

Arminian Confession 1621 and Apostasy

The Remonstrants clearly held to conditional security (upon faith and obedience), and in the possibility of apostasy (i.e., believers falling away from faith, *becoming an unbeliever*, and ending up in hell along with all other unbelievers). The Remonstrants saw apostasy taking place through holding false doctrines or through persisting in sinful and unrepentant behavior.

It should be noted that the Remonstrants were “persuaded that none is to be *easily condemned, or blotted out of the register of Christians* who holds fast to faith in Christ, and in hope of the good things promised by him, [and who] seek from the heart to obey his commands . . . (Preface, 30, emphasis added). Furthermore,

Even if it is true that those who are adept in the habit of faith and holiness can only *with difficulty* fall back to their former profaneness and dissoluteness of life (Heb. 6), yet we believe that it is entirely possible, if not rarely done (Heb. 6:4; Rev. 2 & 3; 2 Pet. 2:18; Ez. 18:24; Heb. 4:1-2; 10:28-29; 10:38-39; 1 Tim. 1:19-20; Rom. 11:18) that they *fall back little by little and until they completely lack their prior faith and charity. And having abandoned the way of righteousness, they revert to their worldly impurity which they had truly left, returning like pigs to wallowing in the mud and dogs to their vomit, and are again entangled in lusts of the flesh which they had formerly, truly fled. And thus totally and at length also they are finally torn from the grace of God unless they seriously repent in time.* (11.7, emphasis added)¹

With this in mind, here are the following passages found in the confession that touch on the topic of apostasy. All the italicized words have been added for emphasis.

¹ The Remonstrants go on to say:

And yet in the meantime we do not absolutely deny it is possible that those who have once truly believed (Contrary to the Canons of the Synod of Dort, ch. 5; Ps. 51, 2 Cor. 2, Isa. 1, Deut. 30) when they fall back to their former profanity of life, may be renewed again by benefit divine grace, become good men, even if we believe that it usually rarely happens and with great difficulty (Luke 11:24, Heb. 6:4, 2. Pet. 2:2). But as often as it happens by the grace of God with such as these, we judge that they are placed entirely among the number of the truly godly, repentant and truly saved, if indeed they persevere in this renewed conversion. (11.7)

The Remonstrants held that “there are some things [i.e., doctrinal beliefs] of such weight and importance that they cannot be contradicted *without greatest danger to our salvation*. (Preface, 15)²

This pertains specifically to those biblical commands recorded in the canonical books that deserve the Christians “undoubted faith” and “most humble obedience” (1.9). To hold to any doctrine or tradition that either contradicts or commands a teaching to be believed contrary to those found in the Bible (Gal. 1:8-9) is to subject oneself to “*the pain and peril of the loss of salvation*, since God can neither contradict himself, and no authority, either human or angelic, ought to be equaled to the divine [authority of Scripture]” (1.9).

The Remonstrants believed that local congregations of believers, “. . . may not only err in doctrine, *but also fall away from the true faith and its profession*,” while “the [universal] church remains safe and whole.” Indeed, there are “both examples and prophecies of *the falling away of many* are obvious everywhere throughout the Holy Scriptures (1 Thess. 2:3, 4:1ff, 2 Tim. 3:1, 2 Pet. 2:1ff, Acts 20:29-30)” (22.6).

The Remonstrants stated that

. . . *there are some actual sins of which it is either expressly written or not obscurely indicated that he who does them cannot share in the kingdom of heaven and eternal life, such as all the works of the flesh which are described in Galatians 5, 1 Corinthians 6 and Ephesians 5, Titus 3 and others*, and those that are similar to them, whether they are accompanied with contempt of God and a manifest abuse of right reason, or whether they are at least such are not the least becoming for one who desires eternal and heavenly good. Such are the love of the world, and worldly things, anxious and perpetual cares and concerns about getting them, possessing and retaining them, etc. (7.6)

The Remonstrants observed that,

There are three kinds of worldly goods, according to the Apostle John (1 John 2:16ff.; 1 Pet. 2:11; Jam. 4:1), to which all other may easily enough be reduced, namely, riches, honors and pleasures. The immoderate desire or excessive love for them is called the lust of the eyes, the pride of life and the lust of the flesh. *These very things are seriously*

² Later on the Remonstrants said, “Far be it from us, who firmly believe that Christians may imprudently err in many things *without the loss of their salvation*, and who judge that there are few things which are absolutely necessary to be known and believed for obtaining eternal salvation” (preface, 18).

to be rejected by the truly godly man because they war against solid godliness and the salvation of the soul. (13.5)

The Remonstrants understood the importance of prayer and the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit to enable believers to withstand the varied attacks of Satan who desires to have us turn from God and wind up in hell along with him.

