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# Historical and Theological Perspectives on the Rise of Arminianism and the Place of Seventh-day Adventism in the Calvinist-Arminian Debate

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## **HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE RISE OF ARMINIANISM AND THE PLACE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISM IN THE CALVINIST-ARMINIAN DEBATE**

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### *Abstract*

This article provides a brief historical survey of some of the theological issues raised by Arminius and *The Remonstrance*, and seeks to identify the key theological arguments that anchor the Arminian perspective of the Adventist doctrine of salvation. Four hundred years ago, in 1610, a group of Dutch pastors and theologians published a document in which they responded to the accusations of heresy leveled against the teachings of their colleague, Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius, who had recently died (1609). This document encapsulated Arminian teachings on the doctrine of salvation in five points and subsequently became known as *The Remonstrance*, a French noun referring to an official and well-articulated document to protest or raise objections about a law or an edict. In the years that followed, the teachings of *The Remonstrance* became a rallying point for those who were dissatisfied with traditional Calvinism. In 1618, during the Synod of Dort, Reformed theologians fought against the Arminian soteriology presented in *The Remonstrance* and formulated their own response to the five points of Arminianism. This eventually became known as the five points of Calvinism, otherwise referred to as TULIP (the Total depravity of human beings, the Unconditional election of the redeemed, the Limited atonement of Christ only for the redeemed, the Irresistible grace of God toward the redeemed, and the Perseverance of the Saints). Subsequent decades and centuries witnessed waves of conflicts among many Christian Protestant religious groups that traced their theological roots to either Calvinism or Arminianism. The Seventh-day Adventist understanding of salvation clearly finds its roots in the Arminian *Remonstrance* and Wesleyan Methodism, but also brings its own unique theological nuances and contributions to this doctrine.

Keywords: Calvinism, Arminius, Arminianism, *Remonstrance*, Salvation, Methodism, TULIP, predestination, freewill.

### *Introduction*

About four hundred years ago, in 1610, a group of Dutch pastors and theologians published a document in which they responded to the accusations leveled against the teachings of their colleague, Reformed theologian Jacobus, or James, Arminius, who had died the year before. This document encapsulated Arminian soteriological teachings in five points and subsequently became known as *The Remonstrance*, a French word referring to an official and well-reasoned document to protest or raise objections about a law or an edict.

In the years that followed, the teachings of *The Remonstrance* became a rallying point for those who were dissatisfied with traditional Calvinism, but more particularly with a strict *unconditional* predestination.

Subsequent decades and centuries witnessed waves of conflicts among many Christian Protestant religious groups that traced their theological roots to either Calvinism or Arminianism. As Roger Olson has shown in his recent book *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*,<sup>1</sup> there are major theological differences between Calvinism and Arminianism, but there are also many points in common. The Seventh-day Adventist understanding of salvation clearly finds its roots in the sixteenth-century Reformation and the Arminian *Remonstrance*. But eighteenth-century Methodism, which championed Arminian thought, forms the immediate theological context for the Adventist doctrine of salvation in the nineteenth century.

This article presents a brief historical survey of the theological issues raised by Arminius and *The Remonstrance*, the Calvinist/Reformed response given at the Synod of Dort, and identifies the key theological arguments that anchor the Arminian perspective of the Adventist doctrine of salvation.

#### *I. Theological Issues Raised by Arminius and the Remonstrance*

Arminianism begins per se in Holland at the end of the sixteenth century. James Arminius was born near Rotterdam in 1559.<sup>2</sup> He studied theology under some of the best teachers of his time and spent five years in Geneva (1582-1587) under the tutelage of Theodore Beza where he was exposed to the various forms of scholastic Reformed theology. In 1588, Arminius received a pastoral appointment

<sup>1</sup>Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

<sup>2</sup>This biographical and historical context of Arminius' life and teachings is taken from Richard A. Müller, "Arminius and Arminianism," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 33-35, and J. K. Grider "Arminianism," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1984), 79-81.

in Amsterdam and in 1602 became professor of theology at the University of Leiden.

