

The Evangelical Ecumenism of
James Arminius

by

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A Thesis presented to the University of
Waterloo in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History
[pagination of this version is not the same as the original dissertation]

Waterloo, Ontario, 1980

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The subject of ecumenism in the age of the Reformation has attracted the attention of historians only recently, and such works as J. T. McNeill's *Unitive Protestantism*, and his *History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517-1948*, are among the relatively few works available on this theme. These books reveal, however, that ecumenism is a motif of Reformation historical thought which is worthy of consideration and research, for it is evident that there were influential Protestant thinkers who strove to preserve the unity of the Church and of the society of which they were a part, in spite of the fractionalism of their age.

One prominent and influential churchman who has not been studied from the perspective of his ecumenism is the Dutch theologian, James Arminius (1560-1609). Not only does Arminius deserve to be called a leading ecumenical thinker, but he perceived himself to be a part of a succession of evangelically oriented ecumenical moderates whom he believed to be the legitimate representatives of the best spirit of the Reformation. Arminius consciously and deliberately identified himself with the spirit and approach of Melancthonian Lutheranism, which in turn possessed striking similarities to the ecumenical thought of Erasmus. The thesis can be defended, therefore, that James Arminius, Philip Melancthon, and Desiderius Erasmus were close enough in spirit, ideology, motivation and ecumenical involvement to substantiate the claim that they belonged to a discernible and distinct stream of Christian thought and practice operative in the Reformation era, the stream which may be labelled Evangelical Ecumenism. Because of his reputation as an ecumenist, Martin Bucer of Strassbourg deserves recognition as belonging to the evangelical ecumenical tradition as well.

An analysis of the works of Arminius reveals the fact that he was determined to stress the evangelical essentials of Reformation theology and indeed of orthodox Christianity throughout the centuries. He refused to be drawn into discussions which were likely to produce dissensions and divisions, preferring to emphasize the beliefs held in common by Christians through the ages, as evidenced by their adherence to the creedal

standards of the early Church and above all by the correspondence with the Scriptures. Arminius disclaimed any sympathy with doctrines which had been deemed heretical in the past and he denied that he had any interest in supporting theological novelty within the Dutch Reformed Church. In fact he asserted his conviction that some current trends in Dutch Calvinism, such as the emphasis being given to the doctrine of extreme predestinarianism, were in danger of producing just such innovativeness. If this were to transpire, Arminius felt that the Dutch Church would be cut off from the mainstream of evangelical Reformation thinking. To Arminius this would have been tragic. He therefore denounced these trends as unbiblical, unorthodox, unevangelical, and unecumenical. In so doing, he identified himself and the theology which he taught with the kind of moderate orthodox evangelicalism represented by Melanchthonian Lutheranism, and which he believed was the faith inherent in the major Protestant Confessions.

Carl Bangs has sought to identify Arminius with the tradition of Reformation Calvinism; it seems more accurate to stress Arminius' affinity with Melanchthon and thus with a wider-than-Calvin Reformation thought-structure, which had its roots at least as far back as the moderate evangelical irenicism of Erasmus. The Bangs thesis is therefore modified, and the historical context of Arminianism enlarged. James Arminius deserves an honoured place in the history of the ecumenical movement. Moreover, he represents a tradition of Reformation thinking that was at once evangelical in conviction and genuinely ecumenical in outlook. This tradition, so prominently represented by Erasmus, Melanchthon, Martin Bucer of Strassbourg, and Arminius of Amsterdam, needs to be recognized and understood if one is to assess more adequately the history of sixteenth century Europe.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ARG *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*

CH *Church History*

CR *Corpus Reformatorum*

JTS *Journal of Theological Studies*

LCC *Library of Christian Classics*

MQR *Mennonite Quarterly Review*

PTR *Princeton Theological Review*

Introduction

In the following pages I set out to define, demonstrate, and give the historical context of the evangelical ecumenism of James Arminius, the early seventeenth-century Netherlands Reformed theologian. The subject of ecumenism, or the unity of Christians and churches, may seem incongruous in the context of the Reformation era, because the Reformation itself brought about such a deep visible rupture in western Christendom. Once inaugurated, Protestantism proceeded to undergo a process of fragmentation; each new fracture seemed only to diminish the possibility of effecting any kind of Catholic or Protestant reconciliation. Recent studies have show, however, that the picture of the Reformation remains both unbalanced and incomplete if one chooses to study only the hostilities and schisms of the age while disregarding the sincere efforts made by various individuals to reduce the tendency toward sectarianism and to restore a sense of unity to a divided Christianity. Thus the topic of ecumenism must be given due consideration in order to fully comprehend the religious dynamics operative in the Reformation age.

Prior to the twentieth century, Reformation scholarship for the most part left the ecumenical activities of the reformers unexplored. Perhaps this was because much Reformation research was still being used by confessional historians as a pretext for carrying on the polemical arguments of the sixteenth century. Working within such a framework would have made an enquiry into the attitudes of the reformers regarding Christian unity somewhat unnecessary and undesirable. In contrast, one might regard the interest of modern scholars in the subject of ecumenism during the Reformation as an outgrowth of the ecumenical movement of the early part of the twentieth century.

This interest in the ecumenism of the reformers can be seen, for example, in certain twentieth-century works on John Calvin. Williston Walker contended that Calvin wanted “a more visible and effective evidence of the spiritual union of Protestantism, and its fellowship and doctrine . . . than proved feasible under the conditions of the sixteenth century.”¹ Calvin, said Walker, was able to unite the various elements of “non Lutheran Protestantism into a real spiritual communion,” which, Walker said, served as “one of Calvin’s largest claims to permanent remembrance.”² John T. McNeill, an eminent

1 Williston Walker, *John Calvin: The Organizer of the Reformed Protestantism* (New York: 1969), 402.

2 Walker, *Calvin*, 402.

Calvin scholar, referred to Calvin as a “unionist” who emphasised catholicity and detested the schism within Protestantism.³ To McNeill, the ecumenism of Calvin stemmed from the ideal of catholic unity inherent in his ecclesiology. Calvin’s protestant, ecumenical ideal, if practised, insisted McNeill, would have “given expression on a grand scale to Christian fraternity, catholicity and democracy . . . and rendered the last four centuries of western civilization incomparably richer and happier than they have been.”⁴ McNeill broadened this thesis to include other Protestant and Roman Catholic ecumenical endeavours during the Reformation age as a contribution to a work published under the auspices of the Ecumenical Institute in Basel, Switzerland.⁵ His larger work, *Unitive Protestantism*, expanded this chapter into a fuller treatment of the non-Catholic ecumenical efforts.⁶ This work deals primarily with the unitive efforts of Lutherans, Reformed churchmen, and the Anglican ecumenical efforts of Thomas Cranmer. The definitions of the church propounded by Luther and Calvin were ecumenical in their scope, McNeill documents.⁷ Conciliarism was also a mark of the protestant ecumenists including the early Luther, Calvin, Bucer and Melancthon, and Cranmer.⁸ In the early days of the Reformation, Luther stressed the importance of councils, which he considered authoritative as long as they complied with Scripture, and as long as they were recognized as of “human ordering, not of divine appointment.”⁹ As time went on, Luther cooled to the idea of a council’s reforming possibilities. His opposition to later council projects was due to his fear “that through an unfree or supine council the monarchical principle would achieve a fresh triumph.”¹⁰ Luther’s change of heart with regard to the possibility of a useful purpose being served by a council, according to McNeill, was due to the peasant’s revolt,¹¹ in which his faith in consensus-achievement was shaken, and he increasingly turned “to the idea of a church ruled by princes and theologians. In any case,

3 John T. McNeill, “Calvin’s Efforts toward the Consolidation of Protestantism,” *Journal of Religion* VIII, (1928), 411–433.

4 McNeill, “Calvin’s Efforts,” **PG?**

5 Ruth Rouse and Stephen Neill eds. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517–1948* (Richmond, 1954). McNeill’s chapter is entitled “The Ecumenical Idea and Efforts to Realize It, 1517–1618,” 25–69.

6 J.T. McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism: The Ecumenical Spirit and its Persistent Expression* (Richmond, 1964).

7 McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, 9, and “Ecumenical Idea,” 31.

8 McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, 96–102.

9 McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, 98. McNeill documents the many calls for councils by Luther and the Lutheran princes from 1518 to 1537.

10 McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, 101.

11 McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, 123.

it is clear that the departure from the conciliar form and principle of church government was not the abandonment of the idea but a providential and strategic postponement of action toward its fulfilment.”¹²

Calvin the ecumenist, according to McNeill, laboured to bring about the union of the Swiss Zwinglians and the Genevans through the *Consensus Tigurinus* of 1549.¹³ Earlier, in 1532, Farrel, Bucer and Oecampadius were instrumental earlier in bringing many Waldensians into the sphere of the Reformed faith.¹⁴ Following Calvin, Beza carried on the work of striving to unite the Lutherans and the Reformed, and was responsible for the publication of the Harmony of Confessions of 1581.¹⁵

Anglican ecumenical endeavours were led by Cranmer, who sought to bring about the production of a consensus of protestant thought by calling for a conference of Calvin, Melancthon, Bucer and himself, all of whom he invited to England in 1547. McNeill notes, “It may not have been clear to Melancthon that what Cranmer had in mind was much more than a basis for the Church of England.”¹⁶ McNeill wonders just what positive result might have transpired if this conference of moderates could have been held.

Another work co-authored by J. T. McNeill and James Nichols documents the ecumenical spirit of the French Protestants meeting in synod at Sainte-Foy in 1578.¹⁷ This conference determined

to send a delegation of four ministers, headed by Antoine de Chandieu together with representatives of all the twenty-four provincial synods of France, to visit the Lutheran Churches of Germany and treat with them on the unity issue. The national synod meeting at Figeac a year later proposed steps toward the preparation of a common confession for Protestants, and resolved “to seek and obtain all suitable means for uniting all the faithful of the particular confessions of the Protestant nations in a single confession of faith.” The national synod of Gap (1603), on an overture from the provincial synod of Dauphine, in order to end the sending of “letters to the orthodox universities of Germany, England, Scotland, Geneva, Basel, and Leiden (and to certain persons in London) entreating them to labour with us to effect this holy union.”¹⁸

12 McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, 123.

13 McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, 197. The twenty-six articles of agreement between Zurich represented by Bullinger and Geneva represented by Farel and Calvin concern the sacraments almost exclusively. They appear in *CR XXV*, 733 ff.

14 McNeill, “Ecumenical Idea,” 48.

15 McNeill, “Ecumenical Idea,” 53.

16 McNeill, “Ecumenical Idea,” 56.

17 John T. McNeill and James Hastings Nichols, *Ecumenical Testimony: The Concern for Christian Unity within the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 40–61.

18 McNeill and Nichols, *Ecumenical Testimony*, 35, 36.

Two Protestant theologians who have been described as leaders of the ecumenical thrust of the first decades of the period of the Reformation were Martin Bucer and Philip Melanchthon. So closely allied were they in spirit and ecumenical endeavour that their names frequently appear together in discussion of unitive efforts during the sixteenth century.¹⁹

Calvin Wright,* for example, introduced his translation of Bucer's *Common Places* with an essay entitled "Martin Bucer, Ecumenical Theologian."²⁰ Wright traced Bucer's attempts to unite the Lutherans and the South German Reformed, culminating in the signing of the Wittenberg Concord of 1536, by which a brief union of these parties was established.²¹ Another shortlived victory for protestant union and Catholic rapprochement was scored by Bucer after difficult negotiations: Lutherans, Reformed, and Catholic representatives agreed to some articles at Regensburg in 1541.²² These and other unitive activities are chronicled by Wright as evidence of Bucer's irenic spirit; Wright believed that Bucer was sincerely motivated and possessed genuine ecumenical theological convictions. Wright quotes a letter from Bucer to Calvin as indicative of Bucer's spirit; his aim, said Bucer, was "most fully to consent, first with the Lord himself and the Holy Spirit (through the Scriptures), secondly with the true and orthodox church of primitive times, and thirdly with all the sons of God of the present age of whatever party they may be."²³ Bucer, Wright asserted, displayed a toleration of the Anabaptists untypical of his age, granting them asylum in Strasburg and perhaps deriving from them principles of church government and discipline.²⁴ Wright concluded that Bucer's profound zeal for the unity of the Church, his irenic spirit, his interest in so many projects for union and reunion, coupled with his charity in being willing to assess the value of others' theological positions and his readiness to revise his own thinking when it was

19 They are treated together, for example, in the *LCC* volume *Bucer and Melanchthon*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck, V.XIX.

20 Martin Bucer, *Common Places*, David F. Wright (tr.), Library of Reformation Classics, Volume IV (Appleford-Abingdon: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 29–52.

21 Bucer, *Common Places*, 38, 39. The Swiss Zwinglians later rejected the Concord: its sentiments on the Lord's Supper proved to be too Lutheran for them.

22 Bucer, *Common Places*, 44.

23 Bucer, *Common Places*, 47. The letter from Bucer to Calvin is dated August 14, 1549, and appears in *CR* 41:13.

24 Bucer, *Common Places*, 30–32.

demonstrated to be biblically incorrect and out of line with truly catholic Christian thought, render him worthy of the title “Ecumenical Theologian.”²⁵

A similar sentiment with regard to Philip Melanchthon is contained in Charles Leander Hill’s introduction to his translation of Melanchthon’s *Selected Writings*.²⁶

Speaking of Melanchthon he wrote:

His willingness to discuss matters objectively with eastern theologians and for all that, with the Roman and Reformed wings of Christianity has been the chief factor in the charge made against him that he was too irenic and too much interested in church union. Recent movements within Protestantism and the Orthodox Church in terms of ecumenicity, however, serve to soften the criticism which historians and dogmatists have customarily made against him . . . It seems to me that no history of the ecumenical movement can be properly written without giving him an exalted position within the stream of its development.²⁷

When one considers the part Melanchthon played in striving for unity between Catholicism and Protestantism at Augsburg in 1530, his effort for Protestant unity at Wittenberg in 1536 and for Catholic/Protestant reunion at Regensburg in 1541 (in both these cases in concert with Bucer), his eagerness to accept the invitations to assist in the reformation of the Churches of France and England, one is inclined to agree with Hill. Indeed, Bucer and Melanchthon do stand out as the most conspicuous examples of a movement for ecumenism within the ranks of the first generation of the reformers.²⁸

The ecumenism of these individuals is clear enough from these descriptions; but the question for the *kind* of ecumenism represented by each remains to be considered. Precisely what were the motivations and ideological presuppositions which lay behind the ecumenical emphases of these Reformation-age thinkers. Were they purely religious, or had they been influenced by renaissance rationalistic and humanistic thought? What kind of unity did each envision; did he seek institutional conformity, fraternal recognition, or perhaps ecclesiastical-social uniformity (i.e., the ideal of one expression of Christianity represented by one church only in a particular geographic region)? These questions have not been sufficiently treated in the Reformation ecumenical literature

25 Bucer, *Common Places*, 50–52.

26 Philip Melanchthon, *Selected Writings*, Charles Leander Hill (tr.), E.E. Flack and L.J. Satre eds. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1962).

27 Melanchthon, *Selected Writings*, xiii.

28 McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, 144, “The men chiefly responsible for the promotion of unitive Protestantism in the German speaking areas in the next two decades were Martin Bucer and Philip Melanchthon . . . For both, church union, wherever a possibility of it appeared, was irresistibly attractive.”

which has been cited. It seems enough for these writers to demonstrate an individual's desire for unity of some sort among Christians to qualify him as an ecumenist. Again, the question of the duration of the ecumenism in question has been somewhat glossed over in these studies. McNeill does mention the fact that the later Luther was much less interested in councils than he had been in early years,²⁹ but still the impression is left that Luther remained basically ecumenical in spite of this change of thinking. Robert Murray makes more of this evolution in the thought of Luther in a book comparing the attitudes toward toleration exhibited by Luther and Desiderius Erasmus.³⁰ The early Luther strongly favoured toleration, Murray declares. The later Luther, at the time of the Saxon visitation, insisted that only one form of Protestantism would be allowed in Saxony.³¹ At this stage Luther could hardly be considered a tolerant ecumenist.

On the other hand Murray examines the views of Erasmus on the theme of toleration, and convincingly demonstrates that Erasmus remained consistent in his attitude toward peace and unity within Christendom.³² To the end of his life Erasmus believed in the possibility of ecumenical coexistence between Christians of various persuasions. If Murray is correct, Erasmus, too, belongs in any discussion of ecumenism in the Reformation era.

The mention of Erasmus in the context of ecumenical research brings to mind another Dutch theologian whose ideas were in many ways similar to those of Erasmus—James Arminius. Superficial mention can be made at this point of their views on free will and divine grace, which were remarkably alike. Was there a connection between their convictions on grace and salvation, and their vision of a united Christianity as well? Was James Arminius an ecumenist? If so, how can his ecumenism be classified? If it did exist, was it a continuous conviction held by him throughout the struggles in the Netherlands at

29 McNeill, *op.cit.*

30 Robert Murray, *Erasmus and Luther: Their Attitude to Toleration* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972), 257–259.

31 Murray, *Erasmus and Luther*, nn. 266, 267. “‘The Freedom of the Christian Man’ was a pamphlet addressed to the people. Five years after its publication the Peasants’ War had devastated . . . Germany. Once Luther had spoken manfully of the rights of conscience. The Saxon Visitation Articles, however, plainly prove that force is for the future to be an element in the propaganda of the Lutheran message. In 1527 the visitors exercise jurisdiction over laymen, have power to examine any suspect of sacramental or other errors pertaining to the faith: witnesses are to be called. If the suspect refuses to abjure his errors, he is given a certain time to sell his lands and possessions and is banished. Practically the Visitation was the means by which the ruler was enabled to get rid of the remaining Roman Catholics. In its methods, it reminds us of the Inquisition.”

32 Murray, *Erasmus and Luther*, 319–40.

the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries? Is there an ideological link between the ecumenism of Erasmus and that of Arminius? Is there any connection between the ecumenism of both men and that of other thinkers mentioned in previous paragraphs?

These questions form the burden of this book. From the evidence to be presented the conclusion will be drawn that Arminius definitely can be classified as an ecumenist, and that his ecumenism can in turn be categorized as “evangelical”; further, that “evangelical ecumenism” as held by Arminius had been the ideal of Erasmus, Melancthon, and Bucer as well. In fact their ecumenical vision, based as it was on their convictions of the primacy of the biblical doctrine of salvation which depends upon the grace of God appropriated by the faith of believers, was so similar that Erasmus, Melancthon, Bucer and Arminius can be shown to have stood in a line of succession. In 1500, Erasmus stood at the beginning of this tradition that I call “evangelical ecumenism.” Two generations later, James Arminius illustrated that that tradition still existed in the context of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands. Linking these generations were Philip Melancthon, who shared the constancy of Erasmus’ ecumenical determination in the midst of his influential involvement in the history of the Lutheran reform, and whose ideals influenced pre-Arminian reform thought in the Netherlands and perhaps the thought of Arminius himself, and Martin Bucer who demonstrated that prior to Arminius’s time this movement was represented within the Reformed branch of Protestantism.

Before proceeding further, a definition should be given indicating what is meant in this dissertation by the term ‘evangelical ecumenism.’ The thesis to be defended in the following pages is that the conception of Arminius relative to the unity of the Christian Church can be labelled ‘evangelical ecumenism.’ The term ‘evangelical’ is used to differentiate the concept from purely secular or rationalistic notions of unity: clearly the term implies a religious theological orientation toward unity. The term expresses the context, the content and the boundaries of Arminius’s ecumenism: the context is religious, the content is centred in the theology of salvation, and the perimeters are fixed by the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy beyond which this ecumenism refuses to go: there is a conception of truth which will not be surrendered even in the name of unity, but

within the limit of a very basic theological definition of essential truth, concord can prevail. In terms of the meaning of the word in sixteenth century though, 'evangelical' means an approach to Christianity which is primarily salvation-centred and which places great emphasis upon the appropriation of the redemption provided by Christ through the faith of the believer: the primary doctrine of the reformers was justification by grace through faith on account of Christ's work, the account of which is given in the authoritative scriptures. This is 'evangelical' doctrine, and Arminius was determined to adhere to it. Arminius can be labelled 'ecumenical' as well as evangelical, because he insisted that Christians can remain united in spirit and endeavour, though divided on certain matters of church thought and practice if the orthodox and evangelical essentials remain the primary if not the exclusive emphasis of Christian teaching. Side issues and evangelical non-essentials were recognized as potentially divisive, and evangelical ecumenism insisted that there be tolerance and reasonable flexibility of attitude in these areas. The essentials, then, that is the beliefs that must be held in order to render anyone worthy of the name evangelical Christian, were delineated in terms of emphases that have become identified with classical Reformation theology: the authority of the canonical scriptures, the tenets of orthodoxy expressed in the early Christian creeds, and above all the salvation provided through Christ and offered freely to man by the grace of God, to be apprehended freely by man through faith issuing in a life of practical Christian piety. Emphasis upon this simple creed would bind Christians together in a common brotherhood of faith and purpose regardless of their differences in other areas of thinking or of church order. To concentrate upon these essential beliefs and to recognize and deliberately tolerate differences among Christians of other persuasions in non-essential matters – this was the kind of Christian endeavour proposed by evangelical ecumenism, and believed by those who adhered to it as most likely to produce social and ecclesiastical concord if practised with consistency.

The central figure of this dissertation is of course, James Arminius. The primary purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate *his* evangelical ecumenism; secondarily the purpose is to demonstrate his relationship to the larger context of an evangelical ecumenism represented by the Catholic Erasmus, the Lutheran Melancthon, and the Reformed Martin Bucer. It will be necessary to demonstrate the evangelical ecumenism

of each of these three men and to indicate their connection with Arminius but the focus of the dissertation will be upon Arminius himself.

The name of James Arminius is associated with a major controversy within the early Dutch Reformed Church and indeed within the political history of the Netherlands in the early seventeenth century. It is a name familiar to students of the history of England in the seventeenth century, associated as it is with the party opposing Calvinistic Puritanism. The ideas of Arminius were foundational for the Wesleyan movement of the eighteenth century, and many theological Arminians are to be found today working within the spectrum of Christian denominations.³³

In spite of this cultural and religious influence, comparatively little has been written about Arminius himself or his own perception of his ecumenical task. That the anti-Arminian party triumphed in the Dutch Reformed Church at the time of the Synod of Dort in 1619 probably accounts for some of this paucity. The last Latin *Opera* of Arminius was issued in 1635; these works were not translated into English and published until the nineteenth century³⁴ and the *Works* remain difficult to obtain. Only one full-length biographical work was written before 1900, the work of the Remonstrant Caspar Brandt, published in 1724.³⁵ A biography focussing upon Arminius's professorial years at Leyden University was published in 1905, but it has yet to be translated from the Dutch.³⁶

33 G. McCulloh, *Man's Faith and Freedom: The Theological Influence of James Arminius* (New York: Abingdon, 1962); Douglas Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration* (Cambridge, 1958); A.H. Harrison, *Arminianism* (London: Duckworth, 1937); A. H. Harrison, *The Beginnings of Arminianism to the Synod of Dort* (London, 1926).

34 Jacobi Arminii, *Opera Theologica*, Luguni Batavorum, apud Godefidum Basson, 1629. English translations: *The Works of James Arminius*, 3 Vols. Vol. I and II (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1825–1828), tr. by James Nichols; Vol. III (London: Thomas Baker, 1857), tr. William Nichols. *The Writings of James Arminius*, James Nichols and W.R. Bagnall eds., 3 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1956).

35 Caspar Brandt, *Historia Vitae Jacobi Arminii* (Amsterdam: 1724); Caspar Brandt, *Historia Vitae Jacobi Arminii* (Brunswick: 1725), edited by J. L. Mosheim; Caspar Brandt, *The Life of James Arminius*, tr. by D.D. John Guthrie (London: Ward and Col, 1854); Caspar Brandt, *The Life of James Arminius*, tr. by D.D. John Guthrie, introduction by T. O. Summers (Nashville: E. Stevenson and F.A. Owen, 1857).

36 J.H. Maronier, *Jacobus Arminius: een Biographie* (Amsterdam: Y. Rogge, 1905).

Secondary literature is rather meagre;³⁷ the only reference to Arminius's ecumenism and its importance in his system of thought is contained in a brief note in McNeill's work.³⁸

The American scholar Carl Bangs published a biography in 1971 which helped to place Arminius in clearer historical perspective, but this work does not satisfactorily treat of the place of Arminius in a larger context of evangelical ecumenism.³⁹ Building upon his earlier doctoral dissertation which had sought to establish the essential Calvinism of Arminius's theology,⁴⁰ Bangs' biographical study enlarged upon the historical background of Arminianism, tracing its roots back into earlier (pre-Arminius) Dutch reform movements in the mid-sixteenth century.

