

ARMINIUS AND WESLEY ON ORIGINAL SIN

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This Paper is concerned with how Jacobus Arminius and John Wesley understood the doctrine of original sin. Arminianism takes its name from the teaching of the Dutch theologian, Jacobus Arminius (1559-1609), who could be described accurately as a Calvinist revisionist. Following his distinguished studies at Marburg and Leiden and finally at Geneva Academy under Calvin's successor, Theodore Beza, Arminius was pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church in Amsterdam for fifteen years. For the remaining six years of his life, he was Professor of Theology in the newly-established University of Leiden.¹ He came to public attention when he was asked to arbitrate in a dispute among Dutch Calvinists who divided over supralapsarian and infralapsarian interpretations of predestination. Whatever Arminius' own views were at this time, it is clear that when he had investigated the questions carefully, he couldn't accept either interpretation, convinced that both went beyond the Calvinism of the Belgic Confession accepted by the Dutch Church in 1574, and which he had signed.²

Arminius was involved in two main controversies; first with Francis Junius and later with Francis Gomarus. In addition he wrote a long reply to the high-Calvinism of the Cambridge theologian, William Perkins, and two long treatises, one on Romans 7 and the other on Romans 9. His own mature views were succinctly expressed in his *Declaration of Sentiments* which were delivered a year before his death. In reply to Junius, Gomarus, and Perkins, the main questions were concerning the nature of predestination, free will and the extent of the atonement. Significantly the doctrine of original sin was never a source of controversy between Arminius and his theological opponents. The *ordo salutis* that Arminius developed can be labelled 'Arminianism', just as long as it is recognised that it does not always correspond with the 'Arminianism' of his successors in Holland, the Remonstrants. There is an interesting comparison here with Calvinism. As that system takes its name from the writings of John Calvin but was modified in demonstrable ways by Theodore Beza and later Calvinists, so the teachings of Jacobus Arminius were modified by later Arminians. In historical theology, even to the present day, it is common to find Arminianism portrayed as the antithesis of Calvinism. As far as the 'Arminianism' of Arminius is concerned, this is a false antithesis; the contrast should be rather between Calvinism and Pelagianism, with Arminius' teaching being seen as a kind of half-

¹ Bangs, Carl. *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 25-80.

² *The Works of James Arminius*, 3 Vols, trans. James Nichols (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Green, 1825), 1:545.

way-house between the two systems, but on questions of free will and human sinfulness, leaning much more to Calvin than to Pelagius.

Arminius' position as revisionist Calvinism could hardly be more clearly seen than in his understanding of original sin and human sinfulness. Like Augustine, Arminius seems to have read the Genesis story literally and understands that Adam sinned against God by the instrumentality of the Devil and his sin is properly understood as disobedience. The consequence was that he fell under 'the displeasure and wrath of God and rendered himself subject to a double death and deserving to be deprived of the primeval righteousness and holiness in which a great part of the image of God consisted'.³ Believing that supralapsarian Calvinism made God the author of sin, Arminius stresses what he calls the 'immediate cause' of Adam's sin, viz., 'man himself, of his own free will and without any necessity either internal or external, transgressed the law which had been proposed to him'. That law carried both threatening and promise and it was possible for Adam to have kept the law as God intended. There is no sense, Arminius argues, in which God can be held responsible for Adam's free action.

Adam sinned freely and voluntarily, without any necessity, either internal or external. Adam did not fall through the decree of God, neither through being ordained to fall through desertion, but through the mere permission of God, which is placed in subordination to no predestination either to salvation or to death.⁴

Adam's transgression was the 'original sin' and it had dire consequences. First, it was an offence against the honour and goodness of God, for the transgression of God's Law is an offence against the Lawgiver Himself. Secondly, it incurred the divine punishment; as *reatus*, subjecting man to death both physical and spiritual, and as *privatio*, the loss of primitive righteousness and holiness. Arminius develops his understanding of our relationship to Adam in a very Augustinian-like way.

The whole of this sin, however, is not peculiar to our first parents, but is common to the entire race and to all their posterity, who, at the time when this sin was committed, were in their loins, and who have since descended from them by the natural mode of propagation, according to the primitive benediction: For in Adam 'all have sinned' (Rom. v,12). Wherefore, whatever punishment was brought down upon our first parents, has likewise pervaded and yet pursues all their posterity.⁵

The Augustinian echoes here are very clear indeed. Arminius insists that in Adam's rebellion against God, he lost the indwelling Spirit, 'the Spirit of grace'. The covenant made with Adam guaranteed that all the divine gifts conferred upon

³ Arminius, *Works*, 2:151.