Arminius soon found himself at odds with two of his university colleagues, Franciscus Gomarus and Lucas Trelcatius. During the decade or so before his university appointment, Arminius had begun to shift his understanding of the Reformed doctrine of predestination and the debate that his views initiated at the university occupied the remainder of his life. In 1608, he argued for his orthodoxy in his *Declaration of Sentiments*, a document he offered to the Estates General of Holland.<sup>3</sup> In this document he presented his views on predestination, human free will, divine grace, assurance of salvation, the divinity of Christ, and his justification for his request to revise the *Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Of all the topics he addressed in the *Declaration* predestination receives the lengthiest treatment and he clearly stated his divergence from the Reformed theology of his colleagues. “The document presents three Reformed views of predestination—the supralapsarian, a modified supralapsarian position, and the infralapsarian—and rejects them all in favour of a fourth position, Arminius’s own.”<sup>4</sup>

#### Supralapsarianism

Supralapsarianism is the form of the doctrine of predestination that Arminius was most at odd with and in order to understand his position and the theological contributions he made, we need to understand what he was against. Calvinist theology laid great emphasis on the sovereignty of God, which was a concept borrowed from Augustine. God is said to be perfect in all respects of his nature, possessor of all power, righteousness, and holiness. He is eternal and completely self-sufficient. Therefore, he is not subject either to time or to any other beings, nor is he to be reduced to spacio-temporal categories for human understanding and analysis. To his creatures God must always remain mysterious, except insofar as he reveals himself to them.

This philosophical understanding of the nature of God, taken from Greek Aristotelian and neo-Platonic philosophy, had some important implications. According to this perspective God is timeless and exists in timelessness; hence, he cannot do anything new for this would reduce him to a set of imperfect and human categories. “Zwingli and Calvin both had emphasized that everything that happens—including the fall of Adam and Eve and the election of some humans to salvation and others to damnation—is decreed by God. In other words [...] nothing at all happens or can happen accidently or even contingently. Everything that happens outside of God himself happens by divine decree. God foreknows

<sup>3</sup>James Arminius, *A Declaration of the Sentiments of Arminius in The Works of James Arminius*, London ed., trans. by James Nichols and William Nichols (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 210-275.

<sup>4</sup>Müller, 34.

what will happen because he foreordains everything that happens, and he foreordains because he decrees it all from eternity.”<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, Reformed theology at the time of Arminius wondered and speculated about the order of these eternally foreordained divine decrees. Theologians asked themselves what could have been the ultimate and first decree in the mind of God, the eternal decree that would bring the most glory to God. “They agreed that all of God’s decrees are simultaneous and eternal because they accepted Augustine’s notion of eternity as an ‘eternal now’ in which all times—past, present and future—are simultaneous. For God, they believed, there is no separation or even succession of moments. Everything is eternally present.”<sup>6</sup> Since God exists only in timelessness, God cannot respond to a human situation, like the fall. What appears to us as God’s response to human life has always been decided of all eternity in the mind of God and God has preordained of all eternity, before the creation of time, everything that has happened in regards to the plan of salvation.

Reformed theologians speculated over the *logical* order of these decrees, not their *chronological* order. At the time of Arminius, they had somehow figured out and established the order of these divine decrees into different schemes. Arminius took issue with the supralapsarian scheme of these decrees. These decrees of God are named in reference to the fall of humanity, particularly when was ordained the decree to save the elect. Supralapsarianism argues that the decree that brings the most glory to God is the salvation of the elect and the damnation of others, and this decree must logically have been in the mind of God *before* the decree to allow or ordain the fall of humanity (from the Latin *supra* before, and *lapsa* fall). The logical order of the supralapsarian decrees is:

1. To predestine some to eternal life in heaven and some others to eternal damnation in hell;
2. To create both the saved and the reprobate;
3. To allow the fall of humanity;
4. To provide atonement and salvation only for the elect;
5. To give salvation only to the elect.