The sixth [phrase in the Lord's Prayer] is that "he would not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil," that is, that he would never permit us to be oppressed too much by grave and lasting temptations (Mark 6:41; 2 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 3:10), a much less defeated, or to be tested beyond our strength (1 Cor. 10:13), but that he would always strengthen and sustain us by his Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16-18, 6:11ff.; 1 Thess. 3:2ff; 1 Pet. 5:10; Heb. 13:20-21; Rom. 5:2ff.) according to his singular power and also fatherly love, especially in grave afflictions, arduous dangers and calamities, and other evils of that kind, *through which Satan tries to utterly destroy us, and turn us from God, lest perhaps being too pressed by them, we choose something contrary to his divine will and harmful to our salvation or a good conscience.* And finally, that always together with the temptation he would will to grant a happy outcome (1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Pet. 5:8-10; 1 John 5:18), that we would be able to suffer it and so finally be gloriously freed from all the snares and enticements and all the fraud and power of Satan, *indeed that we may be rendered immune from all danger of eternal perdition. (14.11)*

The Remonstrants held that . . .

God is occupied with these kinds of gracious acts [i.e., election to glory, adoption, justification, sanctification, and sealing by the Holy Spirit] towards all those, and only those (although unequally and in different measure) who truly believe and repent. We find three kinds or orders of these in the Scriptures: 1. Those who can be called novices (Matt. 13:20; Luke 8:12-13, 24; 1 Cor. 3:1ff.; Gal. 1:6ff.; Rev. 2 & 3), and who are recently converted to the faith, who together with a sincere assent bring indeed a serious and deliberate will to obey the divine will. But when persecution, afflictions and other dangerous temptations arise which [this kind] is not able to resist, it immediately grows weak once again, *and utterly dies.* 2. Those who remain constant for some time in the true faith (Matt. 10:17ff., 24:9ff.; 1 Thess. 3:3ff.; 1 Tim. 1:19, 4:1ff.; Heb. 6:4ff., 10:31, 2 Pet. 2:10ff., 3:17-18) and in a certain holy purpose and demonstrate for a while the truth of their faith by good and holy works, but finally, whether by the enticements of the world, the flesh or Satan, or conquered and broken by some violent tyranny, *they defect and desert from the faith.* 3. Those who either without any defection or

interruption continually persevere to the end in that godly purpose and in holy works (Luke 22:32; 2 Cor. 1:7-8, 7:10; 2 Tim. 2:25-26; Matt. 10:22, 24:13), or *who have fallen again or even often departed, having once again lapsed or fallen*, again are led to serious repentance and so being restored by the grace of God they finally persevere. Therefore the two former orders of believers are indeed truly elected, adopted, and justified, but not absolutely, but only for a time, namely, as far and as long as they are [believers] and remain such. But the third and last sort alone are finally and thoroughly such, that is, according to that which we read in the gospel: he who perseveres to the end will be saved. (18.6)

The Remonstrants go on to write,

For these are divine acts [or election to glory, adoption, justification, sanctification, and sealing by the Holy Spirit], sometimes continuous, sometimes interrupted, that is, for as long and as often as the requisite conditions (that is, the faith and holiness of the covenant) continue to be present within us. But they are interrupted when we no longer stand in our covenant, or when such acts are committed by us which can in no way be consistent with true faith and a good conscience, according to Ezekiel, "If the righteous turns away from his righteousness, and does iniquity, according to all the iniquities which the wicked do, will he do it and live? All the righteousness which he has done will not be remembered because of his transgressions by which he has transgressed. And because of his sins which he sinned, I say, *he shall die*" (Ezek. 18:24; Rom. 11:12ff.; 1 Cor. 9:27, 10:10ff.; Col. 1:21, 23; Heb. 3:6, 14, 10:25-36; Rev. 2:10, 3:11-12). This is in keeping with many other sacred testimonies and examples of the same kind. (18.7)

To summarize, the Remonstrants believed that it was difficult yet possible for believers to become unbelievers through unbelief manifested in persistent unrepentant sin and through the acceptance of false doctrine on essential Christian teaching. Believers who commit apostasy "die" [spiritually] and will be "finally torn from the grace of God," or "blotted out of the register of Christians." Such apostates will experience "the pain and peril of the loss of salvation," and "cannot share in the kingdom of heaven and eternal life." Their end is "eternal perdition."