According to Bangs, the forerunners of Arminius in the Netherlands were such men as Anastasius Veluanus who wrote his *Layman's Guide* in the 1550's and achieved the favour of Melancthon.⁴¹ Bangs asserts that Veluanus' book was popular in the northern provinces of the Netherlands during the formative years of the nascent Dutch Reformed Church to the extent that it became "one of the chief means of instructing the Dutch people in the new faith."⁴² In the *Guide*, Veluanus, representing early Dutch emphases upon lay piety and simple Christian expression, rejected the predestinarian theory of high Calvinism and insisted that there is no distinction between the secret and the revealed will of God: high Calvinism taught that there was such a difference asserting that the reasons for the decree of reprobation and damnation were hidden within the

37 According to Carl Bangs, "Arminius, who was also one of the Reformers, has not been made available to us . . . only a small part of his works ever appeared in Dutch and none since 1617 except his "Declaration of Sentiments" reissued in the Old Dutch in 1960. He has been more accessible in English . . . So far as I know there is nothing in German, nothing in French." *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 18.

38 McNeill and Nicholls, *Ecumenical Testimony*, 66: "Junius was succeeded at Leiden by the celebrated James Arminius who died in the midst of the controversy in which his name became attached to a theological movement that threads its way through later theology. It has often been the sad lot of peaceable men to be drawn into intense controversy, and certainly Arminius had not wish to cause strife or division. In 1606 he delivered a long oration entitled "On Reconciling the Dissensions among Christians." In this discourse, if not in his view of predestination, he writes like a pupil of Junius. But he goes on, much in the manner of Calvin, to project a general council of earnest Christians, representative of all the segments of western Christianity, composed of 'men burning with zeal for God . . . inflamed with love of truth and peace.' In this meeting, freedom to express opinion must be assured; and if differences remain, the parties must pledge not to rail at each other or employ coercion."

39 Bangs, *Arminius*.

40 Carl Bangs, "Arminius and Reformed Theology," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1958.

41 Bangs, *Arminius*, 21, 22.

42 Bangs, *Arminius*, 21, 22.

recesses of the secret will of God.⁴³ Veluanus taught that God's revealed will is his only will and that will is to offer a universally available salvation to mankind on the condition of repentance and faith. This was to become the view of James Arminius, and although there is no direct reference to Veluanus in Arminius's writing, Bang contends that there is "a firm line of continuity between Arminius and Veluanus."⁴⁴

Other representatives of a mild (pre-Arminius) Arminian-like Protestant sentiment which was fairly widespread in the northern Netherlands are mentioned by Bangs: Blikihoeven, Sybrants, Wiggerts, Snecanus, Herberts, and Caspar Coolhaes.⁴⁵ These names do appear in Arminius's writings, for he identified himself with them and the beliefs they represented when accused of holding novel and innovative theological opinions.⁴⁶ Bangs thus purports that there existed in the northern Netherlands from the mid-sixteenth century a theological and social set of values and ideas akin to those later espoused and promulgated by Arminius. In fact the earliest Reformed church in Amsterdam was of this mind set:

On June, 8, 1566, there was a gathering of merchants of Protestant sympathy outside the St. Antonienpoort in a field of reeds along the River Y between the city wall and the hamlet Outewaal ... The group agreed to institute 'hedge preaching' or field preaching throughout Holland ... This secret meeting in the reeds proposed nothing less than an indigenous national reformation. It was begun by Hollanders; no outside agents were present, no clergy, no theologians, no Anabaptists, no Lutherans, and in a strict sense no Calvinists. The doctrinal basis was biblical humanism directed against the Roman corruption of the church. The Heidelberg Catechism played no official role but was probably regarded as a useful tool of instruction. It was from this small beginning that events would move to the establishment of the Dutch Reformed Church in Amsterdam.⁴⁷

And what was the spirit of this early 'Reformed' Church? If its theology was evangelically moderate vis-à-vis high Calvinism, its spirit was tolerant and its ecclesiology was inclusivist. This is shown by the fact that in 1566 the founders of the church were able to institute briefly some reforms in Amsterdam proper before being driven out of the city in the wake of Alva's advance in 1567.⁴⁸ These church pioneers

43 Bangs, *Arminius*, 21, 22.

44 Bangs, *Arminius*, 21, 22.

45 Bangs, *Arminius*, 22.

46 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 115.

47 Bangs, *Arminius*, 93.

48 Bangs, *Arminius*, 95, 96.

seemed to expect that their services would be attended by all those of Protestant sympathy including Lutherans. The Lutherans of Amsterdam insisted upon separate worship, however, on the grounds of eucharistic differences. The newly formed Reformed Church council replied “that the dispute was over a secondary matter and did not warrant a division among the Protestants. This reply reflected both the broad and non-precise nature of the merchants’ religious views and their failure to grasp the significance of the eucharistic controversy for the Lutherans. ... The significance of the event for understanding the temper of the Amsterdam Reformed community ... is that the Reformed leaders wanted a comprehensive church which could include both Reformed (i.e. Zwinglian and Calvinist), and Lutheran Christians.”⁴⁹

The major thrust of Bangs’ book then is to trace the fortunes of these early tolerant but theologically dedicated Reformed leaders of the northern Dutch reform movement through their exile at Emden, their return to Amsterdam in victory in 1578, and the establishing of the church and city government under their auspices, and primarily the subsequent ties between them and the man who became their pastor and theological spokesman, James Arminius.⁵⁰

Bangs’ work purposefully rescues Arminius from the charge of theological innovation which until Bangs had been levelled against him.⁵¹ Arminius did not desert his formerly held theological high Calvinism when he preached and wrote against extreme predestinarianism. Arminius was rather a consistent representative of a different more moderate stream of reform thinking, indigenous to the northern Netherlands. That there came to exist more than one kind of Reformed expression and that the several parties involved in these expressions would conflict ideologically became very apparent just at the time Arminius became theological professor within the seminary of the Dutch Reformed Church at Leiden in 1603. What Arminius represented, championed and

49 Bangs, *Arminius*, 96.

50 The city fathers of Amsterdam agreed to pay the theological education fees of Arminius in return for his promise to serve them as minister when these studies should conclude; Bangs, *Arminius*, 65, says, “Arminius signed an agreement to devote his life, upon completion of his studies, to the service of the church at Amsterdam. The guild agreed to continue its support of his studies, so far as possible with available income, for three or four years.”

51 The biography of Caspar Brandt related that Arminius had held to supralapsarian (extreme predestinarian) views until forced to change his convictions late in his ministerial career. Bangs demonstrates that there is no evidence of such a change of mind. Therefore, his work helps to correct the false impression conveyed in numerous books which are based upon the Brandt work. Bangs, *Arminius*, deals at length with this topic in Chapters Five and Ten.

eventually gave his name to was not a new theological expression; it was a genuine Dutch reformist sentiment firmly rooted in Dutch ideological history. To Bangs this sentiment deserves to be called a legitimate expression of Reformed doctrine – thus his thesis of the essential Reformed (albeit mild) Calvinism of Arminius.⁵²

As useful as Bangs' work is in correcting older notions about Arminius,⁵³ it does seem to possess a certain inner contradiction. Bangs indicates that the pre-Arminian reform sentiment which Arminius himself ultimately represented was indigenous to the Netherlands and was really bound to no confessional position, whether Lutheran, Reformed or Anabaptist. And yet Bangs is insistent that Arminius was a genuine Reformed Calvinist theologian,⁵⁴ in spite of his allegiance to the earlier Dutch reformism with its confessional inclusivism, its tolerance, and its un-Calvinist views with regard to predestination and the universality of the offer of the atonement of Christ. Does Bangs not overstress on the one hand the uniqueness of the early indigenous movement almost divorcing it from influences exerted upon it from outside Holland; and on the other hand is his defence of Arminius's position as an orthodox Reformed theologian not somewhat over-emphasized to the point that Arminius's uniqueness in articulating un-Calvinist sentiments is underplayed? It is the contention of this dissertation that a study of Arminius from the perspective of his evangelical ecumenism will assist in overcoming this contradiction by demonstrating Arminius's place in a larger context of Reformation history, a context encompassing Erasmianism, and containing not only Reformed thinkers like Bucer, but Lutherans as well, as evidenced by the ideas advanced by Philip Melancthon.

This dissertation, then, seeks to go beyond Carl Bangs' interpretation of James Arminius. Before Bangs, Arminius was interpreted as being the innovator, the first

52 Stated strongly in the conclusion of his dissertation, "Arminius and the Reformed Theology," 240–249. A critique of this Bangs' thesis appears in Chapter V of this dissertation.

53 Notions, that is, which centre around the idea of his defection from an earlier held strong hyper-predestinarianism. Mention could be made of such works as Williston Walker, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 399, "Arminius was appointed in 1589 to reply to Coornhert and to defend the supralapsarian position against two ministers of Delft . . . so he studied the questions involved, and came to doubt the whole doctrine of unconditional predestination and to ascribe to man a freedom which had no part in pure Calvinism." Or K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), 765, "The chief figure among the Remonstrants was Jacob Arminius who setting out to refute them, became convinced by them." Or Rosalie Littell Colie, *Light and Enlightenment: A Study of the Cambridge Platonists and the Dutch Arminians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 8, "Little by little . . . Arminius fell away from total acceptance of the Calvinist theology."

54 This is the burden, of course, of Bang's dissertation.

Arminian, the severe modifier of Calvinist doctrine whose modification produced nothing less than a new approach to Christian theology leading in the direction of liberalism and probably latitudinarianism. This interpretation was fostered by Caspar Brandt in his biography of Arminius; it is a view reflected in the writings of A. H. W. Harrison, and has been held by the majority of those who make reference to Arminius and his contribution to the history of Christian thought.

Carl Bangs is certainly responsible for another interpretation of Arminius. Bangs shows that Arminius did not seek to challenge Reformed (in the sense of broad Reformation-Protestant) thinking, but represented faithfully a longstanding tradition of the Netherlands' Protestant thought. Arminius, says Bangs, departed from Calvin only in areas Bangs does not consider significantly un-Calvinist, when studied in context and kept within perspective. If the earlier interpreters un-Calvinized Arminius, removing him from the stream of reformed thought, Bangs re-Calvinized him and presented him as generally a legitimately consistent Calvinist.

This dissertation offers a further interpretation of Arminius, one which builds upon Bangs' work, but finds reason to criticize Bangs for his tendency to over-Calvinize Arminius. Bangs is acknowledged here as the first to show that Arminius was a consistent representative of a genuine Reformation tradition of thought; Bangs did not, however, recognize sufficiently the breadth of this tradition. To Bangs, Arminius was a genuine Reformed theologian and a Calvinist of minor modification. Our purpose is to demonstrate Arminius's allegiance to a broader-than-Calvin stream of Reformation thinking, which was not afraid to depart from Calvin or those who insisted on rigidly adhering to him in major areas of thought, in the name of Reformation evangelicalism and ecumenism. It is this broader stream, represented by Erasmus, Melancthon and Bucer which we are calling 'evangelical ecumenism' and with which Arminius consciously identified himself. Far from stressing a new approach to Christian thought, those in this tradition seemed determined to continue the genuine interests and to assert the essential doctrines of Reformation theology; nothing in their emphases would indicate liberal, rational or humanistically latitudinarian tendencies. Evangelical ecumenism sought to ongoing of what it interpreted as the spirit of the Reformation – the spirit of

restoring primitive Christianity to its pristine essence. James Arminius, we shall demonstrate, consistently represented this tradition of evangelical ecumenism.

James Arminius was born in Oudewater, Holland, in 1560.⁵⁵ He was schooled by a friend of the family, one Aemilius, a former Roman Catholic priest, and probably attended St. Jerome School founded by the Brethren of the Common Life in Utrecht for a time.⁵⁶ Upon the death of Aemilius, Arminius was taken in by Rudolph Snellius, a former resident of Oudewater, who became a professor at Marburg University and who took Arminius there to live and study with him.⁵⁷ In 1574 the mother and brothers and sisters of Arminius were slain in the Spanish massacre of Oudewater (Arminius's father had died earlier). The young orphan left Marburg and took up studies at the newly founded University of Leiden, becoming the twelfth person to enrol there.⁵⁸ While a student at Leiden, Arminius was approached by the city fathers of Amsterdam, who invited him upon graduation from theological studies, to become a minister in their city.⁵⁹ In return for his promise of compliance, the magistrates of Amsterdam promised to pay the fees for Arminius's theological training.

Arminius matriculated from Leiden in 1581 and spent the next six years in Geneva and Basel, studying for the Reformed Church ministry.⁶⁰ He excelled as a scholar, winning high praise from his teachers and from the great Theodore Beza.⁶¹ He arrived in Amsterdam to take up pastoral duties in 1587 and was ordained to the ministry in 1588.⁶²

For the next fifteen years, Arminius served as one of the ministers of the young Dutch Reformed Church in Amsterdam. He married, fathered nine children, and apparently was considered an excellent preacher and beloved pastor.⁶³

55 Bangs, *Arminius*, Chapter One, "Birth and Boyhood," 25–36. Bangs supplies abundant and very interesting information on Arminius's family background and concerning the geographical locations of the historical details he is describing.

56 Bangs, *Arminius*, 34, 35.

57 Bangs, *Arminius*, 37, 38.

58 Bangs, *Arminius*, 47.

59 Bangs, *Arminius*, 65.

60 Bangs, *Arminius*, Chs 5, 6:64–80.

61 Bangs, *Arminius*, 73, 74. Bangs asserts that in spite of Beza's high praise for Arminius and the reciprocal respect of Arminius evidenced by the praise-poem he wrote of Beza (p. 74), Arminius was not influenced strongly by Beza's theological position (p. 75).

62 Bangs, *Arminius*, Chapter 8, "Admission to the Ministry," 110–24.

63 Bangs, *Arminius*, Chapter 9, "Early Duties; Marriage," and Chapter 11, "Pastoral Labours."

In 1601 and 1602 the northern Netherlands was visited by an attack of the bubonic plague. Two of the theological professors of the Leiden University faculty were stricken and died,⁶⁴ and Arminius of Amsterdam was invited to fill one of the vacancies. Reluctantly and after lengthy negotiations, the Amsterdam council and consistory released him as minister.⁶⁵ In 1603 the Doctor of Divinity Degree was conferred upon him and he commenced his career as Professor of Systematic Theology, a career cut short by his untimely death of tuberculosis in 1609.⁶⁶

Arminius lived during the turbulent age of the Netherlands' revolt from domination by Spain.⁶⁷ He was a minister and a theologian at a time when the newly independent United Provinces were discovering their identity and determining their direction politically and religiously.⁶⁸ Broadly speaking there were two main factions into which Netherlanders were divided as the seventeenth century began.⁶⁹ On the one hand were those who belonged to what has come to be known as the Old Beggar tradition – merchants and clergy who had their roots deeply implanted in the northern provinces and who tended to be tolerant religiously and politically favouring a truce with Spain in order to end the long strife and have their independence recognized.⁷⁰ Opposed to these Old Beggars (the name originated in 1560 when representatives from the nobility of Holland petitioned the Spanish king's representative to mitigate the Inquisition in the Netherlands – they were repulsed and given the abusive name *geaux* or “beggars”).⁷¹ The name was accepted in defiance and remained a badge of resistance to Spain), were immigrant merchants who had fled north from the southern Netherland provinces which eventually became Catholic Belgium.⁷² Spanish fury drove them from cities such as Antwerp to

64 Bangs, *Arminius*, 231. The two professors were Lucas Trelcatius and Francis Junius.

65 Bangs, *Arminius*, Chapter 17, “The Call to Leiden,” 231–40.

66 Bangs, *Arminius*, Chapter 24, “The Last Year: 1609,” 317–31.

67 Chronicled so carefully by Pieter Geyl, *The Revolt of the Netherlands* (London: Ernest Benn Co., 1962).

68 Pieter Geyl, *Revolt*.

69 Pieter Geyl, *The Netherlands in the Seventeenth Century*, I (London: Ernest Benn, 1961), 15–17.

70 Pieter Geyl, *Revolt*, 52.

71 Bangs, *Arminius*, 53.

72 These migrations are discussed in detail by Kenneth H. D. Haley, *The Dutch in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 18–20. Haley notes that Catholic merchants as well as Protestants migrated, and implies the economic as well as the religious motivation of the migrants: “Permitted to sell their possessions and emigrate by the agreements which Parma made with many provinces and cities of the south, they moved not only to escape a detested Spanish rule and to be able to worship in their own way, but because cities like Amsterdam and Rotterdam now seemed to offer greater economic opportunities; thus a Catholic . . . could emigrate and become a financial adviser to Oldenbarneveldt. Such merchants took with them a knowledge of the most advanced financial and commercial techniques in Europe.”

Amsterdam. They came bringing their business expertise (they were to become the founders of the Dutch East India Company in 1602, which involvement brought them tremendous wealth and ushered in the golden age of the seventeenth century for the northern Netherlands), and a fierce hatred of all things Spanish, especially Roman Catholicism, adhering to a form of Calvinism which was intolerant, dogmatic, and opposed to any form of state control of religion.⁷³ These latter were opposed to any truce sentiments and in fact believed that the war ought to continue until Spain would be utterly defeated.⁷⁴ Arminius was the adopted son of the Old Beggar city fathers and he represented the former tradition of moderation, tolerance and peace. Naturally he came to incur the wrath of the immigrants who became more numerous and eventually gained more and more control of the city and church governments of Amsterdam.

Obviously, the affairs of church and state were inextricably entwined in these divisions. The peace party favouring toleration, the treaty with Spain and modified magisterial oversight of the national church was represented politically by Oldenbarneveldt, Grand Pensionary of the States General, and religiously by Pastor, later Professor James Arminius of Leiden.⁷⁵ The war party was less tolerant, theologically less flexible, urging a continuance of the war in the hope of defeating Spain and gaining free access to East and West Indian trade, was led by Prince Maurice of Nassau politically; its theological leadership was in the hands of Professor Francis Gomar of Leiden, and Petrus Plancius, influential Amsterdam minister, geographer and founder of the Dutch East India Company.⁷⁶ Although a twelve-year truce was inaugurated between Spain and the independent provinces in 1607, the war party eventually triumphed. After his death, the religious views of Arminius, which had been brought under severe criticism while he lived, were vilified utterly; the Synod of Dort in 1618–1619 condemned ‘Arminian’ sentiments within the Dutch church, and supporters of Arminius’s position were banished.⁷⁷ The political defeat of the peace party was symbolized by the execution of Oldenbarneveldt in 1619.⁷⁸

73 Bangs, *Arminius*, 108, 109.

74 Bangs, *Arminius*, 108.

75 Bangs, *Arminius*, 106.

76 Bangs, *Arminius*, 107, 108. See also Chapter 12, “The East Indian Trade,” 167–185.

77 Bangs, *Arminius*, 356, 357.

78 Bangs, *Arminius*, 356.

It is against this historical background that the theme of Arminius's ecumenism must be studied. That the position he represented within the sphere of theology should have come under such strong attack between 1600 and 1619 can be understood only in relation to the totality of the political, social, economic and religious situation. When Arminius warned of the dangers of extreme partisanship he was addressing a very volatile national situation; his fears of the results of extremism in theology anticipated the victory of the war party and presaged the Dutch involvement in the Thirty Years' War. His practical and literary attempts to promote peace and unity within the church survive as his contribution to the movement for harmony within the totality of Dutch society in the midst of the potentially explosive first decade of the seventeenth century.

The sources which will be analysed in the following chapters are the product of Arminius's late Amsterdam and his Leiden years. These documents clearly reveal the centrality of the evangelicalism of Arminius, which he believed could be the focus for ecumenism if the preachers and teachers within the Dutch Church could agree to accentuate evangelical certainties and minimize doctrinal issues not clearly evangelical which were producing factionalism within the church. Arminius's *Orationes*, addresses presented by him at the commencement of his professorial career, are especially illuminative as expressing the centrality of evangelicalism as his hope for unifying the church in the midst of social and theological turmoil.⁷⁹ The "Private and Public Disputations," lecture notes from his theology classes, will receive analytical treatment for, although they cover the content of a typical course of lectures in Systematic Theology, their spirit is imbued with the evangelical centrality insisted upon in the *Orationes*, and they call for ecumenical applications.⁸⁰ Arminius's lengthy correspondence with representatives of theological positions with which he took issue, and which he feared were in danger of becoming paramount and increasingly threatening the unity of the church and the centrality of the evangelical message,⁸¹ as well as his own

79 Arminius, *De Sacerdotio Christi, Opera*, 9–26.

80 Arminius, *Disputationes Privatae, Opera*, 339–349; *Disputationes Publicae, Opera* 197–338.

81 Arminius, *Collatio cum Junio amica Praedestinatione*, 458–633; *Writings III*, 9–279; *Examen Libelli Perkinsius de mode et ordine praedestinatione, Opera* 634–781; *Writings III*, 282–525.

apologetic treatises⁸² will be critically examined, for all of these shed light on the theme of Arminius's evangelical ecumenism.

Chapter One then will examine two treatises in particular in which Arminius sets out his philosophy with regard to discord and its consequences as well as his proposals for restoring harmony and unity to the church on the basis of a strong emphasis upon evangelical essentials. These proposals include Arminius's call for the convocation of an ecumenical council for the Netherlands as the chief means of reconciling dissensions.

Chapter Two seeks to answer the question, "How sincere was Arminius with regard to his own philosophy? Do his own writings and teaching demonstrate a determination to stress the doctrine of salvation? A comprehensive analysis of the corpus of Arminius's writings will hopefully offer a positive answer to this query.

Again, did Arminius deliberately play down what he considered to be soteriological non-essentials in his writing and teaching, and if so was his motive ecumenical? Did he insist upon de-emphasizing what does not soteriologically matter in order to emphasize more strongly those beliefs which to him matter intensely because they are the cardinal tenets of Reformation evangelicalism? Again, a broad cross section of Arminius's work will be examined in order to answer these questions objectively.

Having established Arminius's commitment to the theory of evangelical ecumenism, the dissertation will consider in Chapter Three the question of his practical ecumenical involvement. By surveying the history of his career especially during the years in which he was embroiled in controversy and confrontation, answers will be sought to such questions as, how did Arminius react to criticism, how did he respond to personal attack and vilification? In the midst of an era of dissension, did his actions reveal a man dedicated to his own stated principles of moderation, patience and confidence that concord must be achieved by peaceful means, or was there a basic difference between his precepts and his practice? Again, it will be concluded that Arminius was a practical as well as a theoretical evangelical ecumenist.

Arminius's perception of the perimeters of Christian orthodoxy will be examined in Chapter Four. Did Arminius view himself as in line with the continuing tradition of Reformation orthodoxy or was he unconcerned about charges of theological novelty,

82 Arminius, *Apologia adversus articulos*, 134–183; *Writings I*, 276–379; *Declaratio Sententiae*, *Writings I*, 193–275.

heterodoxy, or even heresy which were being levelled against him? Specifically what stream of Reformation thought did he identify with? The apologetic works of Arminius will be examined and conclusions drawn relative to Arminius's soteriological ecumenism which he perceived to be the continuation of the legitimate history of genuine Christian thought. Arminius, it will be shown, consciously identified himself only with those involved in this continuation. In other words, he believed in the existence of a tradition of evangelical ecumenism and he saw himself as standing within this tradition.

The remainder of this thesis aims at historically contextualizing the evangelical ecumenism of James Arminius. Chapter Five examines the question of the evangelical ecumenism of Philip Melancthon and Martin Bucer with relationship to that of Arminius. Melancthon will be given more prominence in this chapter because of the greater degree of influence upon the Netherlands and upon Arminius exerted by his ideology; Bucer's ideas will be analysed in order to reveal that a similar approach to ecumenism was represented by another prominent Reformed theologian before the time of Arminius. The last chapter examines the evangelical and ecumenical thought of Desiderius Erasmus and seeks to demonstrate close parallels between this thought and that of James Arminius. The point to be made here is that evangelical ecumenism was indeed represented by very influential thinkers of the Reformation era who pre-dated Arminius. A tradition of "evangelical Ecumenism" did exist and Arminius's perception of identification with it was legitimate.

During the troubled era of the first decade of the seventeenth century James Arminius struggled against increasing intolerance within the Reformed Church of the Netherlands, much of it directed against his person. In this situation he spoke out for harmony and pacific unity specifically in documents which at once describe his evangelical ecumenism, and offer proposals for the healing of divisions.⁸³ The following chapter will consider these important literary works.

83 Arminius, *De Comonendo*, 71–91; *Writings I*, 146–192; *Declaratio Sententiae*, 91–133; *Writings I*, 193–275.G

“On Reconciling Religious Dissensions among Christians”:
The Philosophy and Program of Arminius’s Evangelical Ecumenism

The documents which most clearly set forth Arminius’s position with relation to the need and means for ecumenical co-operation between Christians of varying opinions were entitled *De componendo dissidio religionis inter Christianos* and the *Declaratio sententiae*.⁸⁴ The first of these works was written in 1607, on the occasion of Arminius’s rectoral address at Leiden University, and is a demonstration of the convictions most strongly held by him at this time when controversy was raging in the Netherlands.⁸⁵ He might have chosen to speak polemically or defensively at this point; instead the tone of the whole address is decidedly irenic.