⁴ *Ibid*, 716.

⁵ *Ibid*, 156.

him would be transmitted to his posterity by the grace which they had received. Likewise his disobedience would render him unworthy of these blessings nor would they be conferred on his progeny. 'This was the reason why all men who were to be propagated from them in a natural way, became obnoxious to death temporal and death eternal, and devoid of this gift of the Holy Spirit or original righteousness. His punishment usually receives the appellation of "a privation of the image of God" and "original sin".' Arminius ventures to suggest that the deprivation of the Spirit is itself original sin and that from that deprivation come all actual sins.⁶ The question whether original sin is propagated by the soul or the body Arminius refuses to discuss, as he does the question of the origin of the soul. If he is arguing that original sin is to be understood in terms of privation, then he is clearly not following Augustine's avowal of seminally-transmitted evil.

In terms of actual sin in men and women, Arminius argues that all our sins are either sins of commission or sins of omission; the former an affront to the Law and the latter an affront to the 'law of faith', which is the gospel of Christ. Sins fall into four categories: ignorance, infirmity, malignity and negligence. In Aristotelian fashion Arminius discusses the cause of sin in human experience. The efficient cause is our free will; the 'inwardly-working cause' is 'the original propensity of our nature towards that which is contrary to the Divine law, which propensity we have contracted from our first parents, through carnal generations'. The object of all sin is *commutabile*, i.e. a variable good, to which we are inclined because we have forsaken 'the unchangeable Good'.⁷

Did Arminius teach total depravity as that term has been associated with Calvinism? Whether or not that is the best way to describe Arminius' teaching, there is no doubt at all that he understood man's fallen condition in a way very similar to Calvin's teaching.⁸ Even the magisterial Calvinist theologian, William Cunningham, not noted for making any concessions to Arminianism, admitted the 'orthodoxy' of Arminius in this respect.

It is a common, and not an inaccurate, impression that a leading and essential feature of the Arminian system of theology is a denial of man's total depravity, and an assertion of his natural power or ability to do something, more or less, that is spiritually good, and that will contribute to effect his deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, and his eternal welfare...The statements of Arminius himself, in regard to the natural depravity of man, so far as we have them upon record, are full and satisfactory.⁹

⁶ Ibid, 374, 375.

⁷ Ibid, 158-162.

⁸ Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol 1, trans H Beveridge (London: James C Clark, 1962), 209-264.

⁹ Cunningham, W, *Historical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), 387-389.

The focus of this debate in evangelical theology has always related to the freedom of the will. What is the state of the human will in fallen man? What measure of free choice belongs to the unregenerate? This had been a central argument in the dispute between Augustine and the Pelagians of his day. Arminius is careful not to let the question become one of a philosophical argument between the claims of free will versus determinism. Instead he centres the question on sin and grace; given universal sinfulness, what is the grace offered by God to man and what part does the will play in our salvation? In his *Disputations*, Arminius writes of all humanity ‘under the dominion of sin’ as its ‘assigned slave’.

In this state, the Free Will of man towards the True Good is not only wounded, maimed, 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.¹⁰

This is further explained when he expounds on the unregenerate mind as ‘dark and destitute of the saving knowledge of God, on the ‘perverseness of the affections and the heart...[which] loves and pursues what is evil’, and the ‘utter weakness of all the powers to perform what is good or to avoid evil’. The only conclusion that Scripture allows concerning fallen mankind, Arminius reasons, is that they are ‘altogether dead in sin’.¹¹

If we are right in assuming that Arminius’ treatise, *Dissertation on the True and Genuine Sense of the Seventh Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans*, was his earliest composition, then at that time Arminius held a position which he declared to be ‘directly opposed to the Pelagian heresy’. He understood Pelagianism to teach that a man is able, ‘through his own free will, as being of itself sufficient for him to fulfill the precepts of God—if he be only instructed in the doctrine of the law’. He is sure that when Romans 7 is rightly understood as descriptive of a sinner awakened by grace but not yet regenerated by grace, then ‘this [Pelagian] dogma is not only firmly refuted but also plucked up as if by the roots and extirpated’.¹² If Arminius expected that his Calvinistic opponents would label him a Pelagian, then he was not disappointed, and in many places in his writings he is careful to point out that his understanding of sin and grace is far removed from Pelagianism—and, we might add, much closer to Augustine’s understanding.