<sup>5</sup>Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 457. Based on Eph 1:11 where Paul refers to the plan of him “who works all things after the counsel of His will,” God’s decree is a theological concept for the comprehensive plan for the universe and its history which God’s sovereignty established in eternity. The Westminster Shorter Catechism provides this classic definition: “The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass” (Question 7). See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919), 3:677.

<sup>6</sup>Olson, *Story of Christian Theology*, 457.

### The Remonstrance

In 1610, just one year after the death of James Arminius, five articles of faith based on his teachings were drawn up by his followers. The Arminians, as his followers came to be called, presented these five doctrines to the States of Holland and West Friesland in the form of a *Remonstrance*. The Arminian party also insisted that the *Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism* (which was the official expression of the doctrinal position of the Churches of Holland) be amended to conform to the doctrinal views contained in the *Remonstrance*. They wanted to see changes made to five particular doctrines of the Reformed faith as understood by supralapsarianism.

Before going any further, we should note that Arminius and the Remonstrants did not reject the philosophical foundation of Reformed theology. Their understanding of God's eternal nature, of eternity, and of the need of eternal divine decrees remained intact. What they challenged was the nature of these decrees, their logical order and their biblical and historical foundation. Arminius and his colleagues were Protestant scholastic theologians just as much as other Reformed theologians at the time. By the eighteenth century, however, when John Wesley championed an Arminian understanding of salvation, this philosophical understanding of eternity and of God's relationship with humanity was no longer as prominent and did not concern theologians to the same extent.

What were the five doctrinal points or objections of the Arminian *Remonstrance*?

*God's election of people is conditional to their response.* The first point of contention with traditional Reformed theology was its *unconditional* predestination. Arminians had difficulty accepting that God would decide from all eternity who would be saved and who would not. Moreover, if God would of his own will decide to save some, then why not save all humankind? In this sense Arminianism viewed Calvinism as fatalistic.

The Remonstrants also had difficulty with the antinomian tendencies of Calvinism or the seeming complacency of the people. If God had already determined who would be saved, why should people make much efforts at keeping the commandments of God or in being strict about church standards? For Arminianism this attitude had also a negative impact on missionary and evangelistic endeavors. Why preach the gospel if God has already decided who will be saved? Furthermore, Calvinism's view of predestination was opposed to human freedom and human reason, key concepts of the Renaissance view of humankind.

In contrast to Reformed unconditional predestination, the *Remonstrance* states that God, foreseeing who would believe in Jesus, has predestined the elected people to salvation and that one's salvation is determined by one's acceptance of God's offer. Arminianism affirms that God desires all persons to be saved but an individual has to believe in the salvation Christ has provided in order for her to be

saved and to benefit from salvation. A key text for Arminians is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

*Christ died for all sinners.* The *Remonstrance* objects to Calvinism's view of limited atonement, that Christ atoned for the sins of the elect only. Arminianism affirms that Christ's sacrifice of atonement on the cross was made for all of humankind who has ever lived or will ever live. Yet, the benefits of this universal atonement are applied only to the believer.

*Human freewill is restored by the Holy Spirit.* The *Remonstrance* also specifies that because of the fall of Adam and Eve, the nature of human beings is sinful and that of themselves no one is able to do good or even to believe in God. Even a person's will is affected by sin. However, God has given to every human being a measure of his grace to enable them to accept the influence of the Spirit. Through this divine intervention, called prevenient grace, human beings have a free will and are able to believe in God because the Holy Spirit works in all of them. It is therefore the work of the Holy Spirit to effect a transformation in a person's heart in order for them to rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good.