Looking back over the century just ended, Arminius noted that there were things for which to be thankful and things over which to lament in recent ecclesiastical history. He was aware of the progress of the Reformation and was grateful for the prevalence of Christian truth which seemed to be abounding. And yet he noted that there was reason for sadness for the reflective historian.⁸⁶ One cannot but grieve, he lamented, for the fact of religious separation and division among Christians. Christ was called the Prince of Peace, who preached the gospel of peace, and his followers are supposed to be the sons of peace. Indeed, “the very foundation of Christianity is an act of pacification concluded between God and man and ratified by the blood of the Prince of Peace.”⁸⁷ The precepts of Christianity are peace and concord, the fruit of the gospel is said to be righteousness and peace, and the end of Christianity is to be peace and eternal tranquillity. Yet in spite of all this there are immense rifts between professing believers. “I cannot dissemble the intense grief which I feel in my heart on account of that religious discord which has been festering like a gangrene and pervades the whole of Christianity.”⁸⁸ Surely, he insisted, all

84 The *De componendo* is on pages 71–91 of Arminius, *Opera*, and the *Declaratio sententiae*, on pages 91–133.

85 The occasion for the *De componendo* is mentioned at the beginning of the Oration (*Opera*, 71): “Delivered on the eighth of February, 1605, when Arminius resigned the office of Rector of the University.”

86 Arminius, *De componendo*, 71.

87 Arminius, *De componendo*, 72.

88 Arminius, *De componendo*, 72.

who love Christ deeply regret these dissensions; he determined to speak to this issue in the Oration and to propose possible remedies to the problem.⁸⁹

Continuing to introduce the subject, Arminius indicated his commitment to the ideal of social and religious union; philosophically the highest social good is universal harmony under the dominion of God.⁹⁰ God is one, and there is total agreement within his nature. Nothing is teleologically more desirable than the union of all things under divine governance. Nothing is “more detestable” than contemporary dissensions which indicate that the ideal is yet a great way off.⁹¹ Religiously and philosophically, no discord is more hideous and shocking than that which concerns religion, for by definition religion is that which binds and connects parties together. Religion is ideally the basic unitive agency within human society. The religious element is the highest human faculty, he reasoned, intended to bring to humanity the true knowledge of God, to reconcile and unite people with God and to bind people to each other. The potentiality and propensity for unity contained in religious belief and affection render Christian separation and division inexplicable, ironic and contradictory.⁹²

Dissension was a reality, however, and Arminius recognized that once in existence, religious quarrels are difficult to eradicate. This is in part due to the nature of religion itself, and something so personal that to attack one’s religious beliefs is to attack his very life-supporting ideological structure; people tend, he noted, to hold to religious beliefs tenaciously and resist ideological examination because it is too threatening.⁹³ Another reason he offered for the persistence of religious dissension was the fact that politicians could exploit religious divisions for their own ends “to obtain the fulfilment of their desires, which they would never have procured had they been deprived of such popular assistance.”⁹⁴ This was a bold statement in the context of controversies involving politicians then raging in the Netherlands.

The results of dissension Arminius saw as manifestly pernicious. The wrangling of various parties within Christendom could only serve negative ends.⁹⁵ Beginning with

89 Arminius, *De componendo*, 72, “magnum bonum est unio.”

90 Arminius, *De componendo*, 72.

91 Arminius, *De componendo*, 73.

92 Arminius, *De componendo*, 73.

93 Arminius, *De componendo*, 74.

94 Arminius, *De componendo*, 74.

95 Arminius, *De componendo*, 74.

the production of doubt as to the certainty of religious beliefs on the part of observers of quarrels, the downward spiral of consequences passes to the stage of despair regarding the possibility of discovering the truth of religion, and finally to the point of rejecting religion altogether as socially valuable.⁹⁶ Either an insipid agnostic universalism, which states that all positions are equally erroneous and that all that is needed to heal schisms is goodwill and sincerity, or outright atheism will result when enough people come to the conclusion that religion is only and always divisive.⁹⁷ Many had already used the existence of disunity as an excuse to leave the church and the faith altogether, and this, Arminius felt, would eventually have disastrous moral results.⁹⁸

Added to these religious consequences of disunity are those Arminius calls the affections of the heart, and these produce agonies for society. Hatred, enmity, pride and physical conflict will result unless religious harmony is attained.⁹⁹ Recent history indicated to Arminius that when one side or the other in a religious conflict gained the upper hand, persecution and suffering were invariably inflicted on the other side.¹⁰⁰ Injury, cruelty, rage, attack, banishment, condemnation, exclusion, torment, attempts to secure hypocritical recantations—Arminius cited all of these were cited as being the concomitants of dissension. Should both sides in a religious conflict be relatively equal in strength and numbers, the outcome might even be as it has been in the immediate past, open warfare.¹⁰¹ The religious issue in such conflict renders the possibility of peace improbable, again because of the fact that each side feels that to give ground in the struggle would be to commit religious treachery and betrayal. Peace lovers at such times are deemed deserters of the faith, heretics, apostates and traitors. Religious adversaries are seen as the worst possible creatures—infectious, pestilent, murderers of souls, enemies of God, people to be hated for God’s sake, cursed and to be murdered in God’s name. Religion, ideally *the* force for harmony and peace, has ironically “through the

96 Arminius, *De componendo*, 75.

97 Arminius, *De componendo*, 75.

98 Arminius, *De componendo*, 76, “From atheism, as a root, Epicurism buds forth, which dissolves all the ties of morality, is ruinous to it, and causes it to degenerate into licentiousness. All this Epicurism effects, by previously breaking down the barriers to the fear of God, which alone restrain men within the bounds of their duty.” [WHENCE THIS ENGLISH TRANSLATION?]

99 Arminius, *De componendo*, 77.

100 Arminius, *De componendo*, 77. Arminius says that when recent religious struggles in Spain, Portugal (“Lusitania”), England, France and the Low Countries (“nostra Belgica”) are called to mind, “we shall confess with tears that these remarks are lamentably too true.”

101 Arminius, *De componendo*, 78.

vicious corruption of men...become the field in which they may exercise themselves in cruel and bloody contests.”¹⁰² Finally, the worst of all the evils to derive from religious dissent will be the total destruction of Christianity itself through the warfare of its adherents.¹⁰³

In the beginning of his argument, Arminius identified a number of causes of religious conflicts. One would be the simple fact of the nature of Christianity itself. Because it contains within itself what is known as the offence of the cross, Christianity is bound to stir up the hostility and rancour of its detractors.¹⁰⁴ This is a legitimate struggle in which the church has always been engaged, the struggle for existence and the battle for the faith. Another legitimate conflict is that against tyrannical domination which will not yield to pressure for change and reform. In such cases (and here Arminius was thinking of the various reformation movements, obviously) “it compels those churches which cannot with a safe conscience bear the most iniquitous tyranny to depart from the rest and to assume to themselves the management of their own affairs.”¹⁰⁵

But by and large struggles among Christians are illegitimate, he argued, and stem from sinful love of glory, riches and pleasure on the part of wicked men who hate the truth and the defenders of the truth, and who seem to hate peace itself. There are some people, Arminius suggested, who cannot live “without having an enemy,”¹⁰⁶ and these are the enemies of the peace of the church. This is more than a veiled reference to individuals who, as will be described later in detail, were seeking to stir up dissension in the Dutch church.

There is another kind of personality that, when found within the influential circles of church leadership, will bring about disharmony. This, stated Arminius, is the individual who desires to know all things, who insists on having all theological questions

102 Arminius, *De componendo*, 78. Note his exclamation, “Blessed God! What a quantity of most inflammable matter is there thrown upon the fire of enmities, persecutions and wars. What an Iliad of disasters is thus introduced into the Christian world!”

103 Arminius, *De componendo*, 78. Arminius comments on the history of early Christianity as illustrative of this danger: “Of this a very mournful example is exhibited to us in certain extensive dominions and large kingdoms of the inhabitants of which were formerly among the most flourishing professors of the Christian religion; but the present inhabitants of those countries have unchristianized themselves by embracing Mohammedanism—as system which derived its origin and had its chief means of increase, from the dissensions between the Jews and the Christians, and from the disputes into which the Orthodox entered with the Sabellians, the Arians, the Nestorians, the Eutychians, and the Monothelites.”

104 Arminius, *De componendo*, 78.

105 Arminius, *De componendo*, 80.

106 Arminius, *De componendo*, 82.

answered to his or her satisfaction before allowing the church to rest in peace.¹⁰⁷ All who do not subscribe to this individual's notion of the totality of the truth are considered heretics to be rooted out by force. Here is an attitude of "peering into unnecessary areas it seems to have drawn out from behind the darkness of ignorance and accompanies all its remarks by boldness of assertion ..."¹⁰⁸ Thus Arminius decried a spirit of unwillingness to humbly admit that there is room for difference of opinion in "unnecessary areas," and indeed an insistence upon making these areas touchstones of the truth, unchristianizing all who hold contrary opinions.¹⁰⁹

Arminius listed two attitudes that prevent reconciliation and perpetrate hostilities: prejudice and the immoderate treatment of those whose opinions differ from one's own. One ought to be willing to face the question, what if my opinions are wrong? Do my beliefs find support other than in my tradition? One must beware of the danger of absolutizing one's heritage, for "parents leave their posterity heirs as of their property so also of their opinions and dissensions."¹¹⁰ This objective willingness to submit one's convictions to the scrutiny of re-examination is badly needed if truth is to be genuinely sought.¹¹¹

The resolute determination to deal with prejudice objectively must be accompanied by a proper attitude toward one's religious opponents and their beliefs.¹¹² Speaking of the history of persecution and forceful punishment for heresy, Arminius noted that "those who use arms of this kind openly betray the weakness as well as the injustice of their cause."¹¹³ It is not very probable, he asserted, "that those persons are instructed by the Spirit of Truth who adopt such a course of action."¹¹⁴

Generally the opinions of religious adversaries are not properly handled. The words of one's opponents are deliberately misconstrued and twisted. Those examining an opponent's opinions do not really listen to the arguments of one under suspicion. The

107 Arminius, *De componendo*, 80.

108 Arminius, *De componendo*, 81.

109 Arminius, *De componendo*, 81: "From such a disposition and conduct as this offences and schisms arise in the church."

110 Arminius, *De componendo*, 83.

111 Arminius, *De componendo*, 83: "It is no wonder if these prejudices produce a pertinacity in eagerly defending a proposition once laid down which is a most powerful impediment to reconciliation."

112 Arminius, *De componendo*, 83.

113 Arminius, *De componendo*, 83.

114 Arminius, *De componendo*, 83.

matter under review is blown up out of all proportion. Surely this can make reconciliation and harmony the more difficult to achieve. The adversary is hardly likely to respond positively if such treatment is afforded him or her.¹¹⁵ To this situation of dealing directly with those whose opinions differ Arminius proposed the following remedy.

First of all, it must be recognized that the truth is hard to find and that error is always easy to attain. Secondly, there should be a real attempt to accord the best sentiments to the opinions of the one who is held to be in theological error.¹¹⁶ At the very least there ought to be the willingness to grant that the opponent is the victim of sincere ignorance rather than of deliberate malice. Never be in a hurry, Arminius counselled, to unchristianize the suspected false teacher. He or she may be wrong with regard to the particular area in dispute, but might still be a Christian, a servant and a child of God.¹¹⁷ Again, those seeking to heal religious quarrels rather than to contribute to them ought to strive to put themselves as much as possible in the place of the other party, seeking to see the other's point of view from his or her own perspective. "When we have made this experiment, we may be brought to think that this very person, whom we had previously thought to be in error and whose mistakes in our eyes had a destructive tendency, may perhaps have been given to us by God that out of his mouth we may learn the truth which has hitherto been unknown to us."¹¹⁸ Further, Arminius counselled that every attempt should be made to emphasize and accentuate the articles of religion which both parties in a dispute have in common. These, it may turn out, are many and important, while the issues that divide may be few and inconsequential. Let a truce be called between the disputants; let them lay down their arms and prepare for a lasting peace.¹¹⁹ Let them cease from making the schism wider through the publication of provocative literature and sermonizing.¹²⁰ At this point in the Oration, it is evident that Arminius was referring to the theological crisis in the Netherlands; this is a reminder that his work presents us with an illuminating case study of one involved in a situation of potential division who sought to address himself in moderation to the conflict.

115 Arminius, *De componendo*, 84.

116 Arminius, *De componendo*, 86.

117 Arminius, *De componendo*, 86, 87. Arminius quotes at length from Augustine, who urged a similar attitude toward the Manicheans.

118 Arminius, *De componendo*, 87.

119 Arminius, *De componendo*, 87.

120 Arminius, *De componendo*, 87.

It might seem that Arminius was admitting a universalist position in insisting upon the possibility of Christians of various persuasions co-existing in the same church. But he argues against this suggestion in the section of the Oration devoted to false remedies for the situation of religious dissension.¹²¹ Indeed, to admit universalism is the most false of the courses of action which could be taken. Both sides of a religious issue might agree that there is no ultimate truth and no ultimate error—that everyone may be saved in his own way according to his own beliefs. Arminius called this solution false, indicating that he believed genuine concord and unity among Christians could be achieved without sacrificing the core of truth necessary to be believed for salvation and the glory of God.¹²² As long as there is agreement on the essential articles of the faith, there is room for amicable disagreement with regard to the non-essentials. Just what these essentials and non-essentials are was to be the burden of Arminius’s apologetic teaching, which will be considered presently.

Another false solution to the problem of disunity would be the prohibition of all religious dissent within society, Arminius declared.¹²³ Insistence upon blind conformity would only result in standardizing and sacralizing “the most stupid ignorance.”¹²⁴ Open discussion of theology must always be allowed, even in a society where only one church is established. Theology must change as people’s thought and ideas come more and more into conformity with the mind of God revealed in Scripture, the unchanging norm.¹²⁵ Without a healthy climate of disagreement, the leaders of the church will not feel challenged to re-examine and continually reform theological confessions. Arminius was calling for nothing less than religious freedom and for attitudes on the part of the establishment which would result in the continual reformation of the official faith; spiritual leaders should cultivate attitudes of humility, love, goodwill and patient forbearance. The spirit of mercy and not of suspicion, bitterness and resentment is to mark the leaders of the church and this will go far in healing the schisms within the faith.¹²⁶

121 Arminius, *De componendo*, 84.

122 Arminius, *De componendo*, 84.

123 Arminius, *De componendo*, 84.

124 Arminius, *De componendo*, 84.

125 Arminius, *De componendo*, 85.

126 Arminius, *De componendo*, 86.

The major remedy suggested by Arminius was a call for a council within the Netherlands to settle the disagreements among the theologians in the church in a charitable, Christian and ecumenical way.¹²⁷ The council should be convened by the civil government as the magisterial power convoked councils in ancient times. The council would be composed only of those who were known to be pious, peace-loving, and Bible-believing. Representatives of ministers and laymen were to be included. All the prevailing theological “parties” were to be represented. He said, “It is my sincere and earnest wish, that God would place his angel with a flaming two-edged sword at the entrance of this paradise (the chamber of the meeting) in which divine truth and the lovely concord of the church will be the subjects of discussion.”¹²⁸ Rules reminiscent of calls for councils in the conciliar age were set down, such as, safe conducts were to be offered, the city chosen for the meeting was to be carefully guarded, and so on.¹²⁹ No political discussion was to be engaged in at this council; the agenda was to contain only matters pertaining to religion, doctrine, and the order of the church. With regard to theology, only those things would be treated that were deemed to be the most necessary. In fact, it was one of the purposes of the council to determine just what are the necessary articles to be believed and what things are peripheral.¹³⁰

All participants in the assembly would have to take an oath to be governed by the decisions of the council that they deemed to be in harmony with the Scriptures. No previous oath of allegiance was to be taken to confessions, to teachers, or even to princes.¹³¹ Arminius expressed the belief that Christ himself would reward the earnest desire of those in attendance with a spirit of agreement and unity in the principle matters of doctrine “and especially on those which are supported by clear testimony of scripture.”¹³²

If, in spite of all of these attempts, there were those who could not agree with the decisions of the council, what should the status and course of action of such individuals

127 Arminius, *De componendo*, 87ff. Arminius speaks of Councils in *Disputationes privatae: Opera*, 414ff., where he describes such a gathering as an “ecumenical or general council,” 414.

128 Arminius, *De componendo*, 88.

129 Arminius, *De componendo*, 88.

130 Arminius, *De componendo*, 88.

131 Arminius, *De componendo*, 89.

132 Arminius, *De componendo*, 89.

be? Two courses of action were offered to such dissenters.¹³³ First of all there was the possibility of their receiving what Arminius called the status of “fraternal concord in Christ.” That is, there would be offered to them “the right hand of fellowship” indicating that they were welcome to remain within the national union of churches although they disagreed on some matters that were believed to be indifferent.¹³⁴

The second option was to separate from the majority if the dissenters felt their position warranted such a breach. In such cases, the “right hand of friendship” would be offered to these who could not adhere in the main to the beliefs of the official church, even to the point of rejecting what the majority believed to be essential.¹³⁵ They were not to be silenced by force, but rather allowed to teach and to preach in society that which markedly differentiated them from the national church, but they were to do so with “gentleness and moderation.”¹³⁶ In other words, as long as there was peace and order in society, a Christian pluralism was to be allowed.

The course of action to be followed in the council was one of reasoned debate, with the Scriptures serving as final authority and chief arbiter. Dialectical arguments were to be the format of discussion, questions would be carefully formulated, and finally a declaration of the consensus of the council was to be made which would become the statement of faith of the national church.¹³⁷ As noted above, no one would be coerced into accepting the council’s decisions against his conscience. Arminius indicated that the consequences of the council would be the illustration of the truth, and the ground of its eventual propagation. Serious error would be extirpated from the church and peace and concord would prevail. The chief objective would be achieved in the realization of “the glory of God and the eternal salvation of men.”¹³⁸

Councils such as the one outlined in this oration must be held often, Arminius believed, for they are liable to error and are in need of the correction of future councils. The church would be continually cleansed and reformed by such gatherings.¹³⁹ Strongly refractory individuals would be silenced for they would see that they could not convince

133 Arminius, *De componendo*, 90.

134 Arminius, *De componendo*, 90.

135 Arminius, *De componendo*, 90.

136 Arminius, *De componendo*, 90.

137 Arminius, *De componendo*, 89.

138 Arminius, *De componendo*, 88.

139 Arminius, *De componendo*, 90.

so many impartially moderate men, and the country would be less likely to lend an ear to those who had proved to be obstinate.¹⁴⁰ Such may continue to stir up trouble however, since there are “no remedies calculated to remove all evils.”¹⁴¹ The Oration ends with a final call to pacification, with the word ‘peace’ occurring eighteen times in the last two paragraphs.¹⁴²

In the Oration, *De componendo dissidio religionis inter Christianos*, Arminius stressed the unitive function of the essential doctrines of the faith agreed upon by the national council which he proposed. In that Oration he did not elaborate upon what he considered to be the substance of these essential, necessary beliefs. Such elaboration is contained in later works, for example, in his *Declaratio sententiae*. In the *Declaratio*, Arminius dealt at some length with the matter of the revision of the Dutch creeds, that is, the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, which revision he taught ought to be a large part of the work of the first national council when it should meet.¹⁴³ In describing the nature of an adequate confessional standard for the church, he indicated that it should clearly and distinctly differentiate between the essentials of belief and matters of practice and polity, which should be constantly open to change as the church developed; it is here that he used the phrase “things necessary,” and added the words, “for salvation.”¹⁴⁴ Several time he indicated that the most important articles of the creed would be those which pertained to the matter of salvation. Constant attention to creedal revision would display the scriptural and evangelical loyalty of the Dutch church and it would “openly appear to all the world that we render to the Word of God alone such due and suitable honour as to determine it to be beyond or rather above all disputes, too great to be the subject of any exception, and worthy of all acceptance.”¹⁴⁵ Constant re-examination of creedal standards will determine that “they contain whatever is necessary to be believed unto salvation, so that salvation is, according to this rule, not denied to those things to which it appertains,” and to guard that “they do not contain far too many particulars and embrace several that are not necessary to be believed unto salvation, so

140 Arminius, *De componendo*, 90.

141 Arminius, *De componendo*, 90.

142 Arminius, *De componendo*, 90, 91.

143 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 127–32.

144 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 128.

145 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 128.

that salvation is consequently attributed to those things to which it does not belong.”¹⁴⁶

The following quote indicates the close association Arminius believed to exist between the essential beliefs of orthodoxy and the doctrine regarding salvation:

A distinction ought to be made between the different matters contained in the confession. For while some of them make a near approach to the foundation of salvation and are fundamental articles of the Christian religion, others of them are built up as a superstructure on the foundation, and of themselves are not absolutely necessary to salvation. The doctrines of the former class are approved by the unanimous consent of all the Reformed, and are effectually defended against all gainsaying adversaries. But those of the latter class become subjects of controversy between different parties.¹⁴⁷

The statement of faith for the church, arrived at through the efforts of the national ecumenical council, would be brief, scriptural in expression, and salvific in primary orientation:

Let it be attempted to make the confession contain as few articles as possible; and let it propose them in a very brief form, conceived entirely in the expressions of scripture. Let all the more ample explanations, proofs, digressions, redundancies, amplifications and exclamation be omitted; and let nothing be delivered in it, except those truths which are necessary for salvation. The consequences of this brevity will be, that the confession will be less liable to be filled with errors, not so obnoxious to obloquy, and less subject to examination... Let the practice of the Ancient Church be produced as an example, that comprehended, in as brief a form of words as was practicable, those articles which she judged necessary to be believed.¹⁴⁸

The *Declaratio sententiae* contains references to another of Arminius’s ecumenical dicta, his concern that the theology of the Dutch Church conform to that of mainstream Protestantism and indeed to universal Christian sentiment on essential evangelical matters of theology.¹⁴⁹ His quarrel with the extreme predestinarian position was many-faceted; his lengthy objections to it in the *Declaratio* include the fact that it was inimical to the doctrines of God, of Christ, of humanity, of salvation, and of the church. With regard to the last of these objections, Arminius stated that hyper-predestinarianism was not a doctrine held by the majority of Christian teachers in the past nor had it been a part of the prevailing Protestant teaching since the beginning of the

146 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 128, 129.

147 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 130.

148 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 132.

149 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 115. Also note 103, 105.

Reformation.¹⁵⁰ The ancient ecumenical creeds, the writings of the early fathers and the doctors of the church, the confessions of the Protestants as contained in the *Harmony of Confessions*, and the accepted Dutch symbols, the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism—all are cited by him as being opposed to this hyper-predestinarian teaching. Lutherans (especially Melancthon), the Danish church, and a large segment, he implies, of sentiment within the Reformed churches of the Netherlands are likewise in concert as not favouring this sentiment, and on the contrary as defending the explanation of this doctrine which he has put forward.¹⁵¹ Of the strict view of unconditional predestination he says,

This doctrine of predestination has been rejected both in former times and in our own days by the greater part of the professors of Christianity. Besides, by many of the inhabitants of these our own provinces, this doctrine is accounted a grievance of such a nature, as to cause several of them to affirm, that on account of it, they neither can nor will have any communion with our church. Others of them have united themselves with our churches, but not without entering a protest, “that they cannot possibly give their assent to this doctrine.” But, on account of this kind of predestination, our churches have been deserted by not a few individuals, who formerly held the same opinions as ourselves; others, also, have threatened to depart from us, unless they be fully assured that the Church holds no opinion of this description.¹⁵²

And when he speaks of predestination according to his own definition of the term:

This doctrine of predestination has always been approved by the great majority of professing Christians and even now in these days it enjoys the same extensive patronage. It cannot afford any person just cause for expressing aversion to it; nor can it give any pretext for contention in the church.¹⁵³

Summary: The Treatises analysed in this chapter provide the evidence upon which the following characterization of Arminius’s ecumenism and evangelicalism are drawn.

First of all, Arminius was antischismatic, deplored the divisions within Christendom, and longed for more unity and concord among believers. In this sense his concept of the Church was more universalist than particularistic. Arminius was an advocate of cooperation among Christians of like orthodox and evangelical faith and

150 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 105–115.

151 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 115.

152 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 115.

153 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 120, 121.

would shun the epithet of separatist. His desire was to unite in spirit with the Church of all ages and in the era of the Reformation his motive was therefore unitive rather than factional. The stress of Arminius's ecclesiasticism was upon those areas of belief held in common by Christians of the ages rather than upon ideas which were peculiar to a particular sect or segment of Christianity. With regard to those holding differing views his attitude was one of determined good will, and he was opposed to any notion of the need for religious persecution or inquisition. As long as the peace of society was not threatened, he advocated tolerance even for heresy, but this does not mean he can therefore be called a theological latitudinarian. To Arminius, beliefs matter as long as they are beliefs that *matter*, in the sense of being the primary beliefs of Christians through the ages, and beliefs that matter to those in the evangelical tradition of the Reformation. To Arminius, the Church is a human institution that ought to be open to change and development as new light is shed upon the old absolutes contained in the unchanging Scriptures. Continuing conciliar action is urged to promote educated criticism and constant theological improvement through a pious consensus. There is room in this ecumenism for a necessary intolerance regarding the dogmatic indispensability of doctrines deemed salvifically necessary, but wide room for flexibility in all other areas. Given the realities of the Reformation age, Arminius accepted the fact of differences among professing Christians; something akin to denominational pluralism is recognized by him as a possible social phenomenon which need not stand in the way of Christians of various persuasions recognizing one another's legitimacy and working together despite disagreements that are unworthy of provoking conflict and controversy. Even heretical groups may function, provided social peace is not threatened. Although Arminius recognized the value of the national church, the unity he envisioned among Christians was not institutional, but rather organic, asserting the possibility of celebrating Christian brotherhood across "denominational" frontiers. This, then is the philosophy and program of evangelical ecumenism propounded by James Arminius.