In his *Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed*, Arminius summarises his position on what he termed ‘grace and free will’. His argument leaves no doubt at all where he stands—in acknowledged and reasoned opposition to Pelagianism:

¹⁰ Arminius, *Works*, 2:192.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 194.

¹² *Ibid*, 629, 637.

Concerning Grace and Free Will, this is what I teach according to the Scriptures and orthodox consent: Free Will is unable to begin or to perfect any true and spiritual good, without grace. That I may not be said, like Pelagius, to practise delusion with regard to the word 'Grace', I mean by it that which is the Grace of Christ and which belongs to regeneration: I affirm, therefore, that this grace is simply and absolutely necessary for the illumination of the mind, the true ordering of the affections, and the inclination of the will to that which is good...This grace [*praevenit*] goes before, accompanies, and follows; it excites, assists, operates that we will, and co-operates lest we will in vain...This grace commences salvation, promotes it, and perfects and consummates it. I confess that the mind of a natural and carnal man is obscure and dark, that his affections are corrupt and inordinate, that his will is stubborn and disobedient, and that the man himself is dead in sins. And I add to this, That teacher obtains my highest approbation who ascribes as much as possible to Divine Grace; provided he so pleads the cause of Grace, as not to inflict an injury on the Justice of God, and not to take away the free will to that which is evil.¹³

In view of this clear and unequivocal argument, it is surely time, after four hundred years, to 'drop the charges' of Pelagianism against Jacobus Arminius.

That there are affinities between what Augustine and Arminius taught on sin, grace and salvation cannot be denied, and if Arminius' frequent and approved quotations from Augustine are a guide, he would not have wanted to deny the affinities. Both the Bishop of Hippo and the Amsterdam pastor, and later Leiden professor, were theologians of grace. It is the grace of God in Christ, mediated by the Holy Spirit, that is the sole, sufficient and efficient cause of our salvation. For that reason, both these teachers stressed the importance of preaching the gospel, for it is in the gospel that we sinners hear the good news of saving grace. But the differences between Augustine and Arminius are equally important. Although Arminius held, like Augustine, a doctrine of the headship of Adam and original sin, he did not teach any particular theory of the origin of the soul or of concupiscence as the means of sin's transmission. Likewise Arminius had no doctrine of the damnation of unbaptised infants,¹⁴ and, in particular, the *ordo salutis* that bears his name, repudiated the dogmas of limited atonement and absolute predestination. Whether or not it was his deliberate intention, Arminius constructed a doctrinal system that, on one hand, clearly repudiated Pelagianism, and, on the other hand, likewise repudiated supralapsarian Calvinism. As argued earlier in this paper, the Arminianism of Jacobus Arminius may appropriately be described as revisionist Calvinism.

¹³ Arminius, *Works*, 2:700,701.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 10-14.

In his book, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation*, Alan Sell concludes that ‘in important respects Arminius was not an Arminian’.¹⁵ What Sell has in mind are the marked differences between the doctrines of Arminius and those of some seventeenth and eighteenth century English Arminians. This difference is very clearly seen in looking at Arminius’s teaching on original sin compared with what Daniel Whitby (1638-1726) argued for. An outspoken Anglican Arminian, who wrote vigorously against Calvinism in his *Discourse on the Five Points*, Whitby nevertheless declared that no thinking person could believe, at the same time, the contradictory doctrines of inherited sin and eternal damnation.¹⁶ Interesting as it would be to trace the doctrine of original sin in Arminian writers, both Continental and English, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, our concern is with this teaching in the writings of John Wesley.

As early as 1730 John Wesley was showing a marked interest in hamartiology. In the December of that year he had read two works by William King (1650-1720), and he discussed them by letter with his father Samuel.¹⁷ One of these was *De Origine Mali*, which greatly disappointed Wesley. King gave no attention to the Genesis account of a Fall, nor did he have any doctrine of Adam’s sin affecting the human race. Wesley dismissed King’s rationalism as Stoicism by another name and it is interesting that King’s work, now almost entirely forgotten, has been resurrected and approved as an example of eighteenth-century optimism by John Hick.¹⁸

One of Wesley’s very first apologies for Methodism was his 1742 work, *The Principles of a Methodist*, and in it he outlined his understanding of original sin and salvation by grace.

