

# Arminianism

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**Arminianism** is a branch of Protestantism based on the theological ideas of the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) and his historic supporters known as Remonstrants. Dutch Arminianism was originally articulated in the *Remonstrance* (1610), a theological statement submitted to the States General of the Netherlands. This expressed an attempt to moderate the doctrines of Calvinism related to its interpretation of predestination. The Synod of Dort (1618–19) was called by the States General to consider the *Five Articles of Remonstrance*.

Classical Arminianism, to which Arminius is the main contributor, and Wesleyan Arminianism, to which John Wesley is the main contributor, are the two main schools of thought.

Many Christian denominations have been influenced by Arminian views on the will of man being freed by grace prior to regeneration, notably the Baptists in 17th century, the Methodists in the 18th century, and the Pentecostals in the 20th century.

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### **Precursor movements and theological influences**

According to Roger E. Olson, Arminius' beliefs, i.e. Arminianism, did not begin with him.<sup>[1]</sup> Denominations such as the Waldensians and other groups prior to the Reformation have similarly to Arminianism affirmed that each person may choose the contingent response of either resisting God's grace or yielding to it.<sup>[2]</sup> Anabaptist theologian Balthasar Hubmaier also promoted much the same view as Arminius nearly a century before him.<sup>[1]</sup> The soteriological doctrines of Arminianism and Anabaptism are roughly equivalent.<sup>[3][4]</sup> In particular, Mennonites have been historically Arminian whether they distinctly espoused the Arminian viewpoint or not, and rejected Calvinism soteriology.<sup>[5]</sup> Anabaptist theology seems to have influenced Jacobus Arminius.<sup>[3]</sup> At least, he was "sympathetic to the Anabaptist point of view, and Anabaptists were commonly in attendance on his preaching."<sup>[4]</sup> Similarly, Arminius mentions Danish Lutheran theologian Niels Hemmingsen as holding the basic view of soteriology he held and he may have been influenced by Hemmingsen.<sup>[6]</sup>

### **Emergence of Arminianism**

Jacobus Arminius was a Dutch pastor and theologian in the late 16th and early 17th centuries.<sup>[7]</sup> He was taught by Theodore Beza, Calvin's hand-picked successor, but after examination of the scriptures, he rejected his teacher's theology that it is God who unconditionally elects some for salvation.<sup>[7]</sup> Instead Arminius proposed that the election of God was *of believers*, thereby making it conditional on faith.<sup>[7]</sup> Arminius's views were challenged by the Dutch Calvinists, especially Franciscus Gomarus, but Arminius died before a national synod could occur.<sup>[8]</sup>

Arminius died before he could satisfy Holland's State General's request for a 14-page paper outlining his views. Arminius's followers replied in his stead crafting the *Five articles of Remonstrance* (1610), in which they express their points of divergence with the stricter Calvinism of the *Belgic Confession*.<sup>[8]</sup> This is how Arminius's followers were called Remonstrants, and following a *Counter Remonstrance* in 1611, Gomarus' followers were called Counter-Remonstrants.<sup>[9]</sup>

After some political maneuvering, the Dutch Calvinists were able to convince Prince Maurice of Nassau to deal with the situation.<sup>[7]</sup> Maurice systematically removed Arminian magistrates from office and called a national synod at Dordrecht. This Synod of Dort was open primarily to Dutch Calvinists (102 people), while the Arminians were excluded (13 people banned from voting), with Calvinist representatives from other countries (28 people), and in 1618 published a condemnation of Arminius and his followers as heretics. Part of this publication was the famous Five points of Calvinism in response to the five articles of Remonstrance.<sup>[8]</sup>

Arminians across Holland were removed from office, imprisoned, banished, and sworn to silence. Twelve years later Holland officially granted Arminianism protection as a religion, although animosity between Arminians and Calvinists continued.<sup>[7]</sup> Most of the early Remonstrants followed a classical version of Arminianism. However some, who have been called "Arminians of the head" such as Philipp van Limborch, moved in the direction of semi-Pelagianism and rationalism.<sup>[10]</sup>



Portrait of Jacobus Arminius, from *Kupferstich aus Theatrum Europaeum* by Matthaeus Merian in 1662

## Arminianism in the Church of England

In England, the so-labelled Arminian doctrines<sup>[11]</sup> were held, in substance, before and in parallel of Arminius.<sup>[12]</sup> Actually, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion (finalised in 1571), were sufficiently ambiguous that they could be interpreted as either Arminian or Calvinistic.<sup>[12]</sup> Arminianism in the Church of England was fundamentally an expression of opposition to Calvinism, and only some theologians held to classical Arminianism, but for the rest they were either semi-Pelagian or Pelagian.<sup>[7][12][13]</sup> In this specific context, contemporary historians prefer to use the term "proto-Arminians" rather than "Arminians" to designate the leanings of divines who didn't follow classical Arminianism.<sup>[14]</sup> English Arminianism was represented by Arminian Puritans such as John Goodwin or High Anglican Arminians such as Jeremy Taylor and Henry Hammond.<sup>[12]</sup> Anglican Arminians of the 17th century such as William Laud (1573-1645) fought Calvinist Puritans.<sup>[12]</sup> They actually saw Arminianism in terms of a state church, idea that was completely alien to the views of Arminius.<sup>[7]</sup> This position became particularly evident under the reign (1625-1649) of Charles I of England.<sup>[12]</sup> Following the English Civil War (1642–1651) Charles II of England, who despised the Presbyterians, re-instituted Arminian thought in the Church of England. It was dominant there for some fifty years.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Baptists