Evangelical Ecumenism in the Writings and Teaching of James Arminius

Did Arminius obey his own injunctions? Did he stress, as he urged must be stressed, only those things necessary to be believed for salvation in his writing and teaching? Does he allow minor issues to become dominant, and controversial matters to become paramount in his emphasis? A fairly detailed study of major portions of Arminius' writings will be analysed in this chapter in search of answers to these questions.

A. Arminius's Evangelicalism and its Insistence upon the Centrality of the Doctrine of Salvation

Arminius insisted that the church's main business is to strive unceasingly for the glory of God and the salvation of men. Doctrines which contribute to these ends are the central truths of Christianity. They must be stressed by all Christian teachers and the things that are soteriologically nonessential must not be stressed as though they were primary. This theme of "things necessary to be believed for salvation" as being of paramount importance with respect to belief and proclamation appears again and again in Arminius' works and serves as one of the primary constituent elements in his evangelical ecumenism.

For example, when Arminius began his teaching career at Leiden, his first address, *Oratio De Sacerdotio Christi*, given on the occasion of the conferring of the Doctoral Degree and the commencement of his professorial labours,¹⁵⁴ was exclusively concerned with the issue of salvation, suggesting that this would be the central thrust of his teaching emphasis.¹⁵⁵ This publicly delivered oration is an indication of the style of Arminius' preaching, and contains passages of rhetorical exuberance not found in his more formal theological discourses. This address indicates that the saving grace of God in Christ was the central thought in the theology of James Arminius; as an illustration of his strong evangelicalism and because it contains ideas basic to an understanding of his

¹⁵⁴ Arminius, *Oratio de Sacerdotio Christi*, is found in the *Opera* on pages 9-15. The heading reads, "Delivered on the Eleventh Day of July, 1603, by Arminius, on the occasion of his receiving the Degree of Doctor of Divinity."

¹⁵⁵ Arminius, *Oratio*, 9.

soteriological convictions, the oration will be given close examination and somewhat lengthy analysis.

The topic of the Priesthood of Christ had been chosen, he announced, because he was convinced it would “tend to the glory of God and the salvation of men.”¹⁵⁶ The oration concerns the provision of Christ as the priestly mediator of the New Covenant – a covenant in which Christ serves not only as the priest at the altar but as the sacrificial victim as well.¹⁵⁷ The address begins with a comparison between the old covenant of works and the new covenant of grace and salvation. The first covenant was one in which God promised to be king over his people and to “discharge toward them all the offices of a good king, while he stipulated, as a counter obligation that they become his people, that in this relation they live according to his commands, and that they ask and expect all blessing from his goodness.”¹⁵⁸ The duty of man under the terms of this agreement was obedience; the response of man to God’s benevolent provision is thanksgiving and entreaty.¹⁵⁹ Man was in a sense a creature and a priest of God.

With the fall of man into sin through the transgression of Adam, the covenant was broken between God and man and the original priesthood obliterated. Adam, however, did not fall alone. All those persons “he at that time represented and whose cause he pleaded although they had not then come into existence, were with him cast down from the elevated summit of such a high dignity. Neither did they fall from the priesthood only, but likewise from the covenant of which the priest was but the mediator and the intercessor; and God ceased to be the king and God of men and men were no longer recognized as his people.”¹⁶⁰ This passage displays Arminius’ view of original sin and his conviction regarding the historicity and significance of the fall of Adam.

The oration went on to speak of the institution of a new covenant—the covenant of grace.¹⁶¹ With the institution of the new covenant there was also instituted a new priesthood, in which not only eucharistic sacrifices were to be offered, but primarily an

156 Arminius, *Oratio*, 10.

157 Arminius, *Oratio*, 10.

158 Arminius, *Oratio*, 10.

159 Arminius, *Oratio*, 12.

160 Arminius, *Oratio*, 12.

161 Arminius, *Oratio*, 13.

expiatory, atoning sacrifice was called for. “This is the priesthood which belongs to our Christ, the Anointed One, alone.”¹⁶²

From the description of the necessity of Christ’s priesthood, the oration proceeds to discuss the imposition of the priesthood, that is, it discusses at some length Christ’s incarnation. Here Arminius defends the doctrine of the trinity and demonstrates that for him the theology of salvation is all-important in a consideration of the necessity of incarnation.¹⁶³ In the following words he combined ideas relative to the authority of the Scriptures with the centrality of salvation in his view of the church and its orthodox teachers:

Since this act of imposing (the priesthood of the new covenant) belongs to the economy and dispensation of our salvation, the persons who are comprised under this divine monarch are to be distinctly considered according to the rule of the scriptures which ought to have the precedence in this enquiry, and according to the rules and guidance of the orthodox fathers who agree with these scriptures.¹⁶⁴

Thus God and Christ entered into a covenant which was ultimately sealed with the oath of God Himself.¹⁶⁵ The demand placed upon Christ was that he lay down his soul as a sacrifice for the sin of the world. Christ accepted the conditions of this covenant and was promised an everlasting priesthood and the privilege of bestowing peace on his people as King of Righteousness and Prince of Peace.¹⁶⁶

The description of the incarnation is followed in the oration by a narrative of the sufferings endured by Christ – a section which is unlike anything else in the writings of Arminius because of the emotion which was obviously a vital part of the presentation and which comes through in the writing itself. Christ “did not refuse to take upon himself on our account, the discharge of those difficult and arduous duties which were full of pain, trouble and misery.”¹⁶⁷ A lengthy passage follows describing the sacrifice of Christ and the value of His atonement through

sacrifice of the body of Christ, by the shedding of his blood on the altar of the cross which was succeeded by death, thus paying the price of redemption for sins by suffering the punishment due to them. Christ having completed the oblation of

162 Arminius, *Oratio*, 13.

163 Arminius, *Oratio*, 14ff.

164 Arminius, *Oratio*, 14.

165 Arminius, *Oratio*, 16.

166 Arminius, *Oratio*, 16.

167 Arminius, *Oratio*, 16.

the cross entered heaven with his blood as a sign of the victory he had wrought – thus the redemption of man has two foci – the one on earth and the other state of the deepest humiliation and the other in a state of glory and both of them out of a consummate affection for the glory of God and the salvation of sinners.¹⁶⁸

Again the idea of the two covenants is contrasted indicating the centrality of salvation doctrine in Arminius' thinking: "There are two methods or plans by which it might be possible for man to arrive at a state of righteousness before God and to obtain life from Him. The one is according to righteousness through the law, buy works and of debt, the other is according to mercy through the gospel, 'by grace and through faith'; these two methods are so constituted as not to allow both of them to be in a course of operation at the same time."¹⁶⁹

The oration ends on a note of praise to Christ and the plan of salvation brought about through his priestly work; this passage makes it clear that to Arminius the most important of all revealed truth is the fact that God's glory has been most manifestly demonstrated through His saving act in the person and sacrifice of Christ.¹⁷⁰ The dignity and the value of Christ and his offering are stressed in the strongest terms. The saving work of Christ is pictured as the acme of all creation, the zenith of the works of God,

the highest point and the extreme limit of all the divine works, a never-failing token of the justice and mercy of God tempered together for the economy of our salvation, a very luminous and clear evidence of the most excellent glory of God, and an immovable foundation for the certainty of obtaining salvation through this royal priest."¹⁷¹

The work of Christ's redemptive sacrifice is described as "the epitome of the whole world, the marriage of the universe ... ineffable, inconceivable, incomprehensible ..."¹⁷² and added are the following terse words in conclusion:

What can be a stronger and better proof of the certainty of obtaining salvation through Christ, than that he has asked and procured it for man, that being constituted a king through the priesthood, he has received salvation from the Father to be dispensed to them? In these particulars consists the perfection of the divine glory.¹⁷³

168 Arminius, *Oratio*, 17, 18.

169 Arminius, *Oratio*, 18.

170 Arminius, *Oratio*, 19.

171 Arminius, *Oratio*, 19.

172 Arminius, *Oratio*, 20.

173 Arminius, *Oratio*, 20.

The fruits of Christ's priestly victory are many. Finally, Christians will be raised to kingly dignity with Christ and will enjoy the presence of God eternally. This is one of the very few places where Arminius addressed himself to the matter of eschatology and the language is sparse; the hope of the Christian is "that in a beautiful and glorious state we may spend with him a whole eternity."¹⁷⁴

At the outset of his career as a theological professor Arminius thus presented an oration in which the reformation tenet of salvation's centrality and justification by faith is clearly revealed. This initial lecture looks forward to an emphasis in teaching that is certainly 'evangelical'. Does this emphasis continue through the years of actual teaching?

Arminius' series of lectures in Systematic Theology given at the beginning of his teaching career do indeed demonstrate his determination to maintain the centrality of the doctrine of salvation in his theological emphasis.¹⁷⁵ Early in the lectures the matter of salvation arises and is dealt with at length.

The lectures began with the study of God, his nature, actions and will.¹⁷⁶ God is the object of all theological study – indeed to know God is the aim, purpose and end of theology; Arminius defines theology as "the truth which is after godliness."¹⁷⁷ God, he taught, is the one to be sought as the highest good for he is the best of all beings, the cause of causes, the most lucid and clear Truth able to fill the mind and satisfy the desires. God is greatness personified and as good as goodness itself. He is light itself and the knowledge of him give meaning to everything else. "I venture to assert that nothing can be seen or truly known in any object except in it we have previously seen or known God himself."¹⁷⁸ Indeed,

If thou be acquainted with all other things and yet remain in a state of ignorance with regard to Him alone, thou art always wandering beyond the proper point, and thy restless love of knowledge increases in the proportion in which knowledge itself is increased. The many who knows only God and is ignorant of all things else remains in peace and tranquillity and like one that has found a pearl of great

174 Arminius, *Oratio*, 25.

175 Arminius's three orations, *De Objecto Theologiae; De Authore et Fine Theologiae; De Certitudine S. Sanctae Theologiae* are found in the *Opera* on pages 26-71. The heading reads, "The following three orations were delivered as introductory to the author's first course of Lectures on Divinity, at Leiden, near the close of 1603."

176 Arminius, *Opera*, 28.

177 Arminius, 28.

178 Arminius, *Ibid.* 29.

price although in the purchase of it he may have expended the whole of his substance, he congratulates himself and greatly triumphs.¹⁷⁹

The lectures proceed to describe the character of God: “there is a Nature simple, infinite, wise and just, omnipotent, happy in itself, the maker and governor of all things, that is worthy to receive adoration, which will it is to be worshipped, and that is able to make its worshippers happy.”¹⁸⁰ At this point, early in his argument, Arminius seems to be reminded of man’s unhappiness for he turned from the description of God to the subject of the fall of man into sin. If man is to be rescued from his fallen state, other characteristics in the nature of God must become manifest, otherwise lost man can have no further knowledge of or relationship with the Highest Good. Because of the Fall the characteristics of mercy, longsuffering, gentleness, patience and clemency were called into action and thus were revealed; activities other than creation and preservation were engaged in by God in order to bring about a new creation, necessitated by the ruin and decay of the first creation through the creature’s sin.¹⁸¹ A new providence of God on man’s behalf was revealed resulting in the work of redemption by Christ; indeed a new manifestation of the will of God graciously acting toward man’s salvation was given. So much of God was revealed in spite of the fall and in consequence of it that it is correct to speak of a “new species of theology being called for,”¹⁸² and it is at this point that Arminius distinguished between two kinds of theology, that which can be called “legal” and that which he termed “evangelical.” Again and again in his writings he compares and contrasts these two “species”, indicating the superiority of the Evangelical, salvation-oriented theology of grace and faith.¹⁸³ Because of man’s great need for deliverance, God ordained a mediator, expiator, reconciler, saviour, who “might set forth and display the mercy, longsuffering and patience of God, might provide the eternal redemption, obtain remission of sins, bring in an everlasting righteousness, procure the Spirit of grace, confirm the decree of gracious mercy, ratify the new covenant by his blood, recover eternal salvation, and who might bring to God those what were to be ultimately saved.”¹⁸⁴

179 Arminius, *Ibid.* 29.

180 Arminius, *Ibid.* 31.

181 Arminius, *Ibid.* 33.

182 Arminius, *Ibid.* 33, 34.

183 Arminius, *Ibid.* 34.

184 Arminius, *Ibid.* 34.

The doctrine of God is thus enhanced by the doctrine of salvation and in a most crucial manner.

The heart of Evangelical Theology, says Arminius, consists of two objects, or ends to be sought after – God and Christ, or better, God in Christ. God has manifested in Christ all of his goodness – God is truly the highest and best, not only because of his communication to man through the Legal Theology of the Old Covenant, but because of his grace which demonstrates his desire “to receive into his favor and to reconcile to himself those who are sinners ... and to bestow eternal life on them when they repent.”¹⁸⁵ Evangelical Theology which offers life to all who repent and believe far surpasses Legal Theology in that God in Christ is the clearest and best revelation of God to man.¹⁸⁶ Salvation and redemption in Christ become the keys to theological understanding – in them one is able to comprehend the nature and plan of God in a brighter, fuller way than through Legal Theology. The wisdom and goodness of God and the power of God revealed in creation are grand, but the power of God unto salvation is even greater;¹⁸⁷ the righteousness of faith is far superior to the righteousness of the law: “a solemn and substantial triumph is achieved through faith in Christ’s blood by the wisdom and goodness which having devised and executed the wonderful method of qualifying justice and mercy, appointed the manner of union on Christ in his righteousness.”¹⁸⁸ The thickest darkness is dispelled by the light of the gospel, in which “God appears to have excelled himself and to have unfolded every one of his blessings.”¹⁸⁹ The law revealed God but the brightness of Christ far surpasses the former revelation. Christ is able to fill the mind and completely satisfy the desires of the heart. To know nothing save Jesus Christ is to know the one in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. God in Christ, i.e. God as Saviour, is described by Arminius as the object, the author, the end of theology.¹⁹⁰ God is the chief end of all things. Men cannot go beyond him in their search for that which is Ultimate. The end of theology is the knowledge of God by man – the union in relationship of God and man, “to the salvation of the one and the glory of the other ... In

185 Arminius, *Ibid.* 34.

186 Arminius, *Ibid.* 35.

187 Arminius, *Ibid.* 35.

188 Arminius, *Ibid.* 35.

189 Arminius, *Ibid.* 35, 36.

190 Arminius, *Ibid.* 35, 36. Note also p. 37, “Not only therefore is the cross of Christ necessary to solicit and procure redemption, but the faith of the cross is necessary in order to obtain it.”

this act of ... seeing God, in loving him, and therefore in the enjoyment of him the salvation of man and his perfect happiness consist.”¹⁹¹ So the Evangelical Theology which treats of salvation is declared to provide the essence of the theologian’s quest, “... the felicity prepared for us by Christ and offered to us through Evangelical Theology excels that which would have come to us by the righteousness of the law.”¹⁹²

What did Arminius most hope for his students? What practical use could be made of this Evangelical Theology? The good news of Christ’s redeeming work is to be received, understood, believed. It is the gate of heaven, the ladder of Jacob, the golden chain connecting heaven and earth. “Ample and wide is the opening of the gate and it will easily admit believers. The position of the ladder is unmovable, and will not suffer those who ascend it to be shaken or moved; the joining which unites one link of the chain with another is indissoluble, and will not permit those to fall down who cling to it until we come to him that liveth forever and ever.”¹⁹³ He admonished the future ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church to preach this Evangelical Theology and thus administer God’s grace to others.¹⁹⁴ The evangelistic function of the ministry is uppermost as far as ‘professional’ priorities are concerned.¹⁹⁵ The Evangelical Theology derived from the Scriptures provides the content of the preachers’ vital message.

You will discover that it is not possible to confer on any one, in his intercourse with mankind, an office of greater dignity and utility, or an office that is more salutary in its consequences than this, by which he may conduct them from error into the way of truth, from wickedness to righteousness, from the deepest misery to the highest felicity; and by which he may contribute much towards their everlasting salvation. But this truth is taught by Theology alone.¹⁹⁶

Arminius thus urged them to minister evangelistically, “sowing the gospel with diligence and patience and returning to your Lord with rejoicing, bringing with you an ample harvest, through the blessing of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁹⁷

The question might be raised as to how this emphasis of Arminius differed from other contemporary Reformed teaching in Leiden. Was his stress on faith, on grace, and

191 Arminius, *Opera*, 50.

192 Arminius, *Ibid.* 53, 54.

193 Arminius, *Ibid.* 55.

194 Arminius, *Ibid.* 55.

195 Arminius, *Ibid.* 55.

196 Arminius, *Ibid.* 55.

197 Arminius, *Ibid.* 55.

on Christ's redemptive offer of salvation to believers not typical of all Dutch Reformed preaching and teaching? Apparently not. Arminius' fears that the doctrine of absolute predestination was becoming a paramount teaching and was in danger of overshadowing the simple evangelical approach were not ill-founded. This became apparent in 1604, when Francis Gomarus, Arminius' colleague on the theological faculty of Leiden, presented a series of disputations directly aimed at challenging Arminius' teaching and his theological integrity.¹⁹⁸ These "theses of Gomarius" demonstrate the preoccupation of the hyper-predestinarians with the theme of the divine decrees to election or reprobation rather than with the explication of the application of the biblical atonement scheme, such as Arminius rendered in *De Sacerdotio Christi*. The challenge presented by this incident is indicative of the spirit of the opposition facing Arminius – a spirit both dogmatic and intolerant. The response of Arminius as he carefully examined these Theses indicates his concern lest novel and basically (to him) unevangelical ideas should come to occupy an inordinate amount of attention in the seminary and church as well as his determination to deal patiently with the opposition.¹⁹⁹ His conviction that controversial issues should remain confined to privacy is evidenced by the fact that his lengthy examination of Gomarus' Theses was never published by him, but was printed long after his death (1645).

It is not necessary to embark upon a lengthy analysis of the "Theses of Gomarus" or Arminius' "Examination" of them. A brief explanation of a few of the theses will suffice to indicate the direction of Gomarus' thought.

His first thesis stated what Gomarus considered to be the importance of the doctrine of absolute predestination. This doctrine, he said, can and ought to be taught in the schools and preached about in the churches because predestination is "a principal part, as it were, of divine providence, and subject matter of the Gospel."²⁰⁰ As a matter of

198 Harrison, *Beginnings of Arminianism*, 28, 20. Gomarus' Theses and Arminius' examination of them are found in Arminius' *Works* III, 526-658. The full title is "Examination of the Theses of Dr. Francis Gomarus Respecting Predestination." Note especially p. 588.

199 The Theses of Gomarus account for a small portion of the "Examination." Arminius' tightly reasoned arguments fill most of the 132 pages.

200 Arminius, "Examination," 527. Arminius criticizes this Thesis: "therefore, if predestination be the matter of the gospel, it cannot be that Jesus Christ is excluded from its definition and essence, who is the principal object and matter of the gospel. But in the whole treatise [of Gomarus] is no mention made of Jesus Christ, except where an exposition is given of the means appertaining to the execution of predestination." (Arminius, "Examination," 529).

fact, Gomarus indicated in the eleventh thesis that really the substance of the Christian gospel can be comprehended in the doctrine of predestination. “The mystery of which number [the number chosen to be saved and to be damned], and of particular persons in it, He knows who predestinated them without counsellors. Wherefore the gospel may be styled the Revelation and Book of Predestination.”²⁰¹ The gospel as the book and revelation of predestination: this exaltation of predestination as God’s means of glorifying his grace and his punitive wrath – this is the burden of the theses of Gomarus, and this exaltation deeply troubled Arminius.

The decrees to salvation and damnation are absolute and entirely unconditional, says Gomarus. Nothing in the life of the individual has any bearing upon the predetermined end for which he was created. Note These XII, “The form of the predestination of rational creatures consists in preordination to their supernatural ends, and eternal state ... And therefore predestination cannot be called conditional without a contradiction in terms. Inasmuch as the end has been ordained before the means, the means are entirely subservient to it.”²⁰² That merit as means is excluded in the plan of salvation Arminius readily admitted; but Gomarus removes all conditions – thus removing and leaving out of his discussion completely any reference to repentance and faith as the conditions of salvation, and to this Arminius objects; to deny the need for repentance and faith is to deny the substance of the evangelical message of the Scriptures and thus of the Reformation itself.²⁰³

The double decree of predestination – i.e. the decree to life and the decree to damnation seemed to result in a preoccupation with the idea of reprobation, i.e. damnation. Thesis XVII addresses itself to double predestination: “... the one is to eternal life and glory and the means thereto ... the other is to eternal death and ignominy ... God does nothing in time that he has not decreed from eternity ... the former predestination is named ‘election,’ ... the latter, ‘casting away,’ and ‘reprobation.’”²⁰⁴ In this scheme nothing is said of faith or perseverance in faith: all depends on the unconditional choice

201 Arminius, “Examination,” 553.

202 Arminius, “Examination,” 559.

203 Arminius, “Examination,” 563. Says Arminius, “For the special predestination of a person to salvation and to death belongs to God’s consequent will, which considers the object with all its conditions and circumstances. ... The end has been preordained, and the means subordinated to it; but the end in this place is the glory of God’s grace, which is illustrated by the medium subordinated by God, namely to faith.”

204 Arminius, “Examination,” 574.

of God who “chooses without merit.”²⁰⁵ Again consider thesis XXIII which deals with reprobation, with no reference to impenitent unbelief, reprobation’s cause to Arminius:

But casting away or reprobation is God’s predestination by which he has foreordained certain from among rational creatures indefinitely foreknown, in virtue of his own right and good pleasure, from eternity rejected from eternal life ... to death and eternal ignominy ... and to its way ... creation in an upright state of original righteousness, permission of falling into sin and loss of original righteousness, being forsaken therein – to the glory of his power, wrath, dominion over the reprobate, and of his saving power over the elect.²⁰⁶

Of this decree, Arminius says, “I add that this is a new and recent discovery by which the decree and the execution of the decree are so distinguished.”²⁰⁷

The last thesis of Gomarus has to do with the question of how one can ascertain whether or not he is among the elect or the reprobate.²⁰⁸ Gomarus’ answer is that one need ask, “Am I penitent? Am I a believer?”²⁰⁹ To answer positively is to be assured of inclusion among the elect. Arminius entirely agrees with this method of discovering Christian assurance, but argues that Gomarus is contradicting here all that had been said by him about the unconditional nature of predestination.²¹⁰ Since penitence and faith were not included in his definitions of predestination and its conditions, it is illogical of Gomarus to include them as the means whereby one tests one’s ground for assurance. To Arminius, predestination that leaves out faith as its condition is mere determinism. To emphasize faith and penitence is to declare man responsible, and glorify the grace of God which makes salvation depend not upon man’s meritorious works, but solely upon his apprehension of God’s saving power. Arminius concludes:

Whence it is apparent from the confession of this author that in the Gospel no other predestination to life and to death is taught than that by which believers are destined to life, impenitents and unbelievers to death: of which since no mention has been made in the definition of predestination, election, and reprobation, furnished by the author of these theses, it is certain that his treatment of these subjects is not made in accordance with the gospel.²¹¹

205 Arminius, “Examination,” 581. (Thesis XX).

206 Arminius, “Examination,” 588.

207 Arminius, “Examination,” 593.

208 Arminius, “Examination,” 649. (Thesis XXXII).

209 Arminius, “Examination,” 649.

210 Arminius, “Examination,” 650.

211 Arminius, “Examination,” 651. Arminius’ agitation is evidenced in these words: “For this according to them is the order of the decree of reprobation: in the first moment or point of time, God willed to reprobate some rational creatures, that is, destined them to damnation. In the second moment, because they could not

Therefore, though Arminius' evangelicalism might be assumed to be typical Dutch Reformed teaching, a study of Gomarus' theses leads to the conclusion that it was not. Evangelicalism as Arminius perceived it (soteriologically centred), was in danger of being overcome by a new emphasis upon absolute predestination; Arminius was fully aware of this and seems, in the documents analysed, to be fighting against this perceived danger, not by attacking publicly this new emphasis or its proponents, but by emphasizing evangelical essentials as strongly as possible.

The last section in Arminius' treatment of the elements of Systematic Theology described the certainty of Theology and was in effect a short course in apologetics and Christian Evidence. Here too the arguments lead to the centrality of soteriology in Arminius' evangelicalism. The nature of God and the nature of man both attest the reasonableness of supposing a divine revelation from God to man, and the character of the Scriptures themselves defend the claim that they make of themselves that they are indeed this revelation. God is good, beneficent and communicative, man is capable of obeying divine commands by nature (before the fall), but needs to know the standard and thus a revelation from God is called for by logic. "But since a revelation has been made in the Word which has been published, and since the whole of it is contained in that Word, so that the Word in itself is the sum of theology, we can determine nothing concerning the certainty of theology in any other way than by offering some explanation concerning our true apprehension of that word."²¹² Arminius strongly defends the *sola scriptura* tradition and at this point lists the standard orthodox defences for the divine nature of the Bible—the predictions of Christ's birth which were fulfilled from the Old Testament, the style and character of the Bible as so exalted that there is little comparison with other ancient literature to be made, the other fulfilled prophecies from Old and New Testament times, the miracles of Scripture, the antiquity of the Bible which has survived

be damned while non-existent, he determined to create them, in order to have creatures whom he could damn. In the third moment, because he must damn them justly, it was necessary for them to sin and become wicked, in order that he might in this way attain the end of creation, that is, to carry out their reprobation by damning them for his glory. In the process, I say, they ascribe far baser things to God, than if they should simply say that he created some creatures in order to damn them ... Come, O God, and vindicate thy glory from tongues speaking perverse things concerning thee; nay rather, correct their minds, that they may consecrate their tongues to thee, and may hereafter rightly proclaim true things, and things worthy of thee in accordance with thy Word" (p. 602).