*Grace can be resisted.* In article four the *Remonstrance* explains that God, through his Holy Spirit and his grace, accomplishes all the good that a person may do or conceive. However, the grace of God can be resisted. People may resist the operation of the Holy Spirit in one's life and God does not force anyone against their will to accept his salvation.

*Believers may persevere in the faith or fall from grace.* The last article goes on to say that the Christian may have the victory over sin through the assisting grace of the Holy Spirit. If the individual who is tempted to sin desires the help of Christ, he/she will have the victory. In the last part of the article, the statement becomes blurry, and the writers did not seem to know for sure if it was possible for one to fall from grace, although it cited a few biblical references that support this concept. However, later Arminianism took the position that one's perseverance in the faith is a condition for salvation.

### Synod of Dort

Calvinism reacted strongly to the *Remonstrance* and its five Arminian articles. What Arminianism promoted was tantamount to a redefinition of what Reformation theology had stood for against Roman Catholicism. The Reformers had stood firmly against the possibility of humankind to earn even a little part of their salvation and believed Roman Catholicism had accepted during the Middle Ages an anthropology based on Pelagianism, that human beings are not totally depraved but could operate parts of their salvation. The Reformers believed that this view of humankind was the basis of Roman Catholic sacraments and of a works-oriented salvation scheme.

By understanding the nature of human beings to be totally depraved, as Augustine had believed against Pelagius, Reformed soteriology emphasized the sovereignty of God in the salvation of humanity. From all eternity, God chose who would be saved and who would be lost, without any human participation in salvation. We need to understand the Reformers' position in its context and in reaction to abuses and aberrations in Catholic theology. I believe Arminianism brought back the pendulum of the doctrines of God's sovereignty, human free will and salvation into a more centrist position with a better biblical understanding.

In any case, Reformed theologians reacted strongly against Arminianism. To meet the challenge they faced various Reformed churches of Holland, Switzerland, England and France sent delegates to a synod in the city of Dort from November 13, 1618 to May 9, 1619.

It unanimously rejected the five points of Arminianism and produced a document, the Canons of the Synod of Dort, in which the major doctrines of Reformed theology were carefully defined in response to Arminianism. It is from this document that came what is now called the "five points of Calvinism"<sup>7</sup> or the TULIP:

1. the Total depravity of human beings,
2. the Unconditional election of the redeemed,
3. the Limited atonement of Christ only for the redeemed,
4. the Irresistible grace of God toward the redeemed, and
5. the Perseverance of the Saints.

Regarding the position taken by the Synod of Dort, Jaroslav Pelikan comments, "the Synod of Dort affirmed its allegiance to normative Reformed teaching, as promulgated in the *Belgic Confession*, to whose authority the several national delegations to the synod subscribed, and in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, which was endorsed as 'a very accurate compendium of orthodox Christian doctrine.'"<sup>8</sup> This document is still today the basis of many Reformed doctrinal positions.

Although it is a strong Calvinist document, and a reaffirmation of the basic tenets of supralapsarianism, some of the language and expressions used in it betray an uneasiness with the freedom of the will and such texts of Scripture as John 3:16. From an Adventist perspective, it does not successfully answer the objections raised by James Arminius and *The Remonstrance*. Thus the debate continues 400 years later.

<sup>7</sup>A well-known exposition of the five points of Calvinism is David N. Steele and Curtis A. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1963).

<sup>8</sup>Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 4: *Reformation of Church and Dogma (1300-1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 236.



## *II. Key Theological Arguments of Adventist Arminian Soteriology*

But why are Seventh-day Adventists Arminian in their theology? I will try to answer this question from two directions; first, by highlighting what I perceive to be Arminius's most accurate and powerful arguments showing the weaknesses of an unconditional predestinarian theology and, second, by describing briefly the major foci of Adventist theology.

### Arminius's Key Theological Contributions

After many years of conflicts, as I alluded to earlier, Arminius wrote his *Declaration of Sentiments* in 1608 in which he presented his best arguments against the supralapsarian form of Reformed theology and why he felt it was inconsistent with biblical theology and church history.