The debate between Calvin's followers and Arminius's followers is characteristic of post-Reformation church history. The emerging Baptist movement in 17th-century England, for example, was a microcosm of the historic debate between Calvinists and Arminians. The first Baptists—called "General Baptists" because of their confession of a "general" or unlimited atonement—were Arminians.<sup>[15]</sup> The Baptist movement originated with Thomas Helwys, who left his mentor John Smyth (who had moved into shared belief and other distinctives of the Dutch Waterlander Mennonites of Amsterdam) and returned to London to start the first English Baptist Church in 1611. Later General Baptists such as John Griffith, Samuel Loveday, and Thomas Grantham defended a Reformed Arminian theology that reflected the Arminianism of Arminius. The General Baptists encapsulated their Arminian views in numerous confessions, the most influential of which was the Standard Confession of 1660. In the 1640s the Particular Baptists were formed, diverging strongly from Arminian doctrine and embracing the strong Calvinism of the

Presbyterians and Independents. Their robust Calvinism was publicized in such confessions as the London Baptist Confession of 1644 and the Second London Confession of 1689. The London Confession of 1689 was later used by Calvinistic Baptists in America (called the Philadelphia Baptist Confession), whereas the Standard Confession of 1660 was used by the American heirs of the English General Baptists, who soon came to be known as Free Will Baptists.<sup>[16]</sup>

## Methodists

This same dynamic between Arminianism and Calvinism can be seen in the heated discussions between friends and fellow Anglican ministers John Wesley and George Whitefield. Wesley was highly influenced by 17th-century English Arminianism and thinkers such as John Goodwin, Jeremy Taylor and Henry Hammond of the Anglican "Holy Living" school, and the Remonstrant Hugo Grotius. Wesley knew very little about the beliefs of Jacobus Arminius and arrived at his religious views independently of Arminius.<sup>[17]</sup> Wesley acknowledged late in life, with the 1778 publication of a periodical titled The Arminian, that he and Arminius were in general agreement. Theology Professor W. Stephen Gunther concludes he was "a faithful representative" of Arminius' beliefs.<sup>[18]</sup> Wesley was a champion of Arminian teachings, defending his soteriology in The Arminian and writing articles such as Predestination Calmly Considered. He defended Arminianism against charges of semi-Pelagianism, holding strongly to beliefs in original sin and total depravity. At the same time, Wesley attacked the determinism that he claimed characterized Calvinistic doctrines of unconditional election and reprobation and maintained a belief in the ability to lose salvation. Wesley also clarified the doctrine of prevenient grace and preached the ability of Christians to attain to perfection (fully mature, not "sinlessness"). His system of thought has become known as Wesleyan Arminianism, the foundations of which were laid by Wesley and his fellow preacher John William Fletcher.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Pentecostals

Pentecostalism has its background in the activity of Charles Parham (1873–1929). Its origin as a movement was in the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906. This revival was led by William J. Seymour (1870–1922).<sup>[20]</sup> Due to the Methodist and Holiness background of many early Pentecostal preachers the Pentecostal Churches usually possessed practices which arose from the Wesleyan Arminianism.<sup>[21][22]</sup> During the 20th century, as Pentecostal churches began to settle and incorporate more standard forms, they started to formulate theology, which was fully Arminian.<sup>[23]</sup> Currently, the two largest Pentecostal denominations in the world, the Assemblies of God and the Pentecostal Church of God denominations, hold officially to Arminian views such as conditional election,<sup>[22]</sup> or conditional security of the believer for the first.<sup>[24]</sup>

## Current landscape

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### Protestant denominations

Advocates of Arminianism find a home in many Protestant denominations,<sup>[25]</sup> and sometimes other beliefs such as Calvinism exist within the same denomination.<sup>[26]</sup> Faiths leaning at least in part in the Arminian direction include some of high-church Anglicanism.<sup>[27]</sup> Arminianism is found within the Conservative Mennonites, the Old Order Mennonites and the Amish.<sup>[28][29]</sup> It is found in the mainline Methodists churches, and especially in the various Holiness denominations such as the Church of the Nazarene, the Free Methodist Church, the Wesleyan Church,<sup>[30]</sup> and the Salvation Army. It is found within the Restoration movement in the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ.<sup>[30]</sup> It is found in the Seventh-day

Adventist Church,<sup>[29]</sup> It is found within the General Baptists<sup>[28]</sup> and the Free Will Baptists.<sup>[30]</sup> The majority of Southern Baptists, accept Arminianism with an exception allowing for a doctrine of eternal security,<sup>[31][32][33][29]</sup> though many see Calvinism as growing in acceptance.<sup>[34]</sup> It is also found in a part of the Charismatics including the Pentecostals.<sup>[29][30][35][28]</sup>

## Scholarly support

The current scholarly support for Arminianism is varied: Among Baptist theologians, Roger E. Olson, F. Leroy Forlines, Robert Picirilli, and J. Matthew Pinson are four supporters of a return to the teachings of Arminius. Methodist theologian Thomas Oden,<sup>[36]</sup> "Evangelical Methodists" Bible scholar Ben Witherington III,<sup>[37]</sup> and Christian apologist David Pawson<sup>[38]</sup> are generally Arminian in their theologies. Holiness movement theologians Henry Orton Wiley, Carl O. Bangs and J. Kenneth Grider<sup>[39]</sup> can also be mentioned among recent proponents of Arminianism. Various other theologians or Bible scholars as B. J. Oropeza,<sup>[40]</sup> Keith D. Stanglin,<sup>[41]</sup> Craig S. Keener, Thomas H. McCall,<sup>[41]</sup> and Grant R. Osborne can be mentioned as well.

## Theology

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### Theological legacy

The original beliefs of Jacobus Arminius himself are commonly called Arminianism, but more broadly, the term may embrace the teachings of Simon Episcopius,<sup>[42]</sup> Hugo Grotius, John Wesley, and others. Arminian theology usually falls into one of two groups—Classical Arminianism, drawn from the teaching of Jacobus Arminius—and Wesleyan Arminian, drawing primarily from Wesley. Both groups overlap substantially.