212 Arminius, *Ibid.* 122.

so many vicious attacks, the holiness of the Bible's authors, the fact that so many have been willing to die for their commitment to the truths of the Bible, and the testimony of the character of its truths by the Church through the centuries.²¹³ But the supreme evidence of the Bible's divine character is its revelation of the saving work of Christ. "That the Word, therefore, was divinely revealed, could not be discerned by any mark which was better or more exalted than that of its showing to man the way of salvation, taking him by the hand and leading him into that way, and not ceasing to accompany him until it introduced him to the full enjoyment of salvation. In such a consummation the glory of God most abundantly shines forth."²¹⁴

Arminius' discussion of the Scriptures, especially as treated in the *Disputationes Privatae* is illustrative with reference to his view of their salvific centrality. The end and purpose of the Scriptures is "the instruction of man to his own salvation and to the glory of God."²¹⁵ He goes on to defend a high view of the inspiration of the Bible and its divine authoritativeness, certainly a Reformation distinctive.

With regard to the perfection of the Scriptures Arminius taught that they contain all the church needs to know, do, believe, and hope. Everything necessary for salvation is therein contained; at the same time no doctrine necessary to salvation has been deduced from these Scriptures which was not explicitly known and believed from the very commencement of the Christian Church.²¹⁶ Arminius was conservative in his adherence to the ancient faith – no new dogmas necessary to be believed for salvation will ever be added by Bible teachers: the principle of *non nova dogmata* holds for Arminius. Thus he disapproved strongly of what he perceived to be novel ideas emanating from hyper-predestinarianism.

In the second of the *Disputationes Publicae*, Arminius spoke of "the Sufficiency and Perfection of Scripture"²¹⁷ in terms once again indicating his belief regarding the

213 Arminius, *Ibid.* 129-138.

214 Arminius, *Ibid.* 125.

215 Arminius's *Disputationes Privatae*, is in the *Opera*, 339-457. The heading reads, "These disputations were prepared by Arminius as a kind of syllabus to his Private lectures." The soteriological value of Theology is stated at the beginning of the disputations: "The study of Theology is meant to lead to union with God." The purpose and end is that man may know God, believe in Him and perform His pleasure. Men may expect and obtain union with God through a study of Christ's saving work. "On this account therefore, Theology is not a theoretical science or doctrine, but a practical one" (p. 339).

216 Arminius, *Disputationes Privatae*, 344.

217 Arminius, *Disputationes Publicae*, 204.

soteriological indispensability of the Bible for the church. The Bible possesses a “relative perfection ... according to which they (the Scriptures) perfectly comprehend all things that have been, are now, or ever will be necessary for the salvation of the church.”²¹⁸

Everything needed regarding saving truth has been revealed in Scripture. “Therefore the doctrine taught by the apostles contained whatever will at any time to the end of the world, be necessary, useful and glorious to the church.”²¹⁹ And again, “the church universal is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Therefore the apostles have declared all things which will be necessary for the whole church to the final consummation ... But the whole of saving doctrine consists of a description of the beneficence of God towards us, and of our duty toward God.”²²⁰ The Scriptures fulfil this purpose adequately. They “prevent men from going down to the place of the damned.”

The strong language continues almost redundantly:

No subject can be mentioned by the sole knowledge of which the church ought to bedeck herself, and which subject is not comprehended in the Holy Scriptures... when it follows that the Scripture contains all things necessary to be known for the salvation of the church and for the glory of God ... As soon as anything has been proved not to be contained in the Scriptures, from this very circumstance we infer that thing not to be necessary for salvation.²²¹

In the *Disputationes Privatae*, Arminius indicated his ecumenical understanding of the universal church and links the concepts of his salvation-stress to Christian unity.²²² The church is comprised, he said, of multitudes of sons and servants of God who have been united together by the same faith and by the Spirit of Christ.²²³ By definition the church is “A company of persons called out from a state of natural life and of sin, by God and Christ through the Spirit of both, to a supernatural life to be spent according to God and Christ in the knowledge and worship of both, that by a participation with both they may be eternally blessed to the glory of God through Christ and Christ in God.”²²⁴ In this disputation, Arminius compared the kingdom of God under the Old Covenant with the Christian Church under the New Covenant; again the superiority of the Evangelical over

218 Arminius, *Disputationes Publicae*, 204.

219 Arminius, *Disputationes Publicae*, 207.

220 Arminius, *Disputationes Publicae*, 208.

221 Arminius, *Disputationes Publicae*, 209, 210.

222 Arminius, *Disputationes Privatae*, 403.

223 Arminius, *Disputationes Privatae*, 403.

224 Arminius, *Disputationes Privatae*, 403.

the Legal Theology is stressed. The Evangelical Church as he calls it, is superior to the Legal Church because it is governed by the spirit of real liberty and not legal bondage; mankind has a far more adequate revelation of God presented to it in the glory of God revealed to the church in Christ the Saviour.²²⁵

Ecumenically, the Evangelical Church is superior to its predecessor (Israel) because it is truly catholic. The Old Covenant ‘church’ related to Israel; the Evangelical Church “is diffused through the whole world and has embraced within her boundary all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues.”²²⁶

The subject of predestination is central to Arminius’ *Examen Perkinsius Libelli* Pamphlet.²²⁷ A study of this document indicates that for Arminius the whole predestination issue is soteriological – this was the burden of his lengthy treatment of the supralapsarianism of Perkins. The focus of the ultra predestinarians had shifted away from an evangelical centre, Arminius implied; their concern had become to concentrate on the doctrine of decrees and to stress the glory of God being revealed through his justice and mercy in predestination and reprobation as cardinal truths.²²⁸ To Arminius, the primary importance of the concept of election is that it demonstrates the love of God in his saving work rather than merely exhibiting his absolute universal dominion.²²⁹ Arminius believed in divine sovereignty, but seemed to be of the opinion that this concept was not really at issue. The point he made over and over in this document was that what the church must continually stress in its teaching is the saving love of God revealed through the provision of redemption for all mankind through Christ, to be appropriated by any and all by faith through God’s grace; such an emphasis is both biblical and evangelical. Conversely, to stress the prerogative of God to demonstrate the glory of his justice by unconditionally and arbitrarily choosing some human beings for reprobation appeared to Arminius to be the opposite of the command to preach and

225 Arminius, *Disputationes Privatae*, 404, 405.

226 Arminius, *Disputationes Privatae*, 406.

227 Arminius’s *Examen Libelli Perkinsius* is found in the *Opera*, pp. 634-781. Note Arminius’ Introduction: “May God grant that we all may fully agree in those things which are necessary for his glory and to the salvation of the Christian Church; and that in other things, if there cannot be harmony of opinions there may at least be harmony of feelings and that we may keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

228 Arminius, *Examen Libelli Perkinsius*, 636.

229 Arminius, *Examen Libelli Perkinsius*, 636.

believe the good news of salvation.²³⁰ Indeed, to him, the salvation of believers and the damnation of impenitents seemed best to exemplify the mercy and the justice of God and to demonstrate His glory effectively. To Arminius the hyper-predestinarian position was an adulteration of evangelical theology.

Does Arminius consistently subvert all issues to a soteriological concern? Is he in his own terms an “evangelical” theologian? On the strength of the evidence presented and analysed, the conclusion can be drawn that Arminius was a committed and determined evangelical who consistently laid great emphasis upon “things necessary for salvation,” including Christ’s sacrifice and the call to repent and believe in him as the only conditions required of man. Discussions of the nature of God, the function of theology, the composition of the church, the concept of predestination and the defence of the faith all lead to a consideration and exaltation of soteriology. Dialogue with theologians of the hyper-predestinarian persuasion exemplified Arminius’ fear that the salvific essentials were being compromised and undermined by them. Evangelical essentials must be emphasized, he insisted, in the name of preserving biblical truth; to depart from them is to court error and coincidentally to invite disunity and promote schism. The following section will explore this argument more deeply, and examine Arminius’ ideas relative to non-essential matters of theological consideration.

B. Arminius’ Ecumenism and Its Insistence Upon the Centrality of the Doctrine of Salvation

Arminius was convinced that a stress upon soteriological doctrines common to all evangelical Christians, and an allowance for the possession of non-essential beliefs within the church as long as these do not become primary emphases and threaten church unity, was the route to ecclesiastical, and in his day, social harmony. Certain non-essentials were, he feared, being pushed to the fore in the emphases of some influential Dutch Reformed teachers, and the unity and central purpose of the church were being threatened in the process. In this section, Arminius’ reasons for considering these beliefs to be soteriologically non-essential will be considered as well as his arguments for concluding that stressing these particular views would promote disunity. This is not to

²³⁰ Arminius, *Examen Libelli Perkinsius*, 636.

suggest that Arminius taught that all non-essentials should be avoided altogether; the following pages will also consider some beliefs and practices which Arminius taught were legitimate, perhaps even useful, and which therefore should be tolerated within the church as long as those holding them did not absolutize them or insist that they be universally accepted.

In the *Declaratio Sententiae*, Arminius dealt with the doctrine of predestination at length arguing that the hyper-predestinarian position as it was being expounded by his critics was dangerous because it was both un-evangelical and unecumenical.²³¹ The arguments of the *Declaratio* will be examined in some detail here because of the light they shed upon Arminius' conception of the relationship between the doctrine of salvation and the issue of the unity of the church. It should be kept in mind that the *Declaratio Sententiae* was written reluctantly and not polemically – i.e. Arminius was not writing to attack the beliefs of others, but to defend his own sentiments; he was not initiating a theological dispute; but perceived that he was being hounded into participating in one;²³² he was not setting forth a novel doctrine to challenge current ecclesiastical thought, but rather was criticizing the direction of a considerable part of the teaching of the Dutch Church as being out of step with Reformation theology. He declared that it was his wish that all discussion on this controversial subject be suspended until the convening of a council of the whole Dutch Church, where he hoped open discussion by men of piety and good will would bring resolution to dissension. Nevertheless, he had been called upon time and time again to declare himself with regard to predestination, and he did so in the *Declaratio*, proposing that the supralapsarian position was unevangelical, conducive to division and dissension, and an idea not held by the majority of Christian teachings in ancient or contemporary times.²³³

His argument begins with a definition of predestination as it was being propounded by the hyper-predestinarians. His definition of their view demonstrates that he had studied their arguments carefully and was able to give a satisfactory explanation of their tenets from their perspective.²³⁴ The major motive of supralapsarianism seemed to be, he noted, to defend the glory of God revealed in His choice of some to be damned and

231 The *Declaratio* was “Delivered before the States of Holland, October 30, 1608” (p. 91).

232 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 91-99.

233 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 99-102.

234 Bangs defends the accuracy of the presentation, *Arminius: A Study*, 308.

some to be saved, the choice being made solely on the basis of God's good pleasure. In order that God might be glorified in his justice, God decreed creation and the fall, and man lost his original righteousness. So that God might be glorified in mercy, Christ was foreordained for the salvation of the elect.²³⁵ The concomitants of this belief system might be summarized: It is impossible for the elect not to have faith; the elect are kept and preserved, they cannot sin with a full and entire will, nor can they fall away totally and finally; reprobation means a desertion by God of the non-elect in their sin; the price of redemption was not paid for reprobates, nor is the Spirit of Christ available to them; the hearts of reprobates are hardened by God and the call offered to them to believe is inefficacious and insufficient; this call may be external or internal, leading sinners to believe, tremble and even taste the gift of salvation, but they will of divine necessity fall away from God eventually. Therefore, the elect are necessarily saved and the reprobate are necessarily damned.²³⁶ Those who teach it, Arminius contended, consider this doctrine the foundation of Christianity, salvation and certainty.

Arminius found this doctrinal position to be unacceptable. He objected on biblical grounds to the idea that God wills to save some and damn others with no regard to their personal sin or obedience to the gospel call.²³⁷ He could not accept the idea that creation and the fall were predetermined in order that the decree of saving the elect and damning the reprobate might be carried out. The thought of irresistible salvation and damnation he considered repulsive, because in this scheme God becomes the author of evil and man bears no personal ethical responsibility. The fact that some are denied necessary and sufficient grace and have no capacity to believe and be saved he found biblically and soteriologically indefensible. How could it be, he reasoned, that there is a salvation offered by God to men which is not universally available?²³⁸ How can the gospel call to repent and believe be legitimately offered if repentance and faith are not possible human responses but are indiscriminate divine gifts?

This supralapsarian idea was *the* issue in the Netherlands church at this time, and Arminius addressed himself to this issue, opposing it on historical, philosophical, theological and practical grounds. He feared that this doctrine was in danger of becoming

235 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 102.

236 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 101.

237 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 102.

238 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 102.

the dominant stress in the Dutch Church if its proponents had their way, and Arminius felt that if this came about – if absolute predestination was to be considered the foundation of Christianity – the heart would be taken out of the Evangelical Theology because unconditional predestination denies a universally available salvation offered to all who believe. Arminius believed that the gospel was not contained in this doctrine, which seemed to him to be deterministic.²³⁹

At the same time he rejected this system of predestination on historical, ecumenical and ecclesiological grounds. He demonstrated that there is no history of orthodox acceptance for this teaching, that it had no ancient conciliar support, and was not taught by the major patristic writers.²⁴⁰ Surely the major tenets of the faith will have been believed through the ages, he indicated, and supralapsarian teaching seems to be novel, a dangerous innovative doctrinal emphasis out of place within the belief structure of a church determined to remain within the stream of orthodox Christian understanding.²⁴¹

Again, the idea of the supralapsarians has no support in the Protestant confessional tradition, he continued.²⁴² Here Arminius demonstrated his conviction that the Dutch Church ought deliberately to maintain its ties of union with the majority of Protestant believers who, Arminius perceived, did not embrace supralapsarianism. He desired that the Netherlands church be a part of the ongoing Protestant movement and not be presenting a doctrinal emphasis which was unique in such a way as to cut off the Dutch from the mainstream of Protestant emphasis. The extreme predestinarian stress he thus rendered unecumenical as well as unevangelical and historically unorthodox.²⁴³

All of the theological objections of Arminius to the supralapsarian teaching seem to have been directed against its unevangelical and unecumenical character. For example, the nature of God, of man, of creation, eternal life and death, of sin and grace – all of these biblical themes have been violated by this recent intrusive concept into Christian

²³⁹ Arminius, *Declaratio*, 103.

²⁴⁰ Arminius, *Declaratio*, 103. The seven ancient ecumenical councils and their main issues are listed.

²⁴¹ Arminius, *Declaratio*, 104. “None of those doctors of Divines of the Church who held correct and orthodox sentiments for the first six hundred years after the birth of Christ, ever brought this doctrine forward or gave it their approval.” Works of Jerome, Augustine, Prosper of Aquitaine, Hilary, Fulgentius, and Orosius are cited.

²⁴² Arminius, *Declaratio*, 104.

²⁴³ Arminius, *Declaratio*, 104. Arminius refers to the hyper-predestinarian view as “this novel doctrine of predestination,” 116.

thought.²⁴⁴ Arminius' objections proceed climactically until the last three deal exclusively with the fact that the hyper-predestinarian view is shown to be "hurtful to man's salvation, inverting the order of the gospel"²⁴⁵ and holding back the ministry of the gospel by suggesting that if the decrees of election and reprobation are fixed then gospel work and evangelization are unnecessary. The very last objection states that the doctrine does not agree with Protestant sympathy by and large, and at this point Arminius identified himself with Melanchthon and some of the Dutch proponents of the milder view of grace and free will.²⁴⁶

What were his own sentiments with regard to the doctrine of the decrees? When he comes to answer this question, Arminius does so in a very few sentences.²⁴⁷ To go beyond a brief statement would be, he indicated, to go beyond what the Scriptures will allow in an area characterized by mystery. "It is therefore much to be desired that men should proceed no further in this matter, and would not attempt to investigate the unsearchable judgements of God – at least that they would not proceed beyond the point at which those judgements have been clearly revealed in the scriptures."²⁴⁸

The order of the divine decrees according to Arminius might be summarized as follows. The first decree concerned the salvation of sinful men – Jesus Christ was appointed mediator, redeemer and saviour, whose work was to destroy the power of sin and obtain salvation for mankind. The second decree was to receive into God's favour all who repent and believe in Christ and through him, and to effect the salvation of penitent believers who persevere in faith and obedience to the end. Impenitents and unbelievers God decreed to leave in their sins. Then followed the decree of the means of fulfilling the primary decrees – God brings into being the scheme of salvation, and individuals are chosen for salvation by God on the basis of God's foreknowledge of those who would through grace believe and through grace persevere.²⁴⁹

244 Especially Arminius, *Declaratio*, 106-111.

245 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 112-114.

246 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 115. He mentions also the Danish Lutheran Nicholas Hemmingius, and the Dutch moderates Coolhaes, Herberts, Wiggerston, and Tyko Sybrants. It is here that Arminius places himself in the tradition of indigenous Dutch mild (with respect to the predestinarian arguments and toleration) reform sentiment referred to in the introduction to this thesis.

247 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 119.

248 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 120.

249 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 119.

Not only is the doctrine of extreme predestination unevangelical, but Arminius was convinced that it was a doctrine calculated to do disservice to Christian unity as well. To Junius he wrote, “I wish then that it might be shown plainly ... that God is not made the author of sin by that decree, or that the theory might be changed since it is a stumbling block to many, indeed to some a cause of separating from us and to very many a cause of not uniting with us ...”²⁵⁰ Arminius addressed himself to the unevangelical character of the predestinarian arguments in his reply to William Perkins as well, insisting that the salvation of believers and the damnation of impenitents best exemplifies the mercy and justice of God and thus displays best of all the glory of God.²⁵¹ He also alluded to the fact that the hyper-predestinarian view insisted upon sin as being necessary for the exemplification of God’s justice, which he deemed would implicate God as sin’s author and source: “Therefore sin is not in this respect the means per se for illustrating the glory of God but only the occasion, not made for this purpose nor adapted to it by its own nature, but seized by God and used in this direction with wonderful skill and praiseworthy perversion.”²⁵² Arminius denied that there is biblical support for Perkins’ distinction between the revealed will of God which denominates salvation as universal and the hidden will which arbitrarily chooses individuals for salvation or damnation. Election to Arminius is simply “the decree of God by which he himself from eternity decreed to justify in or through Christ believers and to accept them unto eternal life to the praise of his glorious grace.”²⁵³

On biblical, historical and ecumenical grounds Arminius rejected extreme predestinarianism; his chief argument appears in the *Declaration Sententiae*: “From these premises I draw a further conclusion, that this doctrine of predestination is not necessary to salvation...”²⁵⁴ Therefore, it ought not to be given primary attention as some were doing; undue emphasis upon a non-salvific doctrine can only be termed erroneous, and will result in further dissension:

This doctrine of predestination has been rejected both in former times and in our own days by the greater part of the professors of Christianity.

250 Arminius, , 498, 499.

251 Arminius, *Examen Libelli Perkinsius, Writings*, III 292.

252 Arminius, *Examen Libelli Perkinsius, Writings*, III, 302.

253 Arminius, *Examen Libelli Perkinsius, Writings*, III, 311.

254 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 103.

Besides, by many of the inhabitants of these our provinces this doctrine is accounted a grievance of such a nature, as to cause several of them to affirm that on account of it, they neither can nor will have any communion with our church. Others of them have united themselves with our churches but not without entering a protest ‘that they cannot possibly give their consent to this doctrine...’ Of all the difficulties and controversies which have arisen in these our churches since the time of the Reformation there is none that has not had its origin in this doctrine, or that has not at least been mixed up with it.²⁵⁵

Hyper-predestinarianism, Arminius insisted, is unevangelical and for that reason, if stressed, it becomes a stumbling block to unity. Arminius was determined to work for concord and reluctantly spoke out against a trend in Dutch Reformed thought which he considered inimical to ecumenism.

Although, as his treatment of hyper-predestination shows, Arminius did not believe that non-essentials were to be emphasized, he was not urging that they could not legitimately be held. In several passages Arminius discussed minor beliefs held by himself²⁵⁶ which were no essential to salvation, but concerning which there should be latitude for difference of opinion within the church.

For example, in the *Declaratio Sententiae*, he mentioned a certain dispute between Piscator of Nassau and the French Churches about the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.²⁵⁷ Arminius discussed the issues of this controversy and stated that he himself would not presume to offer any kind of absolute solution to it:

But I never durst mingle myself with the dispute or undertake to decide it; for I thought it possible for the professors of the same religion to hold differing opinions on this point from others of their brethren without any breach of Christian peace or the unity of faith. Similar peaceful thoughts appear to have been indulged by both the adverse parties in this dispute; for they exercised a friendly toleration toward each other, and did not make that a reason for mutually renouncing their fraternal concord.²⁵⁸

This willingness to allow differences of opinion in areas where dogmatism seemed unnecessary (for the matter was not salvifically critical), or impossible (for the Scriptures offer no certain answer to the problem), Arminius called an “amicable plan for

255 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 115.

256 Or beliefs held by others of which Arminius is aware, but does not disapprove, although he may disagree.

257 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 126.

258 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 127.

adjusting differences.”²⁵⁹ Soteriologically necessary doctrines must be intolerantly insisted upon; apart from them, ideological tolerance (except in cases of manifest unbiblical heresy), could be practiced and unity thereby maintained.

Another example of Arminius’ flexibility and non-dogmatic stance with regard to “things not necessary for salvation,” comes through in his defence when charge with believing that there were saints in heaven before the ascension of Christ.²⁶⁰ In this regard he exhibited the humility and uncertainty which he felt were necessary in dealing with beliefs such as this. The question, he said, is whether or not this teaching is essential for salvation; he answered in the negative, and indicated that here is an example of an idea on which he felt at liberty to disagree with others in the church without breaking fellowship with them.²⁶¹ He can defend his view from the Scriptures and even has Calvin on his side, but is not willing to force this non-essential view on others; at the same time he should be given liberty to hold his own convictions without being suspected of serious heresy.²⁶²

Again his refusal to be dogmatic in areas of legitimate question appears in Arminius’ discussion of the state of infants who die outside the covenant, presumably meaning unbaptized infants.²⁶³ He quoted Francis Junius his predecessor at Leiden as teaching the idea that all infants who die will be saved and reserves his own judgement as to how this is related to the redemptive work of Christ.²⁶⁴ Junius had stated, “all infants who are of the covenant and of election will be saved.”²⁶⁵ Then Junius went on to expand this provision, “those infants whom God calls to himself and timely removes out of this miserable vale of sins are rather saved,”²⁶⁶ claiming that charity seems to demand this belief. In other words Junius believed that all infants, baptized or not would at death be taken to heaven. Reflecting on Junius’ position Arminius stated, “Now that which this divine Junius either affirms according to the doctrine of faith or presumes through charity, may not another man be allowed without the charge of heresy to hold within his

259 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 127.

260 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 148.

261 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 148, 149.

262 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 151.

263 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 153.

264 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 155.

265 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 155.

266 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 155.

own breast as a matter of opinion which he is not in the least solicitous to obtrude on others or persuade them to believe?”²⁶⁷ Here is a privately held conviction Arminius felt it was legitimate to hold.

Another controversial and unsettled question about which Arminius was queried was the matter of the confirmation of the angels in their present estate, i.e. having fallen once, can angels ever fall again? Is it conceivable that there might ever be another rebellion among the angels of heaven?²⁶⁸ In the *Apologia Adversus Articulos* Arminius said that he had hesitations about this article of belief. He would not say that the matter could not be settled by someone, but he had yet to come to a settled conviction himself. He was well aware, he said, of the views of Augustine, the fathers and the Schoolmen; in this case he has found their arguments unconvincing. The Scriptures he has studied have not led him to a fixed position. But why, he asked, should this issue be the centre of any kind of controversy. It is a hard issue to settle, and “will be of small service to us.”²⁶⁹ Rather, he urged, let men do the will of God as the angels do in heaven that they may partake with them in eternal blessedness.²⁷⁰

In the conclusion of the *Apologia Adversus Articulos* Arminius indicated that the purpose of his ministry and writing had always been that “we may agree on our sentiments or bear with one another realizing that these points of difference are not of such a description as to forbid professors of the same religion to hold different sentiments about them.”²⁷¹ But then he anticipated the question of his adversary as to whether or not this was a correct and acceptable attitude to hold. Should not all matters of theology be worked out so that a believer may have no doubts and no hesitations concerning the faith? Of all people should not a Theology Professor be fully persuaded about those things which he will teach to others and not to fluctuate in his opinion? Arminius’ reply was to the effect that the most learned man is ignorant of many things and is “always but a scholar in the school of Christ and of the scriptures.”²⁷² In many areas there is plenty of room for hesitation lest one speak “dogmatically about those things of which he has no

267 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 155.