I believe in justification by faith alone...I am firmly persuaded, that every man of the offspring of Adam is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil; that this corruption of our nature, in every person born into the world, deserves God’s wrath and damnation; and therefore, if ever we receive the remission of our sins, and are accounted righteous before God, it must be only for the merit of Christ, by faith.¹⁹

¹⁵ Sell, A P F, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism and Salvation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 97.

¹⁶ Referenced by R Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth-Century England*, (Oxford OUP, 1954), 112.

¹⁷ Wesley, John. *The Works of John Wesley* [‘Bicentennial Edition’] (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 25:257-258; 264-267; hereafter, *Works* [BE].

¹⁸ Hick, John. *Evil and the God of Love* (London, 1979), 151.

¹⁹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 8:361; hereafter, *Works*.

At the very first Conference that Wesley convened with his preachers in 1744, the question was raised as to how the sin of Adam is incurred by the race. The agreed answer was:

In Adam all die; that is, (1.) Our bodies then became mortal. (2.) Our souls died; that is, were disunited from God. And hence, (3.) We are all born with a sinful, devilish nature. By reason whereof, (4.) We are children of wrath, liable to eternal death.²⁰

When he published his 1760 sermon, *The New Birth*, he again gave prominent attention to original sin.

In Adam all died, all humankind, all the children of men who were then in Adam's loins. The natural consequence of this is that everyone descended from him comes into the world spiritually dead, dead to God, wholly 'dead in sin', entirely void of the life of God, void of the image of God, of all that righteousness and holiness wherein Adam was created. Instead of this every man born into the world now bears the image of the devil, in pride and self-will; the image of the beast, in sensual appetites and desires.²¹

In the 1760s he proposed a kind of fraternal union between the evangelical clergy in the country, a union among those who would agree on the 'three grand fundamental doctrines' of original sin, justification by faith and holiness of life.²² When he published his *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* in 1765, he appended a preface in which he gave a kind of hermeneutic for understanding Scripture. 'Have a constant eye to the analogy of faith, the connection and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, inward and outward holiness'.²³

It was his controversy with Dr John Taylor, in the 1750s, that gave John Wesley the occasion to defend what he believed to be the orthodox doctrine of original sin, clearly expressed in Article IX of the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, and entitled 'Of Original or Birth Sin'.

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil...and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation.

In 1740 John Taylor published *The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin proposed to free and Candid Examination*. Denying that Adam's sin was in any way

²⁰ Ibid, 277.

²¹ Wesley, *Works* [BE], 2:190.

²² Wesley, *The Letters of John Wesley: Standard Edition* (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), 4:146.

²³ Wesley, *Works*, 14:253.

transmitted to the race, either seminally or judicially, Taylor set out to prove that the only consequence of Adam's sin is physical death. We all sin in practice and we will be judged only for our own sins which have no relation of any kind to the original sin of Adam. Wesley was greatly concerned that no orthodox scholar had attempted to reply to what he called Taylor's 'deadly poison'. He took nine weeks out of his busy itinerancy, retired to the home of a friend in south London and wrote his reply, *The Doctrine of Original Sin according to Scripture, Reason and Experience*. Published in 1757, it ran to five hundred and twenty-two pages and was the longest single treatise that Wesley published. He followed it in 1759 with his sermon, *On Original Sin*, a summary of the longer work. He took Genesis 6:5 as his text, 'God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth', and defined the orthodox doctrine of original sin. 'The Scriptures aver that "by one man's disobedience all men were constituted sinners", that "in Adam all died", spiritually died, lost the life and the image of God...consequently we, as well as other men, were by nature dead in trespasses and sins, without hope and without God in the world, and therefore children of wrath'.²⁴ Wesley is in no doubt that this is the undeniable teaching of Scripture and of the Articles of the Church. This doctrine is 'the one grand, fundamental difference between Christianity and the most refined heathenism...Hence, all who deny this—call it 'original sin' or by any other title—are but heathens still in the fundamental point which differences heathenism from Christianity'.²⁵ In the last year of his life, 1790, Wesley published his sermon, *Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, and the introduction argues that all mankind has lost the image of God, for 'in Adam all died'.²⁶

This survey of John Wesley's writings, covering six decades of his life and work, has given ample evidence of the importance of the doctrine of original sin in his understanding of the Christian faith. He believed passionately that he found it in the Scriptures, in the orthodox divines of every age of the Church, was prepared to defend it on the grounds of revelation, reason and experience, and concluded that any denial of it was tantamount to a denial of the faith itself.