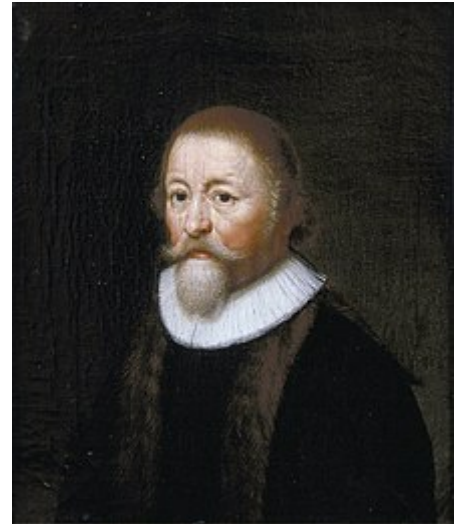
In 529, at the Second Council of Orange, the question at hand was whether the doctrines of Augustine on God's providence were to be affirmed, or if semi-Pelagianism could be affirmed. Semi-Pelagianism was a moderate form of Pelagianism which teaches that the first step of Salvation is by human will and not the grace of God.<sup>[43]</sup> The determination of the Council could be considered "semi-Augustinian".<sup>[44][45][46]</sup> It defined that faith, though a free act of man, resulted, even in its beginnings, from the grace of God, enlightening the human mind and enabling belief.<sup>[47][48][49]</sup> This describes the operation of prevenient grace allowing the unregenerate to repent in faith.<sup>[50][51]</sup> On the other hand, the Council of Orange condemned the Augustinian teaching of predestination to damnation.<sup>[52]</sup> Since Arminianism is aligned with those characteristic semi-Augustinian views<sup>[46]</sup> it has been seen by some as a reclamation of early church theological consensus.<sup>[53]</sup> Moreover, Arminianism can also be seen as a soteriological diversification of Calvinism<sup>[54]</sup> or as a theological middle ground between Calvinism and semi-Pelagianism.<sup>[55]</sup>

### Classical Arminianism

Classical Arminianism is the theological system that was presented by Jacobus Arminius and maintained by some of the Remonstrants.<sup>[56]</sup> Theologians as Forlines and Olson have referred to this system as "classical Arminianism",<sup>[57][58]</sup> while others as Picirilli and Pinson prefer to term it "Reformation Arminianism"<sup>[59]</sup> or "Reformed Arminianism".<sup>[60]</sup>

The teachings of Arminius held to Sola fide and Sola gratia of the Reformation, but they were distinct from particular teachings of Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, John Calvin, and other Protestant Reformers.<sup>[61]</sup>

Classical Arminianism was originally articulated in the *Five Articles of Remonstrance*. "These points", note Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, "are consistent with the views of Arminius; indeed, some come verbatim from his *Declaration of Sentiments*."<sup>[62]</sup> A list of beliefs of classical Arminianism is given below:



Portrait of Simon Episcopius,  
(Anonymous)

## God's providence and human free will

The majority Arminian view accepts classical theism, which states that God is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient.<sup>[63]</sup> In that view, God's power, knowledge, and presence have no external limitations, that is, outside of his divine nature and character.

Besides, Arminianism view on God's sovereignty is based on postulates stemming from God's character, especially as fully revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>[64]</sup> On the first hand, divine election must be defined in such a way that God is not in any case, and even in a secondary way, the author of evil. It would not correspond to the character of God.<sup>[65]</sup> On the other hand, man's responsibility for evil must be absolutely preserved.<sup>[66]</sup> Those two postulates require a specific way by which God chooses to manifest his sovereignty when interacting with his creatures:

On the first hand, it requires, for God to operate according to a limited mode of providence. This means that God purposely exercises his sovereignty in ways that do not illustrate the full extent of his omnipotence. On the second hand, it requires for God's election to be a "predestination by foreknowledge".<sup>[67]</sup>

In that respect, God's foreknowledge reconciles with human free will in the following way: Human free will is limited by original sin, though God's prevenient grace restores to humanity the ability to accept God's call of salvation.<sup>[68][69]</sup> God's foreknowledge of the future is exhaustive and complete, and therefore the future is certain and not contingent on human action. God does not determine the future, but He does know it. God's certainty and human contingency are compatible.<sup>[70]</sup>

Roger Olson expressed those defining ideas in a more practical way:

""Arminianism," [...] is simply a term we use in theology for the view, held by some people before Arminius and many after him, that sinners who hear the gospel have the free will to accept or reject God's offer of saving grace and that nobody is excluded by God from the possibility of salvation except those who freely exclude themselves. But true, historical, classical Arminianism includes the belief that this free will [to repent and believe unto salvation] is itself a gift of God through prevenient grace."<sup>[71]</sup>

## Condition of humanity

Depravity is total: Arminius states "In this [fallen] state, the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace."<sup>[72]</sup>

## Extent and nature of the atonement

Atonement is intended for all: Jesus's death was for all people, Jesus draws all people to himself, and all people have opportunity for salvation through faith.<sup>[73]</sup>

Jesus's death satisfies God's justice: The penalty for the sins of the elect is paid in full through the crucifixion of Christ. Thus Christ's death atones for the sins of all, but requires faith to be effected. Arminius states that "Justification, when used for the act of a Judge, is either purely the imputation of righteousness through mercy [...] or that man is justified before God [...] according to the rigor of justice without any forgiveness."<sup>[74]</sup> Stephen Ashby clarifies: "Arminius allowed for only two possible ways in which the sinner might be justified: (1) by our absolute and perfect adherence to the law, or (2) purely by God's imputation of Christ's righteousness."<sup>[75]</sup> W. Stephen Gunter concurs that Arminius would not take a rigid position on the doctrine of imputed righteousness (the righteousness of Christ is imputed for righteousness of the believer).<sup>[76]</sup> For Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, Arminius would not object to saying rather that "the righteousness of Christ is imputed to righteousness".<sup>[76]</sup> Forlines put it this way: "On the condition of faith, we are placed in union with Christ. Based on that union, we receive His death and righteousness".<sup>[77]</sup>

Christ's atonement has a substitutionary effect which is limited only to the elect. Arminius held that God's justice was satisfied by penal substitution.<sup>[78]</sup> Hugo Grotius taught that it was satisfied governmentally.<sup>[79]</sup> According to Roger Olson, historical and contemporary Arminians have held to one of these views.<sup>[80]</sup>