268 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 162.

269 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 163.

270 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 163.

271 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 182,

272 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 183.

certain knowledge and to intimate that he himself requires daily progress and seeks for instruction.”²⁷³ Some convictions and doctrines are so important that one must have no doubts about them or he forfeits the name Christian, “but there are other things which are not of the same dignity and about which those who treat on Catholic sentiments (such orthodox doctrines as are held by all real Christians) have dissented from each other without any breach of truth or Christian peace.”²⁷⁴

In the *Declaratio Sententiae*, Arminius spoke to the matter of the revision of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism as necessary items for the agenda of the planned synod of the whole Dutch Church.²⁷⁵ The reasons he offered for such a revision were that first of all the Bible is the primary document of the faith. Confessions of churches which at best are but the words of sincere men will always contain some errors and will be in constant need of amendment. There must be a continual willingness to measure the symbols of the faith against the Scriptures and to make sure that the central statements of faith contain only “what is necessary to be believed unto salvation.”²⁷⁶ Further he noted that the confession may contain too many particulars several of which are not necessary to be believed for salvation, so that salvation is consequently attributed to those things to which it does not belong. Again there may be certain ambiguities in these symbols of the church and these need continual modification lest they serve only to “furnish occasion for disputes.”²⁷⁷ The creeds might contain some inner contradictions as well, and Arminius thought that this was the case especially with regard to the Heidelberg Catechism.²⁷⁸

Arminius was primarily concerned about the soteriological content of the confessions; they ought to reflect most clearly the way of salvation and all controversial material should be removed from them:

a distinction ought to be made between the different matters contained in the confession. For while some of them make a near approach to the foundations of salvation and are fundamental arguments of the Christian religion, others of them are built up as a superstructure on the foundation and are not absolutely necessary to salvation. The doctrines of the former class are approved by the unanimous

273 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 183.

274 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos*, 183.

275 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 128-32.

276 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 128, 129.

277 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 129.

278 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 129.

consent of all the Reformed and are effectually defended against all gainsaying adversaries. But those of the latter class become subjects of controversy between different parties.²⁷⁹

The ecumenicity of the articles contained in the confessions must also be considered. Arminius wondered “whether all things are disposed in a manner the most suitable and convenient for preserving peace and unity with the rest of the Reformed churches.”²⁸⁰ After all, he reasoned, the other branches of Protestantism were not above admitting the need for amendment of their accepted statements of faith; here he cited the example of the successive revisions of the Augsburg Confession by the Lutherans. What is there to rear in re-examining creeds:

If the church be properly instructed in that difference which really does and ought to exist between the word of God and all human writings, and if the church be also rightly instructed concerning that liberty which she and all Christians possess, and which they will always enjoy, to measure all human compositions by the standard rule of God’s own word, she will neither distress herself on that account nor will she be offended on perceiving all human writings brought to be proved at the touch stone of God’s word. On the contrary she will feel far more abundant delight, when she sees that God has bestowed on her in this country pastors and teachers, as try at their chief touch stone their doctrines, in a manner at once suitable and proper, just and worthy of perpetual observance.²⁸¹

It must not be assumed that Arminius was opposed to the use of creedal statements and confessions of faith; it is simply that these must conform to the Scriptures which are the unchanging norm of belief, that the central beliefs be evangelical and that they must always be subject to re-evaluation. What laws for church government the church sets down in its confessions must be made with the realization that they are not absolute or primary. Rules and regulations regarding church government and order are of a “middle or indifferent kind”²⁸² as opposed to the foundational salvation truths of the Bible; these rules are useful, according to the circumstances of the church at any particular time and may serve “for good order and decorous administration of the external polity of the church.”²⁸³ But the church must not bind the consciences of men insisting on these indifferent articles as though they were of supreme import; she must not rob herself

279 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 130.

280 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 129.

281 Arminius, *Declaratio*, 131.

282 Arminius, *Disputationes Privatae*, 411.

283 Arminius, *Disputationes Privatae*, 412.

of the privilege of changing and altering these rules, which until changed by official consensus must be observed for the sake of good order.²⁸⁴

The preceding arguments illustrate the fact that Arminius was guided by several principles relative to the possession of dogmatic certainty. First of all, only beliefs which are necessary for salvation are to be insisted upon by the church. Doctrines necessary to present and support the biblical schemes of salvation must be the primary focus of confessions of faith; such beliefs are inherently ecumenical. Beliefs and practices which may be biblically defensible but are not soteriologically necessary may be allowed in the name of Christian harmony as long as their proponents do not insist upon their universal adherence. When they do, as Arminius believed was happening in the matter of hyperpredestinarianism in the Dutch Church dispute, the results will be schismatic and divisive. Arminius urged the church to re-examine constantly (and officially through regular general councils), its statements of belief in the light of the Scriptures, to determine if those beliefs which are being most strongly emphasized are defensible in terms of orthodox biblical evangelicalism. These principles clearly reveal Arminius' devotion to the cause of Christian ecumenism. An analysis of Arminius' treatment of "things necessary for salvation" reveals his evangelicalism; his treatment of "things not necessary for salvation" reveals his ecumenical concern. In his writing and teaching, Arminius carried out the evangelical and ecumenical principles set forth in the oration *De componendo dissidio religionis inter Christianos*.

284 Ibid.

James Arminius and Evangelical Ecumenism: Theory Becomes Practice

In his teaching Arminius stressed soteriological essentials, played down emphasis upon things which are not necessary to be believed for salvation, and stressed that this procedure was suited to the promotion of continued concord within Christianity. How did this teaching work itself out in his own practice? Did Arminius treat those who disagreed with him personally with the respect he called for in his writings? Did his view of respectful treatment of suspected heretics have a chance to be worked out in reality? Was Arminius serious with regard to the need and possibility of an ecumenical council for the Netherlands, or was his call mere rhetoric? Arminius the theoretical evangelic ecumenist has been described in previous chapters; Arminius the practising evangelical ecumenist awaits introduction.

Almost from the beginning of his ministry in Amsterdam, Arminius was the object of criticism because of his views which were considered unorthodox by strict Calvinists. When in 1590 he began to expound the seventh chapter of Romans the anger of another minister in the city, the famous Peter Plancius, was aroused.²⁸⁵ Plancius accused Arminius of the heresy of Socinianism and Pelagianism and Arminius replied using Erasmus among others in defence of his belief that the chapter had reference to the plight of the unregenerate desiring to do good but lacking the power of God to accomplish it.²⁸⁶ To Plancius the very desire for good cannot be attributed to the unregenerate lest the doctrine of absolute total depravity be compromised. Attacks upon Arminius continued to be made throughout 1592 and 1593, and Arminius finally insisted upon a meeting to discuss these charges; reconciliation was temporarily achieved.²⁸⁷ In 1596 and 1597, Arminius corresponded at length with Francis Junius on the subject of predestination, and as indicated in an earlier chapter of this dissertation, sought to convince Junius of the unevangelical nature of the ultra-predestinarian position.²⁸⁸

285 A. W. Harrison, *Arminianism* (London: Duckworth, 1937), 17. "Plancius was not only a divine, he was one of the chief promoters of Dutch voyages of discovery." In fact, he was the chief architect of the VOC, the Dutch East India Company: see Bangs, *Arminius*, 176-185, chapter entitled "The East Indian Trade," especially 178, 179, on Plancius, a noted cartographer and geographer.

286 Ibid.

287 Ibid.

288 Arminius, *Collatio cum Junio, Opera Theologica*, 458-633.

This purpose was also behind his lengthy *Examen libelli Perkinsius*, 1598, in which Arminius stressed the universality of the offer of the Atonement indicating his desire to see the boundaries of the offer of salvation enlarged by theologians.²⁸⁹ The tone of both of these sets of dialogue was respectful, the arguments were logical and the style dispassionate and moderate.²⁹⁰ There was an obvious attempt to persuade each of these thinkers to modify their views to conform to what Arminius was convinced was evangelical truth. It was apparently not his design to bring these discussions out into public view; neither the correspondence with Junius, nor the *Examen libelli Perkinsius* was published until after the death of the correspondents, including Arminius.²⁹¹

A. W. Harrison believed that 1600 marked the beginning of division between the political factions of Maurice and Oldenbarneveltd,²⁹² that is, between those desirous for the cessation of the war with Spain, for a measure of religious toleration in the Netherlands, and for a modicum of government control over the Dutch Church on the one hand, and on the other, those stricter Calvinists who were less tolerant, inclined to see the war carried on in order to defeat Catholic Spain, and who stood for the independence of the church from all lay or political control. Arminians were represented in the former party, and of course would bear the brunt of the attacks of the latter faction. “Strange though it may seem,” says Harrison, “the future of Arminianism was involved in this rivalry between the Dutch military and civil leaders. We will see how inextricably interwoven religion and politics were in this country.”²⁹³ Arminius himself would be criticized and suspected more strongly because of the political overtones of this division.

In 1602 the plague struck Amsterdam and Harrison relates that at least seven hundred were dying each week in the city.²⁹⁴ Bangs remarks upon the faithfulness of Arminius’ pastoral labours during this distressing time, and indicates that his evangelistic convictions were strengthened through this experience.²⁹⁵

289 Arminius, *Examen Libelli Perkinsius, Opera Theologica*, 634-782.

290 Note the opening words to Junius and the respectful tone throughout the Perkins’ treatise.

291 Harrison, *Arminianism*, 22. “The ‘Examination of Dr. Perkins’ Pamphlet’ was not published till after Arminius had died.” Note Ibid. 21, regarding the Junius letters: “Arminius sent the whole of the correspondence to Uitenbogaert in October 1597, so that he could have the benefit of the fullest criticism.”

292 Harrison, *Arminianism*, 22.

293 Ibid. 22.

294 Ibid. 23. Carl Bangs, *Arminius*, 172, speaks of an “estimated 20,000 victims” in Amsterdam, “sometimes as many as 1000 a day.”

295 Bangs, *Arminius*, 172-175. Harrison says, “Arminius himself remained at his post steadfast in prayer for the distressed city, comforting those who were in trouble.” *Arminianism*, 25. On Arminius’ valour during

The plague took the lives of Francis Junius and Lucas Trelcatius, two theological professors at Leiden University, and Arminius was sought as a successor for Junius.²⁹⁶ The opponents of Arminius did much to hinder his appointment, especially Cuchlinus and Francis Gomarus, the latter of whom gave Arminius little peace during Arminius' tenure as theological professor. (Cuchlinus was the Moderator of the Theological Faculty and Gomarus was the senior professor of Divinity.)²⁹⁷ On June 20, 1603, the degree of Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon Arminius and he commenced his teaching responsibilities. On this occasion he presented the evangelically-oriented Oration, *De Sacerdotio Christi*; this oration and his initial lectures in theology which followed it indicated the salvation-centred direction of his teaching; the aim of theology, he said, is the union of God and man – to the glory of the one and the salvation of the other.²⁹⁸

Francis Gomarus seemed determined to cause difficulty for Arminius; early in 1604 he objected to Arminius using the New Testament in his lectures, claiming that the New Testament was his sole province within the university.²⁹⁹ This pettiness was to be

the plague note Bertius' description, from the "Life of Arminius," *Works*, I, 175: "On one occasion when he was in a slum district, he heard the sound of crying in a house. He learned that the whole house was afflicted with the plague and tormented with thirst. He gave money to neighbours who were standing by for purchasing water, and when none would enter, he took the water in himself and imparted refreshment at once for the body and soul of every member of the afflicted family. Arminius' evangelistic determination (so he told Uitenbogaert in a letter – cited by Bangs, 173) was strengthened by two incidents of counselling dying individuals. These people were troubled with lack of Christian assurance, which they were equating with faith. Arminius carefully distinguished between the two concepts, explaining that faith is confidence that God has reconciled the world to himself in Christ. Each of these individuals was convinced that this was true, and Arminius urged them to rest their destiny upon this conviction. "Both were encouraged, he reported, and both were able to commend their souls to God." Ibid. 174. Bangs notes, "Arminius saw in this a confirmation of an earlier conviction of his, that theological precision is necessary for the practical faith lest confused notions should produce in the consciences of men uncomfortable uncertainty"

296 Harrison, *Arminianism*, 24, 25. Bangs, *Arminius*, Ch 17, "the Call to Leyden," 231-239. Note the long section on the call in *Works*, I, 172-194.

297 Harrison says that both men were against the appointment, *Arminianism*, 24. See Bangs, *Arminius*, 233, 234. Gomarus spoke strongly against Arminius before the University Curators, Bangs, 233: "The Curators were pleased neither by the content nor the vehemence of the address." Note Bangs' biographical sketch of Gomarus, 248. "In his theology he was one with Beza and Plancius, a supralapsarian. In his temperament he was fractious in the extreme. Junius himself ... delivered this judgement, 'That man pleases himself most wonderfully by his own remarks. He derives all his stock of knowledge from others ... if at any time he varies from his usual practice, he is exceedingly infelicitous in these occasional changes.' Perhaps nothing brought him into so much personal discredit as his violent attacks on the character of Arminius after the latter's death." Bertius' Funeral Oration appearing in *Works*, I, 74, 75 contains this statement on Gomarus, "The conduct of Gomarus on that occasion elicited the following remark from one of his shrewd contemporaries, 'I should much sooner choose to appear before the judgement of God with the faith of Arminius than with the charity of Gomarus.'" Further incidents of the "ungovernable maliciousness of Gomarus" are given, Ibid. 75, 76.

298 Arminius, *Oratio de Sacerdotio Christi, Opera Theologica*, 9-13.

299 Harrison, *Arminianism*, 27, 28.

but a prologue of his attempts to discredit Arminius later that year. On October 30, Gomarus presented his own position on predestination in the form of thirty-two theses, aggressively defending the supralapsarian position and attaching Arminius' teaching in a vicious way.³⁰⁰ Some of these theses have already been analysed in this dissertation; of this incident Harrison relates:

He showed that the decree of God's election or reprobation preceded the creation of the individuals who were destined to life or death, and violently attacked the views of Arminius who was present. In a letter to Uitenbogaert, Arminius spoke of his deep distress and denied that he had given Gomarus any cause of offence. He made no public reply to his colleague but drew up an examination of the theses Gomarus had put forward, which remained unpublished until 1645.³⁰¹

Once again Arminius refused to fight with the weapons of his enemies, and seems to have deliberately avoided treating his theological adversaries with the venomous jibes inflicted upon himself.

In 1605, in the midst of national strife and with these personal attacks being made against him constantly, Arminius served as Rector of Leyden University. The Curators of the university and "the chief officials were always on his side," reports Harrison.³⁰² But stories of his negative influence upon the orthodoxy of some of the students were spread about him nonetheless, and on June 30 three ministers from the South Holland Synod and two from the North Holland Synod came to discuss with him some of these reports.³⁰³ "They had heard novelties uttered by Leiden students in their several presbyteries and wished to clear up the subject at forthcoming synods. Arminius thought it better to confront such students with their professor if they contravened the Confession or the Catechism. This did not satisfy them, but Arminius would not agree to hold an official conference with them."³⁰⁴ Apparently he felt that this deputation would take his words back to their respective synods, and without his being there to defend himself, would use his words against him, and thus bring about a widening of the theological breach within the church. Instead he suggested a friendly and unofficial discussion, but this "did not

300 Ibid.

301 Ibid.

302 Ibid. 28.

303 Ibid. 30, 31. Arminius describes this encounter in the *Declaratio Sententiae, Opera*, 91-99. See Bangs Chapter, "The Declaration of Sentiments," *Arminius*, 307-316.

304 Harrison, *Arminianism*, 27,28.

satisfy his visitors and they went away disappointed.”³⁰⁵ Arminius was determined to keep silent on matters not yet officially decided upon by the whole church council. That he was not being merely stubborn and difficult is indicated by the fact that shortly after this incident he presented his public disputation on free will which to Harrison demonstrated “a conciliatory spirit.”³⁰⁶ When called upon to do so by an official body, he could clearly state his convictions obviously without fear of personal consequences, as he did when presenting the *Declaratio Sententiae*.³⁰⁷

In spite of his attempts to maintain concord, criticism of his views continued. The Dort presbytery indicated concern to the university officials and the theological faculty was called upon to respond.³⁰⁸ Arminius and other faculty members drew up and signed a document assuring their examiners that “more things are in dispute among the students than we like, but so far as we, the professors of the theological faculty are concerned, there is no dissension which in any way affects the fundamentals of doctrine.”³⁰⁹ Harrison says that Cuchlinus, one of the severest of Arminius’ critics, signed this declaration, although he had “recently arranged a lecture purposely to clash with that of Arminius and had ordered all the students to attend.”³¹⁰ In the midst then of this intense personal stress, Arminius continued to strive for peace and to do as much as anyone to keep the theological situation from becoming worse. At the end of August, the South Holland Synod sent representatives to the university to see what was being done about the accusations of heretical teaching; they were met with the above-mentioned declaration of the faculty and therefore had no grounds for further action.³¹¹

On February 8, 1606, Arminius presented the Oration, *De Componendo Dissidio Religionis Inter Christianos* on the occasion of leaving the office of University Rector.³¹² In the light of events preceding this oration over the space of many months the moderation and pacifism of this document is the more remarkable. It might have been expected that Arminius would have written a scathing denunciation of those attacking

305 Ibid. 31.

306 Ibid. 31.

307 Arminius, *Declaratio Sententiae*, 91-133.

308 Harrison, *Arminianism*, 30.

309 Ibid. Full text in *Works*, I, 39.

310 Harrison, 32.

311 Ibid.

312 Arminius, *De Componendo Dissidio Religionis Inter Christianos*, *Opera Theologica*, 73-91.

him, or might have written and spoken strongly in defence of the positions he was supposed to have been championing. Instead he chose to speak in behalf of concord, harmony, tolerance and evangelical ecumenism for the Dutch church.

Arminius' call for a national council of the Dutch Church did not fall on deaf ears. On March 15, 1606, the States General echoed his sentiments by calling for a national synod which among other responsibilities, should review the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, and would determine the theological direction of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands.³¹³ Strong Calvinists favouring rigid conformity to these symbols of the faith objected strenuously and Arminius, who was obviously father to the idea was under fire again.

That the decision to hold a national church council was more than just a political or theological promise which was not taken seriously in official circles was demonstrated in May of 16-7, when a preparatory conference was held at the Hague to draw up the proposed council's agenda.³¹⁴ Thirteen states were represented; two professors from Leiden and one from Franeker, Lubbertus, took part in the conference.³¹⁵ Arminius was one of the Leiden representatives and here again refused to be intimidated into a theological discussion regarding the issue of predestination, stating that this was a conference to plan for the council, not the council itself, which alone should have jurisdiction to deal with contentious issues.³¹⁶ Lubbertus was a strong supralapsarian and sent garbled reports of the preparatory conference to England, France and the Palatinate.³¹⁷ These reports put Arminius in the worst light.

The preparatory conference ended with division over the matter of the revision of the Confession and the Catechism. Lubbertus was opposed to the revisions, and Bogerman, a delegate from Leeuwarden

313 Harrison, 33.

314 Carl Bangs, *Arminius*, 289-291.

315 Harrison, 34,35. "Three professors of theology were present, Gomarus, Arminius and Sibrandus Lubbertus of Franeker. The last named theologian was a zealous Calvinist who had written to Reformed Churches abroad concerning the dangerous tendencies in the teaching of Arminius. He warned the Huguenot leaders against sending students to Leyden, and he wrote to Andrew Melville of St. Andrews that Arminius ... wished to change the doctrines of the church, giving a garbled account of the Hague Conference. In each case the news came back to the accused persons through the Dutch Ambassadors to England and France respectively."

316 Bangs, *Arminius*, 290. Note Arminius' introduction to the *Declaratio Sententiae*, 95 ff.

317 See note 31 above.

said repeatedly that the scriptures must be interpreted according to the Confession and the Catechism. Arminius wrote to Uitenbogaert later, ‘How could one state more clearly that they were determined to canonize these two human writings and to set them up as the idolatrous calves of Dan and Beersheba.’³¹⁸

At this time the synod of the Dutch Church were coming more and more under the domination of the rigid Calvinist party, and were displaying greater intolerance. “The South Holland Synod at Delft discussed the notion of driving all sectarians out of the land.”³¹⁹ Arminius was becoming more suspect because of his refusal to speak out against the Anabaptists.³²⁰

Far from becoming petulant and retreating into silence or vituperation, Arminius at this time was seeking for someone who would give him a fair and impartial hearing to declare his Christian orthodoxy and ecumenical integrity. Such an individual arose in the person of Hippolytus a Collibus, Ambassador of the Palatinate to the Hague. As indicated earlier, Arminius’ critics had sent reports about him to Heidelberg, and these had been sent by that Palatine University to Hippolytus for investigation. Hippolytus sent to Arminius himself for clarification, and when he received a lengthy letter containing Arminius’ answers to the charges, he was so impressed with them that he urged their publication: thus the appearance of the letter dated April 5, 1608.³²¹ In the letter Arminius insisted that his theology was entirely unheretical, and his sentiments were on the contrary in agreement with the most orthodox fathers of the church.³²² His desire to be recognized as in close association with the evangelical emphasis of the Reformation comes through most strongly in this late document. “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 do that which is evil.”³²³ When writing in response to the “theses of Gomarus,” Arminius defends the *sola fide* doctrine against the notion of predestination which ignores the necessity of faith. The preparatory conference for the national synod reveals an Arminius strongly defending the concept of *sola scriptura* against those who

318 Harrison, *Arminianism*, 35. This Bogerman later served as President of the Synod of Dort.

319 Harrison, 36.

320 Ibid. “For some years Arminius had been under orders to write a treatise against the Anabaptists, and it was one of the reasons for suspicion against him that this task was steadily postponed.

321 Harrison, 36, 37. *Arminius, Epistola ad Hippolytum a Collibus, Opera*, 937-948.

322 Ibid. *Epistola ad Hippolytum*, 940.

323 Ibid.

would place the interpretation of the Bible in a secondary position to the statements of the creeds and confessions of the church; in *Epistola ad Hippolytum a Collibus* the evangelical tenet of *sola gratia* is strongly defended with the approbation of the Palatine Calvinist ambassador. In the same month as this letter was published, Arminius petitioned the States of Holland for a national synod to clear himself, saying that he wished to keep to the teaching of the Reformed Church all the days of his life; apparently he was willing to waive the necessity of the revision of the confessions being a part of the conditions for calling the synod, all “In the interests of peace...”³²⁴ The States were not interested in convening a synod at this time but called Arminius and Gomarus to discuss publicly before them their differences. There was little agreement at this Hague conference, with Gomarus displaying an attitude of uncharitable bitterness.³²⁵

Oldenbarneveldt at this time was pressing for a treaty with Spain, further antagonizing his opponents who accused him (and Arminius with whom Oldenbarneveldt agreed theologically) of holding Jesuit sympathies.³²⁶ Arminius’ statements regarding the papacy although strongly anti-Catholic to our ears, did little to enhance his reputation as they were considered moderate at the time.

Arminius’ attitude toward the papacy was typically moderate. In 1608 anti-Catholic feeling was running very high in the Netherlands and Arminius was accused of holding pro-Catholic sentiments.³²⁷ To clear himself of these charges he spoke out vehemently against the pope in the “Public Disputation” entitled, “On the Roman Pontiff and the Principal Titles Which are Attributed to Him.” Arminius agrees with those who speak of the pope in opprobrious terms – adulterer, false prophet, destroyer and subverter of the church, the enemy of God, the Antichrist, etc. But then he includes a disclaimer which softens this attack considerably. “It is part of religious wisdom to separate the Court of Rome from the Church in which the Pontiff sits.”³²⁸ Bangs interprets these words to mean “it is possible that in spite of the sins of the Pope, there are possibly Roman Catholics who are Christians; or to put it less individualistically, that the church

324 Harrison, *Arminianism*, 38.

325 Harrison, 38, 39. See note 13 above.

326 Harrison, 39.

327 Bangs, *Arminius*, 303.

328 Arminius, “Public Disputations,” *Writings*, I, 631.

of Rome is in some sense a true church.”³²⁹ Bangs quotes from a letter of Arminius to Burgomaster Egbertzoon:

I openly profess that I do not hold the Roman Pontiff to be a member of Christ’s body, but to be an enemy, a traitor, sacrilegious, a blasphemer, a tyrant, and most violent usurper of a most unjust domination over the church: as the son of perdition, as the most notorious outlaw, etc. I understand, however, by the Pope one who exercises the Pontificate in the usual manner. But if some Adrian of Utrecht, supposing him to be elevated without dishonourable artifices to the Pontifical Chair, were actively to set about the reformation of the church, making a commencement with himself the Pope, and with the Pontificate, and with the Court at Rome, and assuming nothing more than the name and authority of bishop – though holding the pre-eminence over all other bishops by virtue of ancient statutes of the church – him I should not dare to call by the above appellations.³³⁰

An interesting episode in the biography of Arminius which illustrates his tolerance and unwillingness to see persecution applied to those who were not part of the national church concerns his actions with regard to the Dutch Anabaptists.³³¹

In June of 1599 the North Holland Synod made plans to expose the errors of Anabaptism with a view to their civil discipline. In September of that year the South Holland Agreed to participate in the project, and Arminius was assigned the task of writing against their beliefs. He took some time deciding whether or not to accept the responsibility, but finally agreed in early January 1600. In August of 1601 he reported that he had read all the Anabaptist literature he had been able to gather together, but was not yet prepared to report. The work was still not complete, he reported, in June of 1602. Again he announced that little progress was being made in 1603. More Anabaptist writings were sent to him in 1604, but no progress was reported that year. In 1605 he asked to be relieved of this responsibility and in 1606 the project was dropped! How is this half-heartedness of Arminius to be accounted for? Bangs believes that Arminius was impressed with many of the beliefs of the Anabaptists which were similar to his own, especially in the areas of grace and predestination. “He was sympathetic to the Anabaptist point of view and Anabaptists were commonly in attendance at his preaching.”³³² Whatever the reasons for his reluctance to write against them, the reluctance stands as an

329 Bangs, *Arminius*, 304.

330 *Ibid.*

331 Bangs, *Arminius*, 166-171.

332 *Ibid.* 171.

example of his theories expressed in the document *De Componendo Dissidio Religionis Inter Christianos* being worked out in practice.