Seventh-day Adventists know very little about James Arminius. In fact, most of Protestantism knows very little about Arminius. He remains one of the least studied Protestant theologians, yet he is still one of the most influential. Among his arguments in the *Declaration of Sentiments*, his twenty objections to the supralapsarian doctrine of unconditional predestination reveal a deep knowledge of Scripture, church history and contemporary theological developments.

Among Arminius's twenty objections I find that five of them, in particular, speak powerfully in favor of his understanding of the plan of salvation and resonate well with Adventist beliefs. At the beginning of the list, he stated unequivocally the main reasons for his decision to reject supralapsarianism. The various texts of Scripture that speak of a person's belief in God's salvation, or of the need to believe in Christ in order to be saved, are at the core of his understanding of the plan of salvation and of the gospel. Arminius saw a crucial sequence of events in Scripture regarding someone's salvation: God loves humanity and gives his Son as a sacrifice of atonement for all humankind, and whoever believes in Christ and repents from sin, receives the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. This sequence he believed is the core doctrine of the gospel and this Good News is a genuine invitation to whoever believes. God provides salvation for all human beings, he invites them to accept Christ as Saviour, those who accept this invitation are saved. Hence, God could not have already determined who would be saved or lost before the creation of the world or before the fall of humankind as stated in supralapsarianism. "For, according to the tenor of the discourses delivered by John and Christ," Arminius explained, "as they are described to us by the Evangelist, and according to the doctrine of the Apostles and Christ after his ascension, the Gospel consists partly of an injunction *to repent and believe*, and partly of a promise to bestow *forgiveness of sins, the grace of the Spirit, and life eternal.*"<sup>9</sup> According to Arminius, the simple sequence of events

<sup>9</sup>Arminius, *Declaration of Sentiments*, 217.

explained in Scripture is to be accepted as God's revelation of the plan and the order of salvation.

A second crucial theological reason that I find appealing is based on his understanding of the nature of God's character. Arminius finds "repugnant" to the nature of God's character the belief that from all eternity he decreed some people to eternal damnation before they were created and even before they made a decision to rebel against him. This, he said, "represents God as decreeing something for a particular end [...] which neither is nor can be good".<sup>10</sup> Fundamentally, he argued, the decision to condemn someone, before that person sins, is an evil decision and cannot be in accordance to God's wisdom, justice and goodness.

A third theological reason relates to the freedom of the will. He argued that human beings were created with freedom of will and, therefore, "with a disposition and aptitude for the enjoyment of life eternal."<sup>11</sup> Hence, if the first decree of supralapsarianism is accurate, then this doctrine is inconsistent with the image of God in human beings; human beings were not really created with freedom of will since logically before their creation they were already unconditionally predestined to either be saved or be lost. In fact, human beings are misled to think that they have freedom of will.

A fourth theological reason relates to the purpose of creation. Scripture tells us that creation was a "good" act of God, which implies a moral quality. At the end of the creation week, "God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good" (Gen 1:31 NKJV). According to Arminius, "If creation be the way and means through which God willed the execution of the decree of his reprobation, he was more inclined to will the act of reprobation than that of creation; and he consequently derived greater satisfaction from the act of condemning certain of his innocent creatures, than in the act of their creation."<sup>12</sup> Again, here, Arminius raised an issue of logical inconsistencies between the supralapsarian understanding of salvation and his understanding of biblical theology. Ultimately, if God derives more glory from the salvation of some and the damnation of others, than he does from the creation of human beings, then why create human beings in the first place? Why give them freedom of the will? Why declare creation to be "very good"? To Arminius, all this is illogical and inconsistent with biblical revelation.