## Conversion of man

Grace is resistible: God takes initiative in the salvation process and his grace comes to all people. This grace (often called *prevenient* or pre-regenerating grace) acts on all people to convince them of the Gospel, draw them strongly towards salvation, and enable the possibility of sincere faith. Picirilli states that "indeed this grace is so close to regeneration that it inevitably leads to regeneration unless finally resisted."<sup>[81]</sup> The offer of salvation through grace does not act irresistibly in a purely cause-effect, deterministic method but rather in an influence-and-response fashion that can be both freely accepted and freely denied.<sup>[82]</sup>

Man has a freed will to respond or resist: Free will is granted and limited by God's sovereignty, but God's sovereignty allows all men the choice to accept the Gospel of Jesus through faith, simultaneously allowing all men to resist.<sup>[83]</sup>

Conversion is synergistic: As Roger Olson put it: "[Arminius]' evangelical synergism reserves all the power, ability and efficacy in salvation to grace, but allows humans the God-granted ability to resist or not resist it. The only "contribution" humans make is nonresistance to grace."<sup>[84]</sup>

## Election of man

Election is conditional: Arminius defined *election* as "the decree of God by which, of Himself, from eternity, He decreed to justify in Christ, believers, and to accept them unto eternal life."<sup>[85]</sup> God alone determines who will be saved and his determination is that all who believe Jesus through faith will be justified. According to Arminius, "God regards no one in Christ unless they are engrafted in him by faith."<sup>[85]</sup>

God predestines the elect to a glorious future: Predestination is not the predetermination of who will believe, but rather the predetermination of the believer's future inheritance. The elect are therefore predestined to sonship through adoption, glorification, and eternal life.<sup>[86]</sup>

## Preservation of man

Related to eschatological considerations, Jacobus Arminius<sup>[87]</sup> and the first Remonstrants, including Simon Episcopius<sup>[88]</sup> believed in everlasting fire where the wicked are thrown by God at judgment day.

Eternal preservation is conditional: All believers have full assurance of salvation with the condition that they remain in Christ. Salvation is conditioned on faith, therefore perseverance is also conditioned.<sup>[89]</sup> Arminius believed the Scriptures taught that believers are graciously empowered by Christ and the Holy Spirit "to fight against Satan, sin, the world and their own flesh, and to gain the victory over these enemies."<sup>[90]</sup> Furthermore, Christ and the Spirit are ever present to aid and assist believers through various temptations. But this security was not unconditional but conditional—"provided they [believers] stand prepared for the battle, implore his help, and be not wanting to themselves, Christ preserves them from falling."<sup>[91][92]</sup>

## Possibility of apostasy

Arminius believed in the possibility for a believer to commit apostasy (i.e., desert Christ by cleaving again to this evil world, losing a good conscience, or by failing to hold on to sound doctrine). However, over the period of time Arminius wrote on this question,<sup>[93]</sup> he expressed sometimes more prudently. For instance, Arminius declared in 1599 that this matter required further study in the Scriptures.<sup>[94]</sup> Arminius said also in his "Declaration of Sentiments" (1607), "I never taught that a true believer can, either totally or finally fall away from the faith, and perish; yet I will not conceal, that there are passages of scripture which seem to me to wear this aspect; and those answers to them which I have been permitted to see, are not of such a kind as to approve themselves on all points to my understanding."<sup>[95]</sup>

But in his other writings he expressed certainty about the possibility of falling away: Arminius wrote in ca. 1602, that "a person who is being 'built' into the church of Christ may resist the continuation of this process". Concerning the believers he said "It may suffice to encourage them, if they know that no power or prudence can dislodge them from the rock, unless they of their own will forsake their position."<sup>[96][97]</sup> He continued by saying that the covenant of God (Jeremiah 23) "does not contain in itself an impossibility of defection from God, but a promise of the gift of fear, whereby they shall be hindered from going away from God so long as that shall flourish in their hearts."<sup>[98]</sup> He then taught that had King David died in his sins he would have been lost.<sup>[99][76]</sup> In 1602, Arminius also wrote: "A believing member of Christ may become slothful, give place to sin, and gradually die altogether, ceasing to be a member".<sup>[100]</sup>

For Arminius, certain class of sin would cause a believer to fall, especially sin motivated by malice.<sup>[76][101]</sup> In 1605 Arminius wrote: "But it is possible for a believer to fall into a mortal sin, as is seen in David. Therefore he can fall at that moment in which if he were to die, he would be condemned".<sup>[102]</sup> Stanglin, along with McCall, point out that Arminius clearly sets forth two paths to apostasy 1. "rejection", or 2. "malicious sinning".<sup>[62][76]</sup> Oropeza gives a general conclusion "If there is any consistency in Arminius' position, he did not seem to deny the possibility of falling away".<sup>[103]</sup>

After the death of Arminius in 1609, his followers wrote a Remonstrance (1610) based quite literally on their leader's "Declaration of Sentiments" (1607) which expressed prudence on the possibility of apostasy.<sup>[62]</sup> In particular, its fifth article expressed the necessity of further study on the possibility of apostasy.<sup>[104]</sup> Sometime between 1610 and the official proceeding of the Synod of Dort (1618), the Remonstrants became fully persuaded in their minds that the Scriptures taught that a true believer was capable of falling away from faith and perishing eternally as an unbeliever. They formalized their views in "The Opinion of the Remonstrants" (1618) which was their official stand during the Synod of Dort.<sup>[105]</sup>



Picirilli remarks: "Ever since that early period, then, when the issue was being examined again, Arminians have taught that those who are truly saved need to be warned against apostasy as a real and possible danger."<sup>[106]</sup> They later expressed this same view in the Remonstrant Confession (1621).<sup>[107]</sup>