Similarly, Arminius' treatment of the Brownists exemplified this attitude of moderate toleration and ecumenical acceptance. The Brownists were English separatists who had come to Amsterdam seeking religious asylum.³³³ In spite of the fact that they were given this asylum and allowed to worship freely, they spoke out against the Dutch Reformed Church on many issues of polity, doctrine, and practice.³³⁴ Ultimately they published a tract against the church which was answered by Francis Junius on January 9, 1599. Two months later Arminius wrote to Junius defending this stand in relation to the Brownists.³³⁵ In this letter the Brownists are not condemned and there is an attitude of toleration of those still considered to be brothers in spite of their harsh sentiments:

of this fact (that we ever charged the Brownists with schismatic heresy as they claim) we declare ourselves to be entirely ignorant. We certainly endured with such a degree of sorrow as was not improper to us this secession of theirs from our churches; and we signified the same in their presence, with a fraternal declaration of our sincere regret. But we did not censure their defection with any such ignominious epithets because we were prohibited solely by our brotherly feelings towards them and our Christian sympathy. Had not these prevented us, more than one occasion would have occurred both of mourning over them and of making a declaration of a more serious nature against them.³³⁶

It must be noted that Arminius was not alone in this recognition. As Bangs relates, "The Dutch churches were willing to grant that the Brownists were true Reformed Christians, and they did not find fault with Brownist views on the doctrines of salvation. What offended the Dutch was the Brownists' uncompromising and total rejection of the polity and practice of the Dutch Churches."³³⁷

On October 30, 1608, Arminius was asked to present his theology before a special meeting of the States General. He responded with the *Declaratio Sententiae*.³³⁸ As noted earlier in analysing this document, the tone of "the Declaration" is apologetic but not offensively polemic. Arminius called for examination and possible modification of rigid views of predestination which he felt were dangerous for the cause of evangelical and

333 Ibid. 156.

334 Ibid. 156, 157.

335 Ibid. 158.

336 Ibid. 159.

337 Ibid.

338 Arminius, *Declaratio Sententiae, Writings*, I, 9-133.

ecumenical endeavour. The *Declaratio* closed with a request for tolerance on the part of those who disagreed with his views on this subject and Arminius promised to maintain his own tolerance and patience until the issue could be thoroughly debated and concluded by the national council of the whole church.³³⁹

This was the last serious public endeavour of Arminius. In June and August of 1609 he met Gomarus in public debate; the latter conference had to be terminated before it was concluded because of Arminius' ill health, which eventually took his life on October 19 of that year.³⁴⁰

339 Ibid. 132-133.

340 Harrison, *Arminianism*, 42.

James Arminius' Conscious Allegiance
to a Perceived Tradition of Evangelical Ecumenism

Although it is the primary doctrine within Evangelical Theology, according to Arminius salvation is not the only doctrine. There exists a larger body of theological truth of which salvation teaching is a part and this belief structure, the “fundamental articles of the Christian religion,” must be adhered to if one is to be called Christian in the truly historical and biblical sense. In this chapter the major theological emphases of Arminius will be examined to demonstrate what he considered to be essential for any ecumenical theology – beliefs required of all Christians through the centuries and necessary to be believed in every age. The ecumenism of Arminius, it will be shown, was limited by the boundaries of conservative, orthodox theology; doctrinal innovations he said, militate against Christian unity. As he explicated these “fundamental articles,” Arminius showed that he perceived himself as standing within a stream of historic evangelical Christian thought, and constantly identified himself with the views of widely held Protestant theology. Where major Protestant thinkers went astray (in his opinion) from biblical evangelicalism, Arminius does not hesitate to criticize and depart from them.

In his discussion of the major doctrines of Christianity Arminius displayed his orthodoxy, and disclaimed any sympathy with sentiments which had been adjudged heretical in the course of Christian history.³⁴¹ His treatment of the attributes of God for example, is quite classical, and even scholastic,

The essence of God therefore, neither consists of material, integral and quantitative parts, of matter or form, of kind and difference, of subject and accident, nor of form and the thing formed ... neither hypothetically and through nature, through capability and actuality nor through essence and being. Hence God is his own essence and his own Being and is the same in that which is and that by which it is.³⁴²

Such qualities as God's incorporeality, immensity, infinity and incorruptibility are all treated in this orthodox and logical manner.³⁴³ When Arminius considered the wisdom

341 E.g. in *Disputationes Publicae, Opera Theologica* 216 ff., *Writings*, I, 434 ff.

342 Ibid. 216. “De natura Dei”.

343 Ibid. 216-219.

of God he did spend many pages pondering the problem of contingency versus necessity and/or freedom in the knowing of God, and he logically concluded that human freedom is grounded in the nature of God. This quotation will serve to illustrate something of the complexity of Arminius' theological style:

Through the understanding of God be certain and infallible, yet it does not impose any necessity on things, nay, it rather establishes in them a contingency ... Therefore if the mode of the thing be contingent, it will know it to be contingent; which cannot be done, if the mode of the thing be changed into a necessary one... it is therefore affirmed with truth concerning thus that things do not exist because God knows them as about to come into existence, but he knows future things because they are future.

....

Through his own will and by means of his power God is the cause of all other things; yet so that when he acts through second causes either with them on in them, he does not take away their own peculiar mode of acting with which they have been divinely endued, but he suffers them according to their own mode to produce their own effects, necessary things necessarily, contingent things contingently, free things freely...³⁴⁴

Other aspects of divinity such as the Trinity and the eternal generation of the Son of God are treated in classical orthodox conservative theological fashion e.g. the Nicene formulae regarding the Trinity and the relationship of the Christ to the Father and the Holy Spirit are carefully defended.³⁴⁵ Sabellianism, the ancient anti-Trinitarian teaching he denounced: "so that the blindness of Sabellius was most wonderful, who could possibly be in darkness amidst such a splendour of daylight?"³⁴⁶

As Arminius moved from the consideration of God to the theology of man, the subject of original sin and indeed the nature of sin in general were concepts demanding explication.³⁴⁷ Here, too, Arminius reflects the Protestant emphasis upon depravity. Man alone was guilty of the first transgression, and the consequences were dire: "But the guilt of this sin can by no means be transfused to God ... for he neither perpetrated this crime through man nor employed against man any action either external or internal by which he might incite him to sin."³⁴⁸ Through the disobedience of Adam mankind lost original righteousness and incurred two deaths, spiritual separation from God and physical loss of

344 Ibid. 222, 223; 225.

345 Ibid. 231-325.

346 Ibid. 237.

347 Ibid. 239.

348 Ibid. 240.

earthly life. All mankind was in the loins of Adam when he sinned, “and with these evils they would remain oppressed forever, unless they were liberated by Christ Jesus, to whom be glory forever.”³⁴⁹

As his lecture notes indicate, Arminius was troubled about the concept of theodicy – the relation that exists between God and evil, for there is a long section on this topic in his treatment of man and sin.³⁵⁰ Because of his chief interest in salvation, Arminius was troubled by the existence of evil in the world, and sought a scriptural explanation to this problem. What is God’s responsibility with regard to evil and what action has God taken to overcome it: “Granting therefore that sin has exceeded the order of every thing created, yet it is circumscribed within the order of the creator himself and the chief good.”³⁵¹ His conclusions on this subject led him to posit sovereignty for God to grant freedom and responsibility to man.

It is clearly evident, we think, that because evils have entered into the world neither providence itself, nor its government respecting evil ought to be denied. Neither can God be accused of being guilty of injustice on account of this his governance; not only because he hath administered all things to the best ends ... but much more because he hath employed that form of administration which allows intelligent creatures not only of their own choice and spontaneously, but likewise freely to perform and accomplish their own motions and actions.³⁵²

This may sound at first as though an idea of free will for man before and after the fall of Adam was a part of the teaching offered here by Arminius; but he went on to teach the loss of free will and its powers as a result of the Fall, and thus indicated his agreement with current Protestant thinking at least as far as this doctrine was concerned.³⁵³ If by free will is meant present freedom for man from sin and its dominion, there is no freedom he asserted. The powers of man to understand, will, and do the good that is required for acceptance with God are lost to men.³⁵⁴ In the unregenerate, he insisted, free will is wounded, marred, infirm, bent and weakened – in his words “imprisoned, destroyed, and lost.”³⁵⁵ Certainly this language is a strong statement of human depravity. But divine grace is not lost sight of in the midst of this negative material on sin, for he taught that the

349 Ibid. 242.

350 “De Iustitia et Efficacia Providentiae Dei in malo,” 246-255.

351 Ibid. 247.

352 Ibid. 254.

353 Ibid. 262, “De Libero Hominis Arbitrio Eiusque Viribus.”

354 Ibid. 263.

355 Ibid. “captivatum, perditum, amissum,” 263.

powers of human freedom,” 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.”³⁵⁶ Arminius therefore stressed depravity, only allowing man enough free will to reject the gospel when unaided by grace.

One of the constituent elements in the process of attaining salvation is repentance, to which Arminius gave considerable attention.³⁵⁷ Repentance he defined as a change of the mind, the affections and the will; the mind change is repentance, the affectionate response is penitence and the wilful turning to God from sin is conversion from the manward side; the whole process from God’s side is known as regeneration.³⁵⁸ The efficient cause of repentance is God working inwardly, His goodness and grace breaking down man’s hostile rebellion. Repentance is not meritorious, the only merit considered in the scheme of salvation being the obedience and the death of Christ.³⁵⁹ The principal cause of repentance is man himself having produced within him by the grace of God a sense of guilt and a desire for deliverance, faith and hope being aroused by the message of the mercy and pardon of God. The law and the gospel are the instrumental causes and the fruit of repentance is the remission of sins on the part of God and good works on the part of man wrought through the efficacy of grace and divine enablement.³⁶⁰ The ultimate end of repentance is the glory of God. “Repentance, penitence, or conversion is an act of the entire man by which in his understanding he disapproves of sin universally considered, in his affections he hates it, and as perpetrated by himself is sorry for it and in the whole of his life avoids it.”³⁶¹

Faith is assent given to truth divinely revealed. The external foundation of faith is the veracity of God and the internal foundation is the truth of God who has spoken to the conscience.³⁶² Faith is of two kinds, legal and evangelical – the object of legal faith is God and the object of evangelical faith is God in Christ. In the act of saving faith sinful man acknowledges his sins and is penitent on account of them; this faith is necessary to bring one to belief. Of course the end of faith is salvation and ultimately the glory of

356 Ibid.

357 Ibid. “De Resipiscentia,” 288.

358 Ibid. 289.

359 Ibid. 289.

360 Ibid. 290.

361 Ibid. 289.

362 Arminius, *Disputationes Privatae, Opera Theologica*, 395.

God. “Evangelical faith is an assent of the mind produced by the Holy Spirit, through the gospel, in sinners, who, through the law know and acknowledge their sins, and are penitent on account of them, by which they are not only fully persuaded within themselves that Jesus Christ has been constituted by God the author of salvation to those who obey him and that he is their saviour if they have believed in him and by which also they believe in him and through him in God as the benevolent father, to the salvation of believers and the glory of Christ and God.”³⁶³

Arminius treated the doctrine of justification in many places, among them a lengthy passage in the *Disputationes Privatae*³⁶⁴ and when he does he demonstrates allegiance to the Reformation sine-qua-non of justification by faith. He defined justification as “a just and gracious act of God as a judge, by which, from the throne of his grace and mercy he absolves from his sins a man, a sinner, but who is a believer, on account of Christ, and the obedience and righteousness of Christ, and considers him righteous, to the salvation of the justified person and to the glory of divine righteousness and grace.”³⁶⁵ He elaborated:

God through his gracious mercy toward us has made Christ to be sin for us ... and because he has placed communion with Christ in the faith of the gospel and has set forth Christ as the propitiation through faith ... As a sinner, man needs justification through grace and as a believer he obtains justification through grace.³⁶⁶

Faith is the instrumental cause of justification, “the act by which we apprehend Christ proposed to us by God ... according to the command and promise of the gospel.”³⁶⁷ By the act of justifying sinners, God reckons them righteous, imputes the righteousness of Christ to them and grants them faith for the development of their own righteousness. The effect of justification is that it produces peace with God, tranquillity of conscience, rejoicing in affliction, hope and the assured expectation of life eternal.³⁶⁸ This statement could have come from Luther’s pen: “That faith and works concur together in

363 Ibid. 395. (*Fides Evangelica*).

364 Ibid. 399 (*De Iustificazione*).

365 Ibid. 399.

366 Ibid. 400.

367 Ibid. 400.

368 Ibid. 400.

justification is a thing impossible. But the merit of Christ is opposed to justification by works and in the scriptures faith and merit are placed in opposition to one another.”³⁶⁹

Near the end of the *Apologia Adversus Articulos* Arminius answered the charge that he did not believe in justification by faith alone, but had suggested that works too, were necessary:

I know the saints who will be placed before the tribunal of Divine Justice have had faith and through faith have performed good works. But I think they appear and stand before God in this confidence or trust, ‘that God hath set forth his Son Jesus Christ as a propitiation through faith in his blood that they may be justified by the faith of Jesus Christ through the remission of sin.’ I do not read that Christ is constituted a propitiation through works in his blood, that we may also be justified through works.³⁷⁰

Perhaps it was argued, Arminius did believe in justification by faith alone, but that he possibly looked upon faith as a work of merit; to this charge he answered with an illustration:

A rich man lavishly bestows alms upon a beggar to meet his and his family’s needs. Does it cease to be a pure gift because the beggar extends his hand to receive it? Can it be said with propriety that the alms depend partly on the liberality of the donor and partly on the liberty of the receiver, though the latter would not have possessed the alms unless he had received it by stretching out his hand? Can it be correctly said, because the beggar is always prepared to receive that he can have the alms or not have it just as he please?³⁷¹

Faith, he declared, is not a work worthy of saving grace. “It is not our wish to do the least injury to divine grace by taking from it anything that belongs to it. But let my brethren take care that they themselves neither inflict an injury on divine justice by attributing that to it which it refuses nor on divine grace by transforming it into something else which cannot be called grace.”³⁷²

How did Arminius define ‘grace’? “Grace is the gratuitous affection by which God is kindly affected towards a miserable sinner and according to which he, in the first place, gave his son, ‘that whosoever believeth in him might have eternal life’ and afterwards he justifies him in Christ Jesus and for his sake and adopts him to the right of

369 Ibid. 400.

370 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos, Writings*, I, 362.

371 Ibid. 365, 366.

372 Ibid. 366.

a son unto salvation.”³⁷³ Grace is thus an infusion of the Spirit’s gifts into the life of the believer, indeed grace *is* the Holy Spirit perpetually aiding and assisting the believer, granting the power to engage in good works for God’s glory.³⁷⁴ “In this manner I ascribe to grace the commencement, the continuance and the consummation of all good and to such an extent do I carry its influence that a man though already regenerate can neither conceive, will, nor do any good thing at all nor resist any evil temptation without this preventing, this exciting, this following and cooperating grace... I do no injury to grace by ascribing too much to free will. Free will answers the question, can grace be resisted? I acknowledge as much to grace as any man.”³⁷⁵

One of the charges levelled against Arminius was that his teaching was Pelagian, setting aside the primacy of grace in human salvation, and emphasizing the good works which men are capable of performing by nature.³⁷⁶ The previously quoted sentiments illustrate that his concept of justification by grace through faith was identical to that of the leading evangelical Protestants. Human nature apart from God’s regenerating grace is depraved and lost: “I do not think that such properties as these can without falsehood and injury to divine grace be ascribed to nature which when destitute of grace and the Spirit of God tends directly downward to those things which are earthly ... We always and on all occasions make this grace to precede, to accompany, and to follow and without which, we constantly assert, no good action whatever can be produced by man ... How can a man without the assistance of divine grace perform anything which is acceptable to God ...”³⁷⁷ Arminius clearly emerges as a defender of the Reformation emphasis on salvation by grace through faith.

One question about which he had been accused of holding Pelagian sentiments had to do with the matter of the possible moral perfection achievable by believers in this life. He was hesitant to address himself to this question, and tentatively offers the opinion that by God’s grace one might attain perfection in life even as Augustine had speculated.³⁷⁸ But Arminius insisted that if it is possible, it is so only “by the grace of

373 Arminius, *Declaratio Sententiae, Opera Theologica*, 123.

374 Ibid. 122.

375 Ibid. 122.

376 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos, Opera*, 156.

377 Ibid. 158.

378 Arminius, *Declaratio Sententiae, Opera*, 124.

God and by no means without it.”³⁷⁹ At this point in his argument in the *Declaratio Sententiae* he heartily disclaimed identification with Pelagianism. “I now declare that account this sentiment of Pelagius to be heretical and diametrically opposed to those words of Christ, ‘without me ye can do nothing’. It is likewise very destructive and inflicts a most grievous wound on the glory of Christ.”³⁸⁰ As to a definition of justification by faith which would comprehensively include the ideas of grace and the righteousness God demands Arminius offered this:

I believe that sinners are accounted righteous solely by the obedience of Christ and that the righteousness of Christ is the only meritorious cause on account of which God pardons the sins of believer ... To a man who believes faith is imputed for righteousness through grace ‘through faith in Christ’s blood.’³⁸¹

These views he claims are those “which are held unanimously by the Reformed and Protestant Churches and which are in complete agreement with their expressed opinions.”³⁸² On the theme of justification by grace through faith he declared that he was prepared to give his signature as a subscriber to Calvin’s statements on this subject as contained in the *Institutes*. “This I am fully prepared to do at any time and to give them y full approval.”³⁸³

This is not to say that Arminius gave unqualified support to the writings of Calvin. Note both his praise and his qualifications in this quote:

The rumour about my advising the students to read the works of the Jesuits and of Coornhert, I can call by no other name than a lie; for never to any one, either by request or spontaneously, have I uttered a word on that subject. So far from this, after the reading of the Scripture, which I strenuously inculcate, and more than any other ... I recommend that the Commentaries of Calvin be read, whom I extol in higher terms than Helmichius himself, as he owed to me, ever did. For I affirm that in the interpretation of the Scriptures Calvin is incomparable, and that his Commentaries are more to be valued than anything that is handed down to us in the Bibliotheca of the Fathers; so much so, that I concede to him a certain spirit of prophecy in which he stands distinguished above others, above most, yea, above all. His *Institutes* so far as respects Common Places, I give out to be read after the Catechism, as a more extended

379 Ibid. 124.

380 Ibid. 126.

381 Ibid. 127.

382 Ibid. 126.

383 Ibid. 127.

explanation. But here I add – *with discrimination*; as the writings of all men ought to be read.³⁸⁴

Arminius could be very discriminating when speaking of some of the ideas of Calvin. For all of his respect for Calvin, Arminius recognized what he considered to be a dangerous stress in Calvin and in Calvin's successor Theodore Beza with regard of course to the matter of unconditional predestination. In the *Collatio cum Junio* Arminius quotes Beza, identifies the ideas of Beza with those of Calvin, and indicates his strong disapproval of the direction of the thinking of the great Genevans:

Beza expresses himself... in his conference with Mombelgartes; "let us," says Beza, "lay down these principles. God, an infinitely wise architect, and whose wisdom is unlimited, when he determined to create the world, and especially the human race had a certain proposed end ... For the eternal and immutable purpose of God was antecedent to all causes, because He decreed in Himself from eternity to create all men for His own glory. But the Glory of God is neither acknowledged nor celebrated unless his mercy and justice is declared. Therefore, He made an eternal and immutable decree by which He destined some particular individuals, of mere grace, to eternal life, and some, by an act of judgement, to eternal damnation, that He might declare His mercy in the former, but his justice in the latter. Since God had proposed this end to himself in the creation of men, it was necessary that He should also devise the way and the means by which he could attain that end ... So also ... it was necessary that man should be so created that, without the destruction of his nature, he might be a fit subject that in him God might declare his own justice. For He could not declare His own justice in man unless He should have destined him to eternal damnation ..."³⁸⁵

This is of course the supralapsarian doctrine, and Arminius attributes it here to both Calvin and Beza: "Calvin and Beza assert this in plain and most manifest declarations..."³⁸⁶ To Arminius this view is unscriptural, unevangelical, making God the author of sin and rendering man morally irresponsible. Arminius denounces the two Reformed theologians for their view, and indicates that Junius' attempts to modify their unecumenical exaggerations have been (as far as he is concerned) unsuccessful:

Beza himself concedes that it is incomprehensible how God can be free from and man be possessive of guilt, if man fell by the ordination of God, and of necessity. This then was to be done: their [Calvin's and Beza's]

384 Arminius' letter to Egebertzoon, May 3, 1603, quoted by Bangs, *Arminius*, 289.

385 Arminius, *Collatio cum Junio*, *Writings*, III, 27.

386 *Ibid.* 179.

theory was to be freed from the consequence of that absurdity, which in my argument, I ascribe to it. It was not, however, necessary to show how God ordained sin, and that He is not indeed the author of sin. I agree with you, both in the explanation of that ordination, and in the assertion that God is not the author of sin. Calvin himself, and Beza also, openly deny that God is the author of sin, although they define ordination as we have seen, but they do not show how these two things can be reconciled. I wish then, that it might be shown plainly, and with perspicuity that God is not made the author of sin by that decree, or that the theory might be changed, since it is a stumbling block to many, indeed to some a cause of separating from us, and to very many a cause of not uniting with us. But I am altogether persuaded that you also perceive that consequence but prefer to free the theory of those men [Calvin and Beza] from an absurd and blasphemous consequence, by a fit explanation, than to charge that consequence to it. This is certainly the part of candor and good will, but used to no good purpose, since the gloss, as they say, is contrary to the text which is manifest to any one who examines and compares the text with the gloss.³⁸⁷

We have already noted that this doctrine was becoming predominant in much Dutch Reformed thought (e.g. the “Theses of Gomarus”): Arminius calls it absurd and blasphemous, and implicates Calvin in the production of it. With this in mind it is somewhat difficult to agree with the conclusions presented in Carl Bangs’ dissertation with regard to the Calvinism of Arminius:

It has been apparent through this description of the later writings that Arminius stands firmly within the tradition of Calvin and the Reformed theology. It is impossible to regard Arminius as an outsider to Calvinism. It is likewise impossible to regard Arminius as only a protagonist of an anti-Calvinism. Nor is he simply the opponent of Beza ... Arminius is by his language, content, and explicit confession, makes evident his loyalty to the Reformation and to Calvinism.³⁸⁸

It appears that Bangs is trying too hard to fit Arminius into the Procrustean bed of Calvinism. In an effort to prove the essential Reformed-mindedness of Arminius, Bangs smooths over these obviously ‘un-Calvinisms’ of Arminius. From the above quote it

387 Ibid. Note also this comment on Calvin from the “Theses of Gomorus”: “Nor has the commendation of those Doctors Calvin and Beza, to whose doctrine that [supralapsarianism] is imputed, anything to do with the matter. For they may deserve well of the church, and yet be entangled in some error: and the illustrious restorers of the churches perhaps did not spy out everything with which the church was deformed, and perchance themselves guilt a superstructure of some errors upon a true foundation; which might easily happen to those who were not immediately instructed by God and let into all truth without peril of error ...” *Works*, III, 565.

388 Bangs, *Arminius and Reformed Theology*, 194.

would seem that Arminius identified Calvin with the position of supralapsarianism; Bangs would not include Calvin among the supralapsarians; if Arminius diverged, it was not from Calvin:

Arminius diverges, to be sure, from others who regarded themselves as the only true inheritors of the Reformed tradition. A cluster of these divergences centres around the concept of grace as God's affection to man as sinner. In this, however, it seems that it is Arminius who stands closest to the soteriological and Christological concern of the Reformers and that it is the supralapsarians who diverge from Calvin and the Reformed confessions.³⁸⁹

There seems to be confusion on the part of Bangs as he insists upon the Calvinism of Arminius, even as he lists important areas of disagreement between the two theologians; Bangs seems to be tautologically asserting, "Arminius is a Calvinist, except where he is not a Calvinist."