What did Wesley understand by this doctrine? First, it should be noted that while he made use of the term 'original sin', most of the passages are found in his treatise against John Taylor. But any paucity of references to the actual term in his other writings should not be interpreted as a lessening of Wesley's insistence on this one of the 'three grand fundamental doctrines' of orthodox Christianity. Years after the Taylor controversy, he defines original sin as 'the proneness to evil which is found in every child of man'²⁷ and argues that there is no way to

²⁴ Wesley, *Works* [BE], 2:173.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 183.

²⁶ Wesley, *Works* [BE], 4:162.

²⁷ Wesley, *Letters*, 6:49.

account for universal wickedness except ‘upon the supposition of original sin’.²⁸ Other descriptions of fallen humanity are found frequently in his writings that mean the same thing: ‘inbred corruption’, ‘inbred sin’ and ‘corrupt sinful nature’.

Wesley interpreted original sin in a way that could be described as near-Augustinian. Adam was the representative of the race and in him the whole race died. While admitting that the actual words ‘representative’ and ‘federal head’ are not found in Scripture, yet Wesley is adamant that they represent biblical teaching. ‘The thing I mean is this: The state of all mankind did so far depend on Adam, that, by his fall, they all fell into sorrow, and pain, and death, spiritual and temporal. And all this is noways inconsistent with either the justice or goodness of God, provided all may recover through the Second Adam, whatever they lost through the first’.²⁹ Wesley did not raise the question whether or not the justice of God is indeed impugned in the doctrine of universal spiritual death through the consequences of Adam’s transgression—unless there is eternal life conferred upon all universally through Christ.

Wesley went further to explain what he meant by representation. Both Adam and Christ represent the race and their headships must be understood together. ‘As Adam was a public person and acted in the stead of all mankind, so Christ, likewise, was a public person, and acted in behalf of all his people; that as Adam was the first general representative of mankind, Christ was the second and the last; that what they severally did in this capacity, was not intended to terminate in themselves, but to affect as many as they severally represented’.³⁰ Later, quoting 1 Cor 15:22, ‘In Adam all die’, he reasoned:

‘In Adam’, or on account of his fall, ‘all’ of mankind, in every age, ‘die;’ consequently, in him all sinned. With him all fell in his first transgression. That they were all born liable to the legal punishment proves him the federal head as well as natural head of mankind; whose sin is so far imputed to all men, that they are born ‘children of wrath’ and liable to death.³¹

While the arguments advanced in his *Doctrine of Original Sin...* were largely determined by Taylor’s thesis, Wesley took a different approach in his sermon, *On Original Sin*. His target was clearly Enlightenment optimism about mankind, and of course he saw John Taylor as a spokesman of that misguided optimism. Having graphically described the wickedness of the antediluvian world, he then compared it with contemporary universal rebellion against God. The root cause is that since Adam we come into the world spiritually blind and dead, and utterly incapable of knowing God unless we are assisted by grace. If two infants were brought up without any instruction in any religion (and, if it were possible,

²⁸ Wesley, *Letters*, 5:327.

²⁹ Wesley, *Works*, 9:332.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 333.

³¹ *Ibid*, 427.

without any influence of the Spirit of God), then, says Wesley, ‘they would know no more of God than the beasts of the field...Such is natural religion, abstracted from traditional, and from the influence of God’s Spirit’.³² The proof of this total depravity is the universal idolatry, self-will and love of the world everywhere in evidence. Wickedness may be restrained by laws, prohibitions and the fear of punishment, but it fills every human heart and enslaves the will until it is extirpated by divine grace.