A fifth theological reason Arminius stated relates to the nature of sin and its impact on the nature of God's character. I find this argument the strongest he made. What is the relationship between sin, human transgression, and eternal damnation? In the plan of salvation, is sin the result of a human transgression to God's law and does it bring about eternal damnation? Paul seems to say so in

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 222.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 223.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 226.

Romans 6:23, “for the wages of sin is death”—death is caused by sin. But, if according to supralapsarianism, transgression was logically decreed before human beings were created, than how can sin be the cause of damnation? Paul states that sin is the cause of damnation but supralapsarianism makes sin the means of damnation since one’s damnation was decreed before sin was ever committed. Hence, Arminius concluded that such a doctrine is profoundly “injurious to the glory of God” because it makes God the reason for the existence of sin; sin was necessary in order to effect the damnation God decreed of all eternity. The first decree of supralapsarianism could not happen unless in the third decree “God ordained that man should commit sin.” Sin is therefore unavoidable in God’s universe and some people, those who are condemned, could not avoid sin. Sin was necessary in order for God to receive all glory and majesty. The logical conclusion of all this according to Arminius is that “God is the author of sin”, “God really sins” by ordaining something evil (which is a moral decision at odds with God’s nature), and “God is the only sinner.”<sup>13</sup> Perhaps of all the theological arguments Arminianism has fired at Calvinism, this is the strongest. How can God be consistent with his character of love if unconditional predestination also assumes that God decreed the existence of sin?

In his *Declaration of Sentiments*, Arminius concluded his list of arguments by stating his own understanding of the eternal decrees of God. God’s decrees are:

1. “to appoint his Son, Jesus Christ, for a Mediator, Redeemer, Savior, Priest and King [...]”;
2. “to receive into favor *those who repent and believe*, and, in Christ, for His sake and through Him, to effect the salvation of such penitents and believers as persevered to the end; but to leave in sin, and under wrath, *all impenitent persons and unbelievers*, and to damn them as aliens from Christ”;
3. “to administer *in a sufficient and efficacious manner* the means which were necessary for repentance and faith; and to have such administration instituted [...]”;
4. “to save and damn certain particular persons.”<sup>14</sup>

To this last decree Arminius adds that the foundation of this decree is the “foreknowledge of God, by which he knew from all eternity those individuals who *would*, through his preventing grace, *believe*, and, through his subsequent grace *would persevere*, [...] and by which foreknowledge, he likewise knew those who *would not believe and persevere*.”<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 228, 229.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 247, 248.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 248.

### What's Arminian in Adventist Theology?

Although Adventists do not subscribe to an Augustinian or scholastic worldview, their theology is anchored and deeply rooted in the basic Arminian system of thought as they inherited it from Methodism. This provides Adventists with the foundation for their core beliefs regarding the character of God and the plan of salvation. In his analysis of the Arminian roots of Adventist beliefs, Russell Staples states, “The cluster of doctrines relating to the Fall and sin and salvation constitute a thoroughgoing evangelical Arminianism.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, the Adventist theme of the great controversy between good and evil provides a theological framework that is dependent on an Arminian understanding of God’s relationship with sinners and the sinner’s need to respond to the gospel invitation.

Adventists believe that the core characteristic of God’s character is love, a selfless love on behalf of his creation, a love that guides all his actions toward the universe and humanity. God’s character of love is intrinsic to who he is and was such prior to the creation of any other beings. The creation of the universe, including angels and human beings, was an act of love. Yet, sadly, this perfect universe created by God became corrupted by sin and rebellion.

According to Adventist beliefs, Scripture teaches that the problem of evil started in heaven when a perfect angel created by God, Lucifer, decided of his own freewill to rebel against God and his government.<sup>17</sup> Deceived by his self-confidence and pride, Lucifer decided to challenge God’s authority and to level against God accusations of tyranny and arbitrariness, that God’s government is based on arbitrary rules, that God is not a god of love but one of vindictiveness. Thus, Adventists understand the core of the problem of evil and sin in the universe to be at once a theological and an ethical problem—that God’s character of love is challenged and misunderstood, that God’s government of the universe and response to humanity’s sin is misrepresented. Satan’s rebellion against God thus began a cosmic controversy between God and Satan, between God’s government and Satan’s claims, a rebellion that spread to Earth with the disobedience of Adam and Eve.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup>Russell L. Staples, “Adventism,” in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 63.