## Forgivability of apostasy

Stanglin points out that Arminius held that if the apostasy came from "malicious" sin, then it was forgivable.<sup>[76][108]</sup> If it came from "rejection" it was not.<sup>[109]</sup> Following Arminius, the Remonstrants believed that, though possible, apostasy was not in general irremediable.<sup>[110]</sup> However, other classical Arminians as the Free Will Baptists have taught that apostasy is irremediable.<sup>[111][112]</sup>

## Wesleyan Arminianism

John Wesley thoroughly agreed with the vast majority of what Arminius himself taught.<sup>[18]</sup> Wesleyan Arminianism is classical Arminianism with the addition of Wesleyan perfectionism.<sup>[113]</sup> Here are mentioned some positions on specific issues within Wesleyan Arminianism:

### Nature of the atonement

Steven Harper proposed that Wesley's atonement is a hybrid of the penal substitution theory and the governmental theory.<sup>[114]</sup> However, theologians as Robert Picirilli, Roger Olson and Darren Cushman Wood consider that the view of Wesley concerning atonement is by penal substitution.<sup>[115][116][117]</sup> Wesleyan Arminians have historically adopted either penal or governmental theory of the atonement.<sup>[118]</sup>



Portrait of John Wesley, by George Romney

### Preservation and apostasy of man

Wesley fully accepted the Arminian view that genuine Christians could apostatize and lose their salvation, as his famous sermon "A Call to Backsliders" clearly demonstrates. Harper summarizes as follows: "the act of committing sin is not in itself ground for the loss of salvation [...] the loss of salvation is much more related to experiences that are profound and prolonged. Wesley sees two primary pathways that could result in a permanent fall from grace: unconfessed sin and the actual expression of apostasy."<sup>[119]</sup> Wesley believed that such apostasy was not irremediable. When talking about those who have made "shipwreck" of their faith,(1 Tim 1:19) Wesley claims that "not one, or a hundred only, but I am persuaded, several thousands [...] innumerable are the instances [...] of those who had fallen but now stand upright."<sup>[120]</sup>

### Christian perfection

One issue that typify Wesleyan Arminianism is Christian perfection.<sup>[7]</sup> According to Wesley's teaching, Christians could attain a state of practical perfection, meaning a lack of all voluntary sin by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, in this life. Christian perfection (or *entire sanctification*), according to Wesley, is "purity of intention, dedicating all the life to God" and "the mind which was in Christ, enabling us to walk as Christ walked." It is "loving God with all our heart, and our neighbor as ourselves".<sup>[121]</sup> It is "a restoration not only to the favour, but likewise to the image of God," our "being filled with the fullness

of God".<sup>[122]</sup> Wesley was clear that Christian perfection did not imply perfection of bodily health or an infallibility of judgment. It also does not mean we no longer violate the will of God, for involuntary transgressions remain. Perfected Christians remain subject to temptation, and have continued need to pray for forgiveness and holiness. It is not an absolute perfection but a perfection in love. Furthermore, Wesley did not teach a salvation by perfection, but rather says that, "Even perfect holiness is acceptable to God only through Jesus Christ."<sup>[123]</sup>

## Other variations

Some doctrines adhere among other to the Arminian foundation and, while minority views, are highlighted below.

### Open theism

The doctrine of open theism states that God is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient, but differs on the nature of the future. Open theists claim that the future is not completely determined (or "settled") because people have not made their free decisions yet. God therefore knows the future partially in possibilities (human free actions) rather than solely certainties (divinely determined events).<sup>[124]</sup> Some Arminians, such as professor and theologian Robert Picirilli, reject the doctrine of open theism as a "deformed Arminianism".<sup>[125]</sup> Joseph Dongell stated that "open theism actually moves beyond classical Arminianism towards process theology."<sup>[126]</sup> There are also some Arminians, like Roger Olson, who believe Open theism to be an alternative view that a Christian can have.<sup>[127]</sup>

### Corporate view of election

The majority Arminian view is that election is individual and based on God's foreknowledge of faith, but a second perspective deserves mention. These Arminians reject the concept of individual election entirely, preferring to understand the doctrine in corporate terms. According to this corporate election, God never chose individuals to elect to salvation, but rather He chose to elect the believing church to salvation. Dutch Reformed theologian Herman Ridderbos says "[The certainty of salvation] does not rest on the fact that the church belongs to a certain "number", but that it belongs to Christ, from before the foundation of the world. Fixity does not lie in a hidden decree, therefore, but in corporate unity of the Church with Christ, whom it has come to know in the gospel and has learned to embrace in faith."<sup>[128]</sup>

Corporate election draws support from a similar concept of corporate election found in the Old Testament and Jewish law. Indeed most biblical scholarship is in agreement that Judeo-Greco-Roman thought in the 1st century was opposite of the Western world's "individual first" mantra—it was very collectivist or communitarian in nature.<sup>[129]</sup> Identity stemmed from membership in a group more than individuality.<sup>[129]</sup> According to Romans 9–11, supporters claim, Jewish election as the chosen people ceased with their national rejection of Jesus as Messiah. As a result of the new covenant, God's chosen people are now the corporate body of Christ, the church (sometimes called *spiritual Israel*—see also Covenant theology). The pastor and theologian Brian Abasciano claims "What Paul says about Jews, Gentiles, and Christians, whether of their place in God's plan, or their election, or their salvation, or how they should think or behave, he says from a corporate perspective which views the group as primary and those he speaks about as embedded in the group. These individuals act as members of the group to which they belong, and what happens to them happens by virtue of their membership in the group."<sup>[129]</sup>

These scholars also maintain that Jesus was the only human ever elected and that individuals must be "in Christ" through faith to be part of the elect. This was, in fact, Swiss Reformed theologian, Karl Barth's, understanding of the doctrine of election. Joseph Dongell, professor at Asbury Theological Seminary, states

"the most conspicuous feature of Ephesians 1:3–2:10 is the phrase 'in Christ', which occurs twelve times in Ephesians 1:3–14 alone [...] this means that Jesus Christ himself is the chosen one, the predestined one. Whenever one is incorporated into him by grace through faith, one comes to share in Jesus' special status as chosen of God."<sup>[130]</sup> Markus Barth illustrates the inter-connectedness: "Election in Christ must be understood as the election of God's people. Only as members of that community do individuals share in the benefits of God's gracious choice."<sup>[131]</sup>