So far Wesley’s interpretation could rightly be labelled Augustinian federalism, and he did confess that the true gospel comes ‘within a hair’s-breadth’ of Calvinism.³³ But unlike Augustine, who argued so consistently for a seminal transmission of original sin, Wesley candidly admitted he did not know how sin was propagated. ‘The fact I know, both by Scripture and by experience. I know it is transmitted; but how it is transmitted, I neither know nor desire to know’.³⁴ Wesley also departed from Augustine in denying imputed guilt. While he seems to vacillate between an understanding of original sin as a corruption of the soul and original sin as a disorder of the human spirit through having lost the indwelling Spirit, he was sure that we are not charged with Adam’s guilt. This is because of prevenient grace, the ‘free gift’ of Romans 5:15-17, which comes ‘upon all men unto justification of life’. As Wesley developed his understanding of sin and grace against the claims of Calvinism, he gave more and more prominence to prevenient grace. His near-Augustinian doctrine of original sin did not lead him either to an avowal of imputed guilt or unconditional predestination—and he firmly believed that it was his interpretation of prevenient grace that enabled him to avoid, on one hand, Pelagianism, and on the other, Calvinism. In his long tract, *Predestination Calmly Considered*, he explained where he differed from the Calvinists. ‘That the sin of Adam committed in paradise is imputed to all men, I allow; yea, that by reason hereof “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now”. But that any will be damned for this alone, I allow not, till you show me where it is written. Bring me plain proof from Scripture, and I submit; but till then I utterly deny it.’³⁵

Twenty five years he held the same conviction:

That ‘by the offence of one, judgement came upon all men unto condemnation’ is an undoubted, truth, and affects every infant as well as every adult person. But it is equally true that ‘by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification’. Therefore no infant ever

³² Wesley, *Works* [BE], 2:178.

³³ Wesley, *Works*, 8:284.

³⁴ Wesley, *Works* [BE], 26:519; also *Works*, 9:335.

³⁵ Wesley, *Works*, 10:223.

was or will be sent to hell for the guilt of Adam's sin, seeing it is cancelled by the righteousness of Christ as soon as they are sent into the world.³⁶

Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace also had the most significant implications for how he held, at the same time, the doctrines of original sin and free will. He attributed all that measure of freedom of choice which fallen men and women possess to the actions of grace. 'Natural free will, in the present state of mankind, I do not understand: I only assert that there is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man together with that supernatural light which "enlightens every man that comes into the world."'³⁷ When his opponents charged him with denying free-will while John Fletcher allegedly asserted it, Wesley responded: 'Both Mr Fletcher and Mr Wesley absolutely deny natural free will. We both steadily assert that the will of man is by nature free only to evil. Yet we both believe that every man has a measure of free-will restored to him by grace'.³⁸ Wesley was endeavouring to hold together a doctrine of human fallenness and a capacity in fallen humanity whereby the gift of grace enables a response to grace. And, like Arminius, Wesley was always a theologian of grace. 'I always did for between these thirty and forty years clearly assert the total fall of man and his utter inability to do any good of himself; the absolute necessity of the grace and Spirit of God to raise even a good thought or desire in our hearts'.³⁹ While prevenient grace is not justifying grace, it is God's enablement to the sinner to respond to further grace. It is, therefore, a supernatural gift of God, and it gives to every human being that power of choice which is the prerequisite for all moral responsibility.

Although it can be shown that John Wesley had read Arminius' *Declaration of Sentiments* as early as 1731, he did not describe himself as an Arminian until 1770. This was almost certainly because the term had become loose enough to be descriptive of any protest against Calvinism, even that urged by Socinians like John Taylor. But in the 1770s Wesley was forced to take a more definitive doctrinal stand and he launched his monthly *Arminian Magazine*. In his short tract, *What is an Arminian?* he came to the defence of both Arminianism and Arminius. Arminians are usually accused of denying original sin and justification by faith but both charges are false. 'With regard to these charges they plead, Not guilty. They are entirely false. No man that ever lived, not John Calvin himself, ever asserted either original sin or justification by faith, in more strong, more clear and express terms, than Arminius has done'.⁴⁰ And we might add that, with arguments very similar to those of Arminius, John Wesley clearly and expressly

³⁶ Wesley, *Letters*, 6:239, 240.

³⁷ Wesley, *Works*, 10:229, 230.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 392.

³⁹ Wesley, *Letters*, 5:231.

⁴⁰ Wesley, *Works*, 10:359.

asserted both original sin and justification by faith. There is a very recognisable and definable doctrine of original sin that can be designated Arminian-Wesleyan.