<sup>17</sup>Scripture passages that speak of this great controversy include Job 1:6-12; Isa 14:12-14; Eze 28:12-19; Rev 12:7-17; Luke 10:18. Gregory A. Boyd’s books *God at War* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997) and *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001) present an understanding of this great controversy that is similar to what Adventists have believed.

<sup>18</sup>The Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Belief #8 on the Great Controversy states, “All humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe. This conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-

God's response to Adam and Eve's transgression was the plan of salvation, a plan that had been devised by the Trinity "before the foundation of the earth" (Eph 1:4; Rev 13:8). This plan of redemption insists that only God can redeem humanity from the fall and that only God's Son could die for humanity. This plan was devised as a response of God's love, a self-sacrifice on behalf of his creation. Yet, since the core issue of the great controversy is a misunderstanding of God's character, God cannot force anyone to accept his offer of salvation. Forcing or preordaining someone's salvation would be tantamount to give credence to Satan's accusations. Instead, the entire plan of salvation is based on the freewill of individuals to accept or reject the salvation provided by Christ's death on the cross as an act of God's redeeming, selfless love. Adventists believe that no one will be forced to live with God for eternity. God's dealings with humanity since the beginning of sin have been for the ultimate purpose to bring an end to this rebellion by demonstrating his love, mercy and justice through Christ's life and sacrificial death, and through his people Israel and the Church. When the rebellion began in heaven, God could have easily destroyed all opposition but in doing so, he would have cast a shadow on his character and given some credibility to Satan's accusations. It was to reveal the true character of God and to answer the accusations of Satan that Christ came to this earth to redeem humanity. Christ's death for the salvation of humankind did not only make heaven accessible to men and women who repent of their sins and accept the offer of salvation, but before all the universe it justified and vindicated God in his dealing with the rebellion of Satan.

This Adventist theological understanding of the origin of evil and sin and the plan of salvation are based on core Arminian presuppositions: that God's character is essentially love, a moral quality that respects decisions made by other free created beings; that God created human beings in his image with freedom of choice; that sin broke humanity's relationship with God but in God's mercy the Holy Spirit grants to all individuals a measure of grace to allow them the capacity to make the right choice in regards to spiritual matters; that Christ's sacrificial death on the cross is for the benefit of all human beings; that salvation in Christ is offered to every one; that God's grace sustains those who persevere in faith unto the end; and that God's foreknowledge of those who will be ultimately saved or

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exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels. He introduced the spirit of rebellion into this world when he led Adam and Eve into sin. This human sin resulted in the distortion of the image of God in humanity, the disordering of the created world, and its eventual devastation at the time of the worldwide flood. Observed by the whole creation, this world became the arena of the universal conflict, out of which the God of love will ultimately be vindicated. To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation" (Rev 12:4-9; Isa 14:12-14; Eze 28:12-18; Gen 3; Rom 1:19-32; 5:12-21; 8:19-22; Gen 6-8; 2 Peter 3:6; 1 Cor 4:9; Heb 1:14).

lost respects every human being's freedom of choice and that God elects to salvation those whom he knows will make the right choice.

