (Phil. 1:29). He regarded as a gift the twofold distinction of believing on Christ and suffering with Him. According to Scripture faith is a gift of divine grace to man before it becomes an act of man. The conclusion is inescapable that, if God did no more than make salvation possible by the death of His Son and left it to man to realize his salvation by believing on Christ of his own volition, then God by the death of His Son made salvation an unrealizable possibility. And that is only another way of saying that in that case Christ not only might have died in vain, but actually must have.

Arminianism faces a dilemma. It is, of course, wholly unwilling to grant that its view of the design of the atonement involves the futility of the atonement. Yet, in order to escape that conclusion it must take its seat on one horn or the other of a most serious dilemma. Either it must teach that man is able to exercise saving faith without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, or it must teach that all men actually will be saved in the end. Of the latter of these positions Berkhof has said: "It should also be noted that the doctrine that Christ died for the purpose of saving all men, logically leads to absolute universalism, that is, to the doctrine that all men are actually saved. It is impossible that they for whom Christ paid the price, whose guilt He removed, should be lost on account of that guilt. The Arminians cannot stop at their halfway station, but must go all the way."²⁷ As a matter of fact most Arminians take the former of these positions, but it is as patently unscriptural as is the latter. And as to the latter position, while historic Arminianism rejects it, some present-day Arminians are prepared to accept it.

Under the title *A Display of Arminianism* John Owen, sometime vice-chancellor of Oxford University, has offered what is perhaps the most conclusive refutation of Arminianism ever written. The fallacy of the Arminian view of the divine design of the atonement he set forth as follows: "God imposed his wrath due unto, and Christ underwent the pains of hell for, either all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some sins of all men. If the last, some sins of all men, then have all men some sins to answer for, and so shall no man be saved. If the second, that is it which we affirm, that Christ in their stead and room suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the world. If the first, why, then, are not all freed from the punishment of all their sins? You will say, 'Because of their unbelief; they will not believe.' But this unbelief, is it a sin, or not? If not, why should they be punished for it? If it be, then Christ underwent the punishment due to it, or not. If so, then why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which he died from partaking of the fruit of his death? If he did not, then did he not die for all their sins." Having said that, Owen challenged the followers of Arminius: "Let them

²⁷ *Systematic Theology*, p. 395.

choose which part they will.”²⁸

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²⁸ The Works of John Owen, Edinburgh, 1862, X, 173f.