In one important respect John Wesley advanced the doctrine of original sin well beyond what Arminius had defined. This was in relation to his doctrine of scriptural holiness. Arminius defined sanctification:

It is a gracious act of God, by which he purifies man who is a sinner, and yet a believer, from the darkness of ignorance, from indwelling sin and from its lusts or desires, and imbues him with the Spirit of knowledge, righteousness and holiness...This sanctification is not completed in a single moment; but sin, from whose dominion we have been delivered through the cross and death of Christ, is weakened more and more by daily losses, and the inner man is day by day renewed more and more'.⁴¹

Wesley clearly went further than Arminius in his conviction that salvation in Christ is salvation from sin, and from all sin, inner and outer, in this life. When he stood in the pulpit of St Mary's, Oxford, seventeen days after his Aldersgate heart-warming, his subject was Salvation by Faith. This 'great salvation' means being 'saved from sin...Jesus will save his people from their sins...All that believe in him, he will save from all their sins, from original and actual, past and present sin, of the flesh and the spirit'.⁴²

Twenty nine years later Wesley was still insisting on the possibility of deliverance from all sin in this life. In his sermon, *The Repentance of Believers*, he cites or refers to a whole catena of Scripture passages to prove that sin still persists even in the justified. Following this *simul justus et peccator* argument, categorised in terms of pride, self-will, love of the world, anger, and the 'evil which cleaves to all our words and actions', Wesley avers: 'All the children of God scattered abroad agree...[that] by all the grace which is given at justification we cannot extirpate them...Most sure we cannot, till it shall please our Lord to speak to our hearts again, to speak the second time, "Be clean". And then only "the leprosy is cleansed". Then only the evil root, the carnal mind, is destroyed, and inbred sin subsists no more'.⁴³

In the last decade of his life this theological distinctive had not changed. Speaking in 1784 of the stages of spiritual growth that lie beyond justification, in terms of the 'little children, young men and fathers' of 1 John, Wesley encourages his people to seek that fulness of salvation from inner sin that has been his evangel for half a century. 'In the same proportion that he grows in faith, he grows in holiness; he increases in love, lowliness, meekness, in every part of the image of God; till it pleases God, after he is thoroughly convinced of inbred sin, of the total corruption of his nature, to take it all away, to purify his heart and

⁴¹ Arminius, *Works*, 2:409, 410.

⁴² Wesley, *Works* [BE], 1:122.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 346.

cleanse him from all unrighteousness'.⁴⁴ These three selections from his sermons, in 1738, 1767 and 1784, show conclusively that John Wesley never wavered in his conviction that salvation means salvation from sin, from all sin, in this life, including inner sin. What has developed, however, is Wesley's insistence on the primacy of love. It is the love of God in the soul that 'excludes' or 'expels' sin, and it is love governing the heart and life that is the benchmark of holiness. Increasingly in his exposition of Christian holiness, Wesley spoke of original sin in terms of its manifestations in the Christian's life; his favourite ascriptions were pride, self-will and love of the world.⁴⁵ These depict a spiritual disposition, a mind-set of the flesh—and in this context Wesley understands entire sanctification as 'love excluding sin'.⁴⁶ Scriptural holiness is perfect love; it is a new disposition, a new harmony of spirit, a new mind-set, as it were, displacing the old. To love God with all the heart and soul and mind, is to leave no place for contrary dispositions.

John Wesley's doctrine of original sin was an integral part of an *ordo salutis* that enabled him to stress, as Scripture does, both the exceeding sinfulness of sin and full deliverance from its power in this life. His stress on sin, as both inherited corruption and acquired guilt, saved him from Pelagianism. His stress on the universal love and grace of God saved him from Calvinism. His stress on 'the faith that works by love' saved him from antinomianism. And, his stress on Christian holiness as the love of God and man saved him from pharisaism. Essentially Arminian in his understanding of sin, grace and salvation, that is, the Arminianism of Jacobus Arminius, Wesley advanced the doctrine of sanctification beyond Arminius' perimeters. In conclusion, the evidence demonstrates that both Arminius and Wesley gave an important place to the doctrine of inherited sinfulness. Their explication of this doctrine of original sin can be described as near-Augustinian but their distinctive departures from Augustine's position are part of the framework of Arminian Wesleyanism.

⁴⁴ Wesley, *Works* [BE], 3:175, 179.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 350-352.

⁴⁶ Wesley, *Letters*, 4:192.