## Arminianism and other views

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### Divergence with Pelagianism

Pelagianism is a doctrine denying original sin and total depravity. No system of Arminianism founded on Arminius or Wesley denies original sin or total depravity;<sup>[132]</sup> both Arminius and Wesley *strongly* affirmed that man's basic condition is one in which he cannot be righteous, understand God, or seek God.<sup>[133]</sup> Arminius referred to Pelagianism as "the grand falsehood" and stated that he "must confess that I detest, from my heart, the consequences [of that theology]."<sup>[134]</sup> David Pawson, a British pastor, decries this association as "libelous" when attributed to Arminius' or Wesley's doctrine.<sup>[135]</sup> Indeed, most Arminians reject all accusations of Pelagianism.<sup>[136][137]</sup>



*Allegory of the theological dispute between the Arminianists and their opponents* by Abraham van der Eyk (1721), allegorically represents what many Arminians thought about the Synod: the Bible on the Arminian side was outweighed by the sword, representing the power of the state, and Calvin's Institutes on the other

### Divergence with semi-Pelagianism

Some schools of thought, notably semi-Pelagianism, which teaches that the first step of Salvation is by human will,<sup>[43]</sup> are confused as being Arminian in nature. But classical Arminianism and Wesleyan Arminianism hold that the first step of Salvation is through the prevenient grace of God, though "the subsequent grace entails a cooperative relationship."<sup>[138][139]</sup>

### Divergence with Calvinism

The two systems of Calvinism and Arminianism share both history and many doctrines, and the history of Christian theology. However, because of their differences over the doctrines of divine predestination and election, many people view these schools of thought as opposed to each other. The distinction is whether God desires to save all yet allows individuals to resist the grace offered (in the Arminian doctrine) or if God desires to save only some and grace is irresistible to those chosen (in the Calvinist doctrine). Many consider the theological differences to be crucial differences in doctrine, while others find them to be relatively minor.<sup>[140]</sup>

### Similarities

- Total depravity – Arminians agree with Calvinists over the doctrine of total depravity. The differences come in the understanding of how God remedies this human depravity.

### Differences

- Nature of election – Arminians hold that election to eternal salvation has the condition of faith attached. The Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election states that salvation cannot be earned or achieved and is therefore not conditional upon any human effort, so faith is not a condition of salvation but the divinely apportioned means to it. In other words, Arminians believe that they owe their election to their faith, whereas Calvinists believe that they owe their faith to their election.
- Nature of grace – Arminians believe that, through grace, God restores free will concerning salvation to all humanity, and each individual, therefore, is able either to accept the Gospel call through faith or resist it through unbelief. Calvinists hold that God's grace to enable salvation is given only to the elect and irresistibly leads to salvation.
- Extent of the atonement – Arminians, along with four-point Calvinists or Amyraldians, hold to a universal atonement instead of the Calvinist doctrine that atonement is limited to the elect only, which many Calvinists prefer to call *particular redemption*.<sup>[141][142]</sup> Both sides (with the exception of hyper-Calvinists) believe the invitation of the gospel is universal and "must be presented to everyone [they] can reach without any distinction."<sup>[143]</sup>
- Perseverance in faith – Arminians believe that future salvation and eternal life is secured in Christ and protected from all external forces but is conditional on remaining in Christ and can be lost through apostasy. Traditional Calvinists believe in the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, which says that because God chose some unto salvation and actually paid for their particular sins, he keeps them from apostasy and that those who do apostatize were never truly regenerated (that is, born again) or saved. Non-traditional Calvinists and other evangelicals advocate the similar but distinct doctrine of eternal security that teaches if a person was once saved, his or her salvation can never be in jeopardy, even if the person completely apostatizes.

## See also

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- Covenant theology
- Salvation in Christianity
- Grace in Christianity
- Sovereignty of God in Christianity
- Order of salvation
- Substitutionary atonement
  - Satisfaction theory
  - Penal theory
  - Governmental theory
- Justification
- Predestination
- Free will in theology
- Decisional regeneration
- Synergism
- Apostasy in Christianity

## Notes and references

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1. Olson 2014, p. 1.
2. Visconti 2003, pp. 253–.
3. Sutton 2012, p. 86.

4. Bangs 1985, p. 170.
5. Bender 1953. "Mennonites have been historically Arminian in their theology whether they distinctly espoused the Arminian viewpoint or not. They never accepted Calvinism either in the Swiss-South German branch or in the Dutch-North German wing. Nor did any Mennonite confession of faith in any country teach any of the five points of Calvinism. However, in the 20th century, particularly in North America, some Mennonites, having come under the influence of certain Bible institutes and the literature produced by this movement and its schools, have adopted the Calvinist doctrine of the perseverance of the saints or "once in grace always in grace." In doing so, they have departed from the historic Arminianism of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement."
6. Olson 2013b. "I am using "Arminianism" as a handy [...] synonym for "evangelical synergism" (a term I borrow from Donald Bloesch). [...] It's simply a Protestant perspective on salvation, God's role and ours, that is similar to, if not identical with, what was assumed by the Greek church fathers and taught by Hubmaier, Menno Simons, and even Philipp Melanchthon (after Luther died). It was also taught by Danish Lutheran theologian Niels Hemmingsen (d. 1600)—independently of Arminius. (Arminius mentions Hemmingsen as holding the basic view of soteriology he held and he may have been influenced by Hemmingsen.)"
7. Heron 1999, p. 128.
8. Wynkoop 1967, chap. 3.
9. Loughlin 1907.
10. Olson 2009, p. 23.
11. Tyacke 1990, p. 24, .
12. McClintock & Strong 1880.
13. Tyacke 1990, p. 245. "Of the various terms which can be used to describe the thrust of religions change at the time Arminian is the least misleading. It does *not* mean that the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius was normally the source of the ideas so labelled. Rather Arminian denotes a coherent body of anti-Calvinist religious thought, which was gaining ground in various regions of early seventeenth-century Europe."
14. MacCulloch 1990, p. 94. "If we use the label "Arminian" for English Churchmen, it must be with these important qualification in mind [of been related to the theology of Arminius]; "proto-Arminian" would be a more accurate term."
15. Gonzalez 2014, pp. 225–226.
16. Torbet 1963, p. 37, 145, 507.
17. Grider 1982, p. 55.
18. Gunter 2007, p. 82.
19. Knight 2018, p. 115.
20. Knight 2010, p. 201.
21. Knight 2010, p. 5.
22. Satama 2009, pp. 17–18.
23. Olson 2009, p. 93.
24. AG 2017.