If Adventists have been so insistent on talking about the commandments of God, and particularly the observance of the Sabbath, it is because of this theme of the great controversy and of our Arminian roots. At the core of this controversy is the character of God. The misrepresentation of God's character by Satan is a core issue, but also part of Satan's challenge to God's character is a challenge to his law, which is a true representation of his character. Satan's aim is also to misrepresent and distort God's law. In Adventist thought, the character of God and the law of God are not two separate elements of this controversy; God's law is a reflection of his character, of who he is. Hence, Adventists argue, keeping the commandments is the best way to demonstrate one's faith in God, not to be saved but to thank God for salvation. The same goes for all Adventist lifestyle teachings on health and taking care of our minds and bodies. If it is true there is a controversy over God's character and his government of the universe, each human being is part of this controversy and has a role to play in it. Our decisions may impact our own salvation and that of others. God's grace is sufficient to save all sinners, but God will not force someone to live with him for eternity. While Satan uses lies and deception to fulfill his purpose against God and his people, God on the other hand uses only loving persuasion. He never forces someone to serve Him.

Seventh-day Adventism is fundamentally Arminian. Of course, Adventism has many other points in common with other Christian groups but at the core of its belief system is Arminianism. And for Adventists, Arminius and the Remonstrants are part of a long line of God's faithful people who sought to understand the Scripture to the best of their abilities and to share the good news of the plan of salvation with others. Many of them were persecuted for their faith. Nonetheless, their legacy lives on. Adventists consider them as their spiritual ancestors.

*Appendix*  
*The Remonstrance*

Article One

“That God, by an eternal and unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son, before the foundation of the world, hath determined, out of the fallen, sinful race of men, to save in Christ, for Christ’s sake, and through Christ, those who, through the grace of the Holy Ghost, shall believe on this his son Jesus, and shall persevere in this faith and obedience of faith, through this grace, even to the end; and, on the other hand, to leave the incorrigible and unbelieving in sin and under wrath, and to condemn them as alienate from Christ, according to the word of the Gospel in John 3:36: ‘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,’ and according to other passages of Scripture also.” Biblical texts supporting this position include John 3:16, 17; Ezek 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim 2:3-4; Acts 17:30-31.

Article Two

“That agreeably thereunto, Jesus Christ the Savior 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 this forgiveness of sins except the believer, according to the word of the Gospel of John 3:16, “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.” 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.” Other biblical texts supporting this position include John 1:29; 2 Cor 5:14-15; Heb 2:9; Isa 53:6; 1 Tim 2:6; Titus 2:11.

Article Three

“That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do any thing that is truly good (such as saving Faith eminently is); but that it is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the Word of Christ, John 15:5, ‘Without me ye can do nothing.’”

#### Article Four

“That this grace of God is the beginning, continuance, and accomplishment of all good, even to this extent, that the regenerate man himself, without prevenient or assisting, awakening, following and cooperative grace, can neither think, will, nor do good, nor withstand any temptations to evil; so that all good deeds or movements, that can be conceived, must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. but respects the mode of the operation of this grace, it is not irresistible; inasmuch as it is written concerning many, that they have resisted the Holy Ghost. Acts 7, and elsewhere in many places.”

#### Article Five

“That those who are incorporated into Christ by true faith, and have thereby become partakers of his life-giving Spirit, have thereby full power to strive against Satan, sin, the world, and their own flesh, and to win the victory; it being well understood that it is ever through the assisting grace of the Holy Ghost; and that Jesus Christ assists them through his Spirit in all temptations, extends to them his hand, and if only they are ready for the conflict, and desire his help, and are not inactive, keeps them from falling, so that they, by no craft or power of Satan, can be misled nor plucked out of Christ’s hands, according to the Word of Christ, John 10:28: “Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” But whether they are capable, through negligence, of forsaking again the first beginning of their life in Christ, of again returning to this present evil world, of turning away from the holy doctrine which was delivered them, of losing a good conscience, of becoming devoid of grace, that must be more particularly determined out of the Holy Scripture, before we ourselves can teach it with the full persuasion of our mind.” Biblical texts supporting this position include Heb 3:6, 14; 6:4-6; 10:26, 35, 38; 1 John 2:24; 1 Tim 1:19; 4:16; 2 Tim 2:12; 1 Cor 9:27; Rom 11:22.