25. Olson 2014, pp. 2–3, . "Methodism, in all its forms (including ones that do not bear that name), tends to be Arminian. (Calvinist Methodist churches once existed. They were founded by followers of Wesley's co-evangelist George Whitefield. But, so far as I am able to tell, they have all died out or merged with traditionally Reformed-Calvinist denominations.) Officially Arminian denominations include ones in the so-called "Holiness" tradition (e.g., Church of the Nazarene) and in the Pentecostal tradition (e.g., Assemblies of God). Arminianism is also the common belief of Free Will Baptists (also known as General Baptists). Many Brethren [anabaptists-pietists] churches are Arminian as well. But one can find Arminians in many denominations that are not historically officially Arminian, such as many Baptist conventions/conferences."
26. Akin 1993. "In Protestant circles there are two major camps when it comes to predestination: Calvinism and Arminianism. Calvinism is common in Presbyterian, Reformed, and a few Baptist churches. Arminianism is common in Methodist, Pentecostal, and most Baptist churches."
27. Satama 2009, p. 16.
28. Olson 2014, pp. 2–3.
29. Olson 2012.
30. Olson 2009, p. 87.
31. SBC 2000, chap. 5.
32. Harmon 1984, pp. 17–18, 45–46.
33. Walls & Dongell 2004, pp. 12–13, 16–17.
34. Walls & Dongell 2004, pp. 7–20.
35. Akin 1993, .
36. Driscoll 2013, pp. 99–100.
37. Witherington III 2013. "The first and most important reason I'm a Wesleyan is because of the character of God [...] which is love freely given and freely received. [...] According to the Calvinistic message we are saved by grace through faith alone and our actions have nothing to do with it. [...] According to the Wesleyan approach to the gospel, it's not just about notional assent [...] it's about trusting the truth about God and that is an activity."
38. Pawson 1996.
39. Grider 1982.
40. Oropeza 2000.
41. Stanglin & McCall 2012.
42. Episcopius & Ellis 2005, p. 8. "Episcopius was singularly responsible for the survival of the Remonstrant movement after the Synod of Dort. We may rightly regard him as the theological founder of Arminianism, since he both developed and systematized ideas which Arminius was tentatively exploring before his death and then perpetuated that theology through founding the Remonstrant seminary and teaching the next generation of pastors and teachers."
43. Stanglin & McCall 2012, p. 160.
44. Oakley 1988, p. 64.
45. Thorsen 2007, ch. 20.3.4.
46. Bounds 2011.
47. Denzinger 1954, ch. Second Council of Orange, art. 5-7.
48. Pickar 1981, p. 797, ch. Faith.
49. Cross 2005, p. 701.
50. Olson 2009, p. 81.

51. Stanglin & McCall 2012, p. 153.
52. Denzinger 1954, ch. Second Council of Orange, art. 199. "We not only do not believe that some have been truly predestined to evil by divine power, but also with every execration we pronounce anathema upon those, if there are [any such], who wish to believe so great an evil."
53. Keathley 2014, p. 703, ch. 12.
54. Magnusson 1995, p. 62.
55. Olson 2014, p. 6.
56. Pinson 2002, p. 137.
57. Forlines 2011.
58. Olson 2009.
59. Picirilli 2002, p. 1.
60. Pinson 2002, pp. 149–150.
61. Pinson 2003, pp. 135, 139.
62. Stanglin & McCall 2012, p. 190.
63. Olson 2009, pp. 90–91.
64. Olson 2014, p. 11.
65. Olson 2013a. "Basic to Arminianism is God's love. The fundamental conflict between Calvinism and Arminianism is not *sovereignty* but *God's character*. *If Calvinism is true, God is the author of sin, evil, innocent suffering and hell*. [...] Let me repeat. The most basic issue is *not* providence or predestination or the sovereignty of God. The most basic issue is *God's character*."
66. Olson 2010. "Classical Arminianism does NOT say God never interferes with free will. It says God NEVER foreordains or renders certain evil. [...] An Arminian COULD believe in divine dictation of Scripture and not do violence to his or her Arminian beliefs. [...] Arminianism is not in love with libertarian free will –as if that were central in and of itself. Classical Arminians have gone out of our way (beginning with Arminius himself) to make clear that our sole reasons for believe in free will AS ARMINIANS [...] are 1) to avoid making God the author of sin and evil, and 2) to make clear human responsibility for sin and evil."
67. Olson 2018. "What is Arminianism? A) Belief that God limits himself to give human beings free will to go against his perfect will so that God did not design or ordain sin and evil (or their consequences such as innocent suffering); B) Belief that, although sinners cannot achieve salvation on their own, without "prevenient grace" (enabling grace), God makes salvation possible for all through Jesus Christ and offers free salvation to all through the gospel. "A" is called "limited providence," "B" is called "predestination by foreknowledge.""
68. Picirilli 2002, pp. 42–43, 59-.
69. Pinson 2002, pp. 146–147.
70. Picirilli 2002, p. 40.
71. Olson 2017.
72. Arminius 1853a, p. 252.
73. Arminius 1853a, p. 316.
74. Arminius 1853c, p. 454.
75. Pinson 2002, p. 140.
76. Gann 2014.
77. Forlines 2011, p. 403.
78. Pinson 2002, pp. 140–.

79. Picirilli 2002, p. 132.
80. Olson 2009, p. 224, .
81. Picirilli 2002, pp. 154-.
82. Forlines 2001, pp. 313–321.
83. Olson 2009, p. 142.
84. Olson 2009, p. 165.
85. Arminius 1853c, p. 311.
86. Pawson 1996, pp. 109-.
87. Arminius 1853c, p. 376. "First, you say, and truly, that hell-fire is the punishment ordained for sin and the transgression of the law."
88. Episcopius & Ellis 2005, ch. 20, item 4.
89. Picirilli 2002, p. 203.
90. Arminius 1853b, pp. 219–220.
91. Arminius 1853b, pp. 465, 466. "This seems to fit with Arminius' other statements on the need for perseverance in faith. For example: "God resolves to receive into favor those who repent and believe, and to save in Christ, on account of Christ, and through Christ, those who persevere [in faith], but to leave under sin and wrath those who are impenitent and unbelievers, and to condemn them as aliens from Christ"."
92. Arminius 1853c, pp. 412, 413. "[God] wills that they, who believe and persevere in faith, shall be saved, but that those, who are unbelieving and impenitent, shall remain under condemnation".
93. Stanglin & Muller 2009.
94. Arminius 1853b, pp. 219–220, A Dissertation on the True and Genuine Sense of the Seventh Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. [1599]
95. Arminius 1853a, p. 665. "William Nichols notes: "Arminius spoke nearly the same modest words when interrogated on this subject in the last Conference which he had with Gomarus [a Calvinist], before the states of Holland, on the 12th of Aug. 1609, only two months prior to his decease"".
96. Oropeza 2000, p. 16. "Although Arminius denied having taught final apostasy in his *Declaration of Sentiments*, in the *Examination of the Treatise of Perkins on the Order and Mode of Predestination* [ca. 1602] he writes that "a person who is being 'built' into the church of Christ may resist the continuation of this process". Concerning the believers, "It may suffice to encourage them, if they know that no power or prudence can dislodge them from the rock, unless they of their own will forsake their position."
97. Arminius 1853c, p. 455, Examination of the Treatise of Perkins on the Order and Mode of Predestination. [ca. 1602]
98. Arminius 1853c, p. 458, Examination of the Treatise of Perkins on the Order and Mode of Predestination. [ca. 1602]
99. Arminius 1853c, pp. 463–464, Examination of the Treatise of Perkins on the Order and Mode of Predestination. [ca. 1602]
100. Arminius 1853a, p. 667, Disputation 25, on Magistracy. [1602]
101. Stanglin 2007, p. 137.
102. Arminius 1853a, p. 388, Letter to Wtenbogaert, trans. as *Remarks on the Preceding Questions, and on those opposed to them*. [1605]
103. Oropeza 2000, p. 16, .
104. Schaff 2007.



105. DeJong 1968, pp. 220-, art. 5, points 3-4. "True believers can fall from true faith and can fall into such sins as cannot be consistent with true and justifying faith; not only is it possible for this to happen, but it even happens frequently. 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."
106. Picirilli 2002, p. 198.
107. Witzki 2010.
108. Stanglin & McCall 2012, p. 174.
109. Stanglin 2007, p. 139.
110. DeJong 1968, pp. 220-, chap. 5.5. "Nevertheless we do not believe that true believers, though they may sometimes fall into grave sins which are vexing to their consciences, immediately fall out of every hope of repentance; but we acknowledge that it can happen that God, according to the multitude of His mercies, may recall them through His grace to repentance; in fact, we believe that this happens not infrequently, although we cannot be persuaded that this will certainly and indubitably happen."
111. Picirilli 2002, pp. 204-.
112. Pinson 2002, p. 159.
113. Olson 2009, p. 189, note 20.
114. Pinson 2002, pp. 227-. "Wesley does not place the substitutionary element primarily within a legal framework [...] Rather [his doctrine seeks] to bring into proper relationship the 'justice' between God's love for persons and God's hatred of sin [...] it is not the satisfaction of a legal demand for justice so much as it is an act of mediated reconciliation."
115. Picirilli 2002, pp. 104–105, 132–.
116. Olson 2009, p. 224. "Arminius did not believe [in the governmental theory of atonement], neither did Wesley nor some of his nineteenth-century followers. Nor do all contemporary Arminians"
117. Wood 2007, p. 67.
118. Olson 2009, p. 224, .
119. Pinson 2002, pp. 239–240.
120. Wesley & Emory 1835, p. 247, "A Call to Backsliders".
121. Wesley 1827, p. 66, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection".
122. Wesley & Emory 1835, p. 73, "The End of Christ's Coming".
123. Wesley 1827, p. 45, "Of Christian Perfection".
124. Sanders 2007, Summary of Openness of God.
125. Picirilli 2002, pp. 40, 59-. Picirilli actually objects so strongly to the link between Arminianism and Open theism that he devotes an entire section to his objections
126. Walls & Dongell 2004, p. 45.
127. Olson 2009, p. 199, note 67.
128. Ridderbos 1997, p. 351.
129. Abasciano 2005.
130. Walls & Dongell 2004, p. 76.
131. Barth 1974, p. 108.
132. Pinson 2002, pp. 138–139.
133. Arminius 1853b, p. 192.
134. Arminius 1853b, p. 219. The entire treatise occupies pages 196–452
135. Pawson 1996, p. 106.

136. Pawson 1996, pp. 97–98, 106.
137. Picirilli 2002, pp. 6-.
138. Schwartz & Bechtold 2015, p. 165.
139. Forlines 2011, pp. 20–24.
140. Gonzalez 2014, p. 180.
141. Spurgeon 1858.
142. Olson 2009, p. 221.
143. Nicole 1995.

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## External links

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- [The Society of Evangelical Arminians \(http://evangelicalarminians.org/\)](http://evangelicalarminians.org/)
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