There is another group of divergences, however, which are more marked and which more clearly set Arminius off from traditional Reformed doctrine. These have to do with the resistibility of grace, the perfection of believers, assurance, and perseverance. While at these points Arminius acknowledges some deviation from at least some passages in Calvin, he still claims, and with considerable success, that his views are consonant with Scripture as interpreted by Augustine and even by the Reformed confessions ... This is to say that the later writings, as well as the earlier, show Arminius to be legitimately a Reformed theologian ... He is a Calvinist, although he reserves and exercises the right to make corrections and modifications where he feels that the great reformer had been blind to certain problems within his own system.³⁹⁰

But why is it necessary or desirable to defend the Calvinism of Arminius so strenuously? Bangs is to be commended for his effort to demonstrate the identification of Arminius with genuine Reformation theology and the tradition of indigenous Dutch Reformed-minded thought which had its roots in Erasmianism and the *Devotio Moderna*, a tradition which can legitimately be labelled evangelical and Reformed in the broad sense of the word, but which knew nothing of the supralapsarianism of high Calvinism. This tradition can be called Calvinist only in the very broadest sense: where it stressed as Calvin certainly did the Reformation emphases of evangelicalism, that is, justification by grace through faith according to the plan of salvation clearly laid down in the authoritative

389 Ibid.

390 Ibid. 194, 195.

scriptures. This is the tradition to which Arminius belonged but it is a tradition broader than Calvin. When Calvin identified with this tradition, Arminius lauded him and praised his writing. When Calvin presented ideas inimical to this tradition, Arminius did not hesitate to depart from him, or from those whose ideas were attributable to him, identifying himself at those points with other Reformation theologians, however non-Calvinist, whom he recognized as being consistent in their evangelicalism:

This doctrine of Predestination (supralapsarianism) has been rejected both in former times and in our own days, by the greater part of the professors of Christianity. But omitting all mention of the periods that occurred in former ages, facts themselves declare, that the Lutheran and Anabaptist churches, as well as that of Rome account this to be an erroneous doctrine. However highly Luther and Melancthon might at the very commencement of the Reformation have approved of this doctrine, they afterwards deserted it. This change in Melancthon is quite apparent from his later writings; And those who style themselves “Luther’s Disciples” make the same statement respecting their master while they contend that on this subject he made a more distinct and copious declaration of his sentiments, instead of entirely abandoning those which he formerly entertained. But Philip Melancthon believed that this doctrine did not differ greatly from the Fate of the Stoics. This appears from many of his writings but more particularly in a certain letter which he addressed to Gaspar Peucer, and in which, among other things, he states: “Laelius writes to me and says, that the controversy respecting the stoical fate is agitated with such uncommon fervor at Geneva that one individual is cast into prison because he happened to differ from Zeno. O unhappy times! When the doctrine of salvation is thus obscured by certain strange disputes!”³⁹¹

This lengthy quote is significant in revealing the following attitudes in Arminius’ thought. First it demonstrates his identification with the beliefs of Lutherans, and especially with those of the later Melancthon on the issue of predestination. Arminius was obviously familiar with Melancthon’s ideas and positively inclined toward them. Second, his guarded criticism of Calvin (Zeno), and the undue emphasis being placed on predestination in Geneva is manifested. Third, Arminius is in agreement with the exasperation of Melancthon regarding the fact that emphasis upon hyper-predestinarianism is anti-evangelical, obscuring the doctrine of salvation.

Arminius, therefore, consciously identified himself with the tradition of biblical evangelicalism which he perceived as not being represented by those strictly adhering to

³⁹¹ Arminius, *Declaratio Sententiae, Opera Theologica*, 115.

Calvin's tenets. This tradition he recognized as encompassed within Melancthonian Lutheranism, and here he implicitly maintains an ideological kinship with Melancthon.

"Melancthon and his followers" are again referred to when Arminius answered the charge that he taught the possibility of apostasy as a novel belief. Arminius said in the *Apologia Contra Adversos* that the fathers and even the Harmony of Confessions of the Reformed Churches subscribe to this possibility.³⁹² In other words Arminius believed this idea to be legitimate within the framework of accepted Protestant thinking. Incidentally he defines what he means by the term Reformed in this article, and his definition is rather broad: "... those churches that have seceded from Popery and have come under the denomination of 'protestants', and 'the Reformed.'"³⁹³ He then proceeded to demonstrate that Prosper and Augustine taught the possibility of apostasy and went on to show that the Augsburg Confession suggested the idea as well.³⁹⁴ "Besides, Philip Melancthon and his followers and the greater portion of the Lutheran Churches are of the opinion that faith is bestowed even on the non-elect. Yet we are not afraid of acknowledging these Lutherans for brethren."³⁹⁵

A comparison between the thought of Philip Melancthon and that of Arminius reveals striking similarities, and it is surprising that these have not been explored before. The following chapter will examine the question of Melancthon's ecumenical and evangelical approach and will seek to demonstrate the relationship between Melancthon's and Arminius' evangelical ecumenism.

392 Arminius, *Apologia Adversus Articulos, Opera*, 134.

393 Ibid. 134.

394 Ibid. 135.

395 Ibid. 135.

Arminius, Melanchthon and Bucer:
Ideological Links with Earlier Evangelical Ecumenism

Sufficient evidence has been put forth in the preceding pages to demonstrate the reality of James Arminius' evangelical ecumenism. The last chapter made reference to Arminius' identification with the evangelical spirit of other reformers, and especially of Philip Melanchthon's place in Arminius' esteem. In the following pages a description of Melanchthon's evangelical ecumenism will be drawn, similarities between his and Arminius' ecumenical outlook will be described, and an attempt will be made to trace some possible links between Melanchthon's ideas and those of Arminius. The purpose of this exercise is to establish a place for Arminius within a wider historical context of evangelical ecumenism.

From 1530 until his death in 1560 Philip Melanchthon worked almost unceasingly in the cause of church unity both with Catholics and Protestants. For these efforts Clyde Manschreck was willing to grant him the title, "Father of the Ecumenical Movement."³⁹⁶ Melanchthon, said Manschreck, "was one of the very few who tried to bind together the segments of Reformation Christianity, and was one of the first to realize the unitive significance of the Eucharist."³⁹⁷ As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the part played by Melanchthon at the Diet of Augsburg, 1530, the Wittenberg Concord of 1536, the Regensburg agreement of 1541, and his responses to invitations to participate in ecumenical dialogues in France and England (1535 and 1537 respectively), are illustrative of this ecumenical spirit. These endeavors are worthy of some explanation.

³⁹⁶ Clyde Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959), 229. Other biographies of Melanchthon include those of Carl Smith (1860), J. W. Richard (1896), Karl Hartfelder (1896), H. Borkmann (1947), and Robert Stupperich (1965). Collected works of Melanchthon include the monumental contribution of Bretschneider and Bindseil, the Latin *Opera Omnia* of Melanchthon, Vol I-XXVIII of the *Corpus Reformatorium* (CR), begun in 1834 and augmented in 1897 by the *Supplementa Melanchthoniana*. Monographic studies have appeared on anniversaries of Melanchthonian significance – e.g. in 1930 the Jubilee celebrations for the Augsburg Confession saw the publishing of E. Werner Elert's *Morphologie de Lutherums*, and Hans Engellund's *Melanchthon, Glauben und Handeln*, and in 1960 the 400th anniversary of Melanchthon's death produced several noteworthy books and articles including an excellent anthology of essays, edited by Vilmos Vajta, *Luther and Melanchthon*. Note also Robert Stupperich's "Postscript – A Word About Melanchthon Research," *Melanchthon*, 151-159.

³⁹⁷ Clyde Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 229.

At Augsburg in 1530, Melanchthon served as the chief architect of the Augsburg Confession, a comprehensive defence of Lutheran Theology.³⁹⁸ A letter written by Melanchthon to his brother from Augsburg indicates something of the serious sense of responsibility he felt in the midst of this undertaking.³⁹⁹ The Protestant theology must be presented so carefully that there would be no misunderstanding serious enough to bring about the catastrophe of schism and possibly war, he noted. He has sought to make the truth of the evangelical position as clear as possible in order that the emperor and the Catholic representatives will understand that there is no real need for reprisals and repression of the Protestants. The doctrine will be seen to be that of primitive Christianity and not necessarily inimical to tolerant recognition. “Dear brother,” he wrote, “I dare not drop the matter so long as I live. Not through my fault shall peace be destroyed ... I must maintain my principle of omitting everything that increases bitterness. God is my witness that my intentions (to work diligently that peace might be preserved) have been good.”⁴⁰⁰ Manschreck cites evidence to prove that during the months he spent at Augsburg while writing the Augsburg Confession, Melanchthon engaged in negotiations with several imperial secretaries in the hope that concessions could be made on both sides which might end in the production of a genuinely reformed and undivided church.⁴⁰¹ These promising negotiations were broken off, however, as other representatives from both sides discovered the secret meetings and decided that too much was being compromised.⁴⁰² Of course the Confession when read to the Augsburg Diet was not accepted by the Imperial delegates and Melanchthon had to write the Apology defending it against the *Confutatio Pontifica* of Eck. In the midst of this laborious effort Melanchthon wrote to his friend Silberboner, that one of the purposes of the Confession and the Apology was to demonstrate that the evangelicals had done as much as possible to defend the truth and to keep the peace of the church.

The story of the Convention, is a long drama of tragedy. Yet our confession will show until the end of time that we piously and conscientiously thought about and sincerely endeavoured to set forth the doctrine of the church universal and to extend the glory of Christ... If we

398 “The Augsburg Confession,” *Creeds of Christendom*, III, Philip Schaff, ed., 1-73.

399 Melanchthon, quoted by Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 182.

400 Ibid. See also J. W. Richard, *Melanchthon*, 205.

401 Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 187, 188.

402 Ibid. 191.

are suppressed by ungodly means, our writing will show generations to come that our opponents ... stirred up the prince against us and did not concern themselves with either the upbuilding of the church or the glorification of the name of Christ. The matter now rests with God alone

...⁴⁰³

At Augsburg, then, Melanchthon seems to have been striving to clarify the Protestant position so that it would be clearly understood, being convicted that such a clear rendering of Reformation views would dispel rancor and promote pacification. The truth, he intimated, can only be discovered in an atmosphere of moderation, and the truth when perceived and believed by the majority will beget peace within society. These sentiments are reflected in Melanchthon's letter to Cricius, Bishop of Plock in Poland. "Above all, he wrote, he had come to realize at Augsburg that the positive doctrines of the gospel must first be brought into clear light before an agreement between the two parties could be attained."⁴⁰⁴ The truth cannot be perceived in an atmosphere of polemic argumentation; if the truth is to win out every effort must be made to speak with clarity and with temperate moderation so that both sides may weigh each other's arguments carefully. To Matthew Alber Melanchthon wrote on August 25, 1530, in the midst of Augsburg's turmoil, "I know that our moderation is reproached by the people. It is not fitting, however, to heed the cry of the masses; we must look to peace and to the future. If concord can be restored in Germany, it will be a great blessing to all."⁴⁰⁵

From 1530 to 1545 Melanchthon engaged in negotiations with Martin Bucer regarding the possibilities of union between the Lutherans and the South German Reformed Evangelicals. The two men finally met at Cassel, and the matter of the Lord's Supper seemed to be the only issue standing in the way of accord. Melanchthon had been instructed by Luther to insist upon maintaining the idea of the oral manducation of the body of Christ, which view was unacceptable to Bucer.⁴⁰⁶ But Melanchthon, as will be shown below, had developed differences with Luther on this doctrine, and at length he and Bucer reached what to them was a satisfactory basis for union of the two reformation groups. With this apparent agreement between Strasburg and Wittenberg well under way, Bucer suggested that the Swiss Zurichers be invited to send delegates in order to

403 Ibid. Melanchthon, quoted by Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 191.

404 Robert Stupperich, *Melanchthon*, R. A. Fischer tr. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965), 101.

405 Ibid. 88.

406 Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 234. The manducation idea was or had become 'alien' to Melanchthon by this time.

consummate a three-party coalition.⁴⁰⁷ In May of 1536 Melanchthon, major spokesman next to Luther for Lutheranism, and Bucer, leader of the reform party at Strasburg, and representatives from Zwinglian Zurich, met in Wittenberg and finally adopted an agreement which seemed to satisfy all three parties.⁴⁰⁸ On May 29, 1536 there was held a communion service in Luther's home where the final negotiations for this union had taken place, and the Wittenberg Concord had been signed.⁴⁰⁹ The Lutherans, the Zwinglians through their representatives, and the South Germans through Bucer were united theologically. That the triumph was short-lived due to Swiss resistance does not take away from the vision and the energy of those who brought it about.⁴¹⁰

Melanchthon and Bucer worked together again in 1543, striving to bring Cologne into the orbit of reform.⁴¹¹

In 1540 an imperial conference³ convened in Worms and Melanchthon debated with John Eck, urging the call of a free council which might be reformatory in spirit.⁴¹² The sessions of this colloquy were later moved to Regensburg and in May 1541 had progressed to the point where a union formula was drawn up which seemed satisfactory to all parties present, Catholic and Protestant.⁴¹³ The major topic agreed upon was justification by faith, stated in such a way that even John Calvin who was present enthusiastically approved.⁴¹⁴ To the participants in this conference it seemed that Protestantism and Catholicism could perhaps be reunited; Luther and the Roman *Curia* disallowed the formula, however.⁴¹⁵

Melanchthon became involved in ecumenical discussions not only in Germany and Switzerland, but in France and England as well.⁴¹⁶ The French king, Francis I, invited Bucer and Melanchthon to France in 1535 to help bring about a religious settlement in that land. In advance of travelling to France, Melanchthon prepared a

407 Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 235,236.

408 Ibid.

409 Ibid.

410 Ibid.

411 Ibid. 243 ff.

412 Robert Stupperich, *Melanchthon*, 114 ff.

413 Ibid. 117. Calvin wrote to Farel, "You will marvel when you see what has been obtained from the adversaries. Our side has upheld the summary of true doctrine. There is nothing in the formula which is not found in our writings." Ibid.

414 Ibid.

415 Ibid.

416 Robert Stupperich, *Melanchthon*, 104, 105; J. T. McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, 162 ff. Clyde Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 220 ff.

document suggesting a plan for reform of the French Church which would allow considerable latitude for traditional Catholic practices as long as these would not undermine the concept of justification by faith, or lead to idolatry or sin.⁴¹⁷ There seemed to be progress in these negotiations toward the reform of the French church along lines suggested by a moderated Protestant reformer, when Protestant insurrections in France and rumors circulating in Strasburg and Wittenberg of Bucer's and Melanchthon's compromises rendered their continuation impossible.⁴¹⁸ King Francis sent personal representatives to urge Melanchthon to come to France in spite of these difficulties; Melanchthon apparently wished to go but the elector of Saxony refused to give his permission, believing that Francis' motives were entirely political, aimed at gaining Protestant support against his enemy Catholic Emperor Charles V. Possibilities of a Bucerian/ Melanchthonian reform of the French Church came to nothing.⁴¹⁹

Henry VIII of England was anxious to secure Melanchthon's services in negotiating a union between England and the Schmalcald League of Protestant German estates and so he invited Melanchthon to come to England and work in the area of developing a confession for the Anglican Church.⁴²⁰ Melanchthon drew up on 1536 the thirteen Wittenberg Articles as a basis for union between England and the Saxon reform.⁴²¹ Henry did not appear interested in this type of approach and continued to send delegates to Wittenberg to urge Melanchthon's compliance in his bid to join the League. Melanchthon insisted that England must first subscribe to the Wittenberg Articles and to the Augsburg Confession with its *Apology*.⁴²² Henry's political motives were revealed eventually and the England/Schmalcald union endeavor was abandoned. Here again, as

417 C. Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 222. Such matters as the Episcopal organization of the church, clerical garb, the celebration of certain holy days could be allowed. Communion in both kinds should be offered, private masses abolished, and clerical marriage allowed.

418 McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism*, 168.

419 Ibid.

420 Clyde Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 225.

421 Ibid.

422 Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 227. The Wittenberg Articles closely resemble the Thirty Nine Articles of the Anglican Church. Cranmer was obviously impressed with Melanchthon, "for Cranmer not only circulated and used his works, but also repeatedly invited Melanchthon to come to England." Manschreck says that Cranmer used the *Consultations* by Melanchthon, (1543) as the basis of his *Order of Communion* (1548). Manschreck adds that in 1559, Queen Elizabeth I directed scholars to read Melanchthon "to induce them to all godliness." Manschreck, Preface to his translation of the 1555 *Loci Communes*, xxi.

with the French proposal, Melanchthon urged union, but only on condition that the doctrine of the evangelical reform, justification by faith, not be at all compromised.⁴²³

Though briefly summarised, the foregoing chronicle illustrates Melanchthon's persistent dedication to the cause of ecclesiastical harmony in the early days of the Reformation. What were the characteristics of his ecumenical vision?

First and most obvious is the fact that Melanchthon was motivated by a desire to see Christians living together in harmony and union. His conception of the church was clearly universal and ecumenical. "Our confession will show until the end of time that we piously and conscientiously thought about and sincerely endeavoured to set forth the doctrine of the church universal and to extend the glory of Christ."⁴²⁴ Whenever he wrote about the church it is with a view of describing the body of Christ in its widest dimensions.⁴²⁵

Second, and deriving from this universal view of the Church, was Melanchthon's conviction that the reformation in which he was consciously involved was not to be understood in terms of novelty but in terms of the restoration and renovation of primitive Christianity.⁴²⁶ In this way he made a deliberate attempt to emphasize doctrines held in common throughout all ages by the majority of Christians, especially in the area of the doctrine of salvation, and to allow for differences of opinion and practice in areas where a definite consensus does not exist: note again his words to his brother from Augsburg, "But not by my fault shall peace be destroyed ... I must maintain my principle of omitting everything that increases bitterness."⁴²⁷ This principle can be seen in practice in the articles written by Melanchthon for the proposed reformation of the church of France. There Melanchthon was willing to allow for a wide latitude with regard to local practice within the church, although he insists that the orthodox doctrine must not be surrendered. This desire to promote unity based on biblical, evangelical and patristic doctrinal

423 Ibid.

424 Melanchthon, quoted by Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 182.

425 E.g. Articles VII and VIII of the "Augsburg Confession," *Of the Church, and What the Church Is: Creeds of Christendom*, (Schaff ed.), III, 11-14.

426 Ibid. Article XXII, 26-28; note call for unity and restoring of ancient faith in this article and in the Preface, 3-7.

427 Melanchthon, quoted by Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 182. Note Robert Stupperich, *Melanchthon*, 88, where Melanchthon's letter of August 25 to Matthew Alber is quoted: "I know that our moderation is reproached by the people. It is not fitting, however, to heed the cry of the masses. We must look to peace and the future. If concord can be restored in Germany, it will be a great blessing for all."

fundamentals led Melanchthon to adopt an attitude of moderation by which he refused to become belligerent or to use the language of intransigence in negotiating with other Protestants and with the Catholic teachers and thinkers: note the secret negotiations in Augsburg where it seemed he was leaving no stone unturned in seeking for a statement of faith that would clearly and understandably be both evangelical and peace-producing.⁴²⁸

This pacific temperament was not his by nature, says Stupperich.⁴²⁹ It derived, it seems, from his conviction that doctrines should unite people, not divide them. The one doctrine that speaks of the unity of God and man – justification by grace through faith in the sacrifice of Christ is stressed as a unifying agent in Christian divisiveness (as emphasized in the Wittenberg Concord and the Regensburg agreement), and flexibility with regard to non-evangelically essential beliefs and practices is a major part of his ecumenical platform.⁴³⁰

This flexibility with regard to allowing non-essentials in belief and practice as long as they do not threaten the centrality of evangelical justification was expanded in Melanchthon's approach to include a willingness to alter convictions in essential doctrinal matters. When it became obvious that convictions formerly held were first of all less than biblically evangelical, and second promoted division rather than harmony among believers, these convictions must change. This principle can be seen at work in the evolution within his thinking with regard to two doctrines in particular: the Lord's Supper and unconditional election.

His earlier held view of the Lord's Supper Melanchthon came to believe was too rigid, too detailed and specific to be biblically defensible. At the same time he concluded that to become less precise with regard to the nature of the presence of Christ in the ceremony of the Eucharist would be to open the door to wider fellowship with Christians of other (non-Lutheran) persuasions. He came to believe that the Supper is primarily a visible symbol of Christ's redemptive work and of His unifying presence among

428 Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 187-189.

429 Stupperich, *Melanchthon*, 24. Melanchthon's friend Camerarius is quoted by Stupperich as saying that Melanchthon is "all too inclined to sudden anger," "but that he had learned to harness this emotion."

430 Stupperich, *Melanchthon*, 131. The theme of justification by faith, says Stupperich, was central to both the *Augsburg Confession* and the *Apology*. The *Confession* is the "standard expression of the evangelical faith," and in the *Apology* (89) "faith in Christ which justifies the sinner before God provides the inner structure."

believers. The Supper became for him the sign of the reality of genuine evangelical ecumenism.

Up until 1530, it is fairly definite that Melanchthon followed Luther in his belief regarding the physical presence of Christ in the Supper.⁴³¹ In that year Melanchthon, at Augsburg, received a copy of Oecampadius' *Dialogue* in which the Swiss Reformed theologian demonstrated that there was reliable patristic support for the symbolical view of the Lord's Supper.⁴³² Melanchthon was impressed; he had believed that Luther's position of the real presence of the spiritual/physical Christ in the Supper had unqualified patristic support. His agreement with Luther's position now began to shift in the direction of the Reformed view. He concluded that Luther was being too contentious on the issue, and was increasingly unable to accept the view that the communicant partakes of the physical Christ through the process of oral manducation.⁴³³ Writing to Martin Bucer in 1533, Melanchthon made reference to the Marburg Colloquy and indicated that his kinship with Bucer's ecumenical ideal, as well as concern over the possibility of the Lord's Supper being a divisive issue:

You are taking the steps necessary for a sound union of the churches, and to the best of my ability, I promise to stand by you in this. I am not at all pleased that one question [the Eucharist] should separate us. I do hope that as we confide in one another, means will be found to make an end of division. That sudden meeting [Marburg] of men who would not give an inch did not help in this enormous evil. Would to God that you and I at least could talk together on this issue.⁴³⁴

Besides this Melanchthon believed that the Supper's importance lay in its function rather than in precise dogmatic understanding of the composition of the elements representing Christ's body and blood. The Supper served the evangelical purpose of confirming the believer's faith that Christ and his grace are offered for forgiveness. As an evangelical symbol of grace and salvation, and as a sign of the reality of Christ's presence among his people, the Supper is meant to unite and not divide Christians.⁴³⁵

431 Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 231.

432 Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 231.

433 Luther on the Lord's Supper: "The heart of our doctrine is this, that in the bread or with the bread, the body of Christ is really eaten, so that all motions and actions which are attributed to the bread, are attributed also to the body of Christ, so that the body is actually torn with the teeth and eaten ... From this view I cannot deviate even if heaven should fall on me." Richard, *Melanchthon*, 251.

434 Melanchthon, quoted by Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 233.

435 Michael Rogness, *Melanchthon, Reformer Without Honour*, 70.

Melanchthon's view of the Lord's Supper was therefore gradually modified after 1530, and thus his reasons for not considering union with the Reformed were removed. Luther it seems was bound by Christological categories in his insistence upon the presence of the physical nature of Christ in the Supper, and for this reason could not consider uniting with Bucer or the Swiss Reformed.⁴³⁶ To Luther, Christ as the God-Man represented the eternal union of the spiritual and physical natures in one indivisible person. God in Christ has become man eternally. Wherever Christ is there is the spiritual divine nature and there is the human nature, which for Luther must be described as physical; through the concept of *communicatio idiomatum* Luther understood that the attributes (*idioma*) of divinity were communicated to the human nature of Christ. Deity is omnipresent, therefore ubiquity or omnipresence is a quality of the physical nature of the glorified Christ.⁴³⁷ To believe that Christ is spiritually present and received in the Supper, but to deny his literal physical presence was in Luther's thinking to divide Christ, which is impossible and heretical.

Melanchthon was unwilling to remain this definite theologically. He believed strongly in the Trinity and emphasized the deity of Christ at length in the succeeding editions of the *Loci Communes*,⁴³⁸ but as far as the Supper was concerned, he became convinced that to believe in and celebrate the real presence of Christ who is represented by the elements as giving himself savingly for His own is sufficient.

It should be confessed that in the giving of the elements, bread and wine, Christ is truly and substantially present. Indeed, I would require no more than that. The scriptures and the ancient church allow one to say no more than this. . . . I do not like to speak before the young and the unlearned of this matter, whether the body be in all places; I have advised others to keep silent too. As for the ancients, what they taught is known to all.⁴³⁹

Melanchthon eventually came to hold the position that Christ is truly present and truly received in the sacrament. How this transpires he was content to leave within the realm of

436 Rogness, *Melanchthon*, 68.

437 See Robert H. Fischer, "Luther's Stake in the Lord's Supper Controversy," *Dialog* (Winter, 1963), 50.

438 Melanchthon, *Loci Communes – 1555* (Manschreck, tr.), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), n 11-39.

439 Melanchthon, quoted by Peter Fraenkel, "Ten Questions Concerning Melanchthon, the Fathers, and the Eucharist," *Luther and Melanchthon*, Vilmos Vajta, ed., 146-164.

mystery.⁴⁴⁰ This led to a more ecumenical stance, for he was unwilling to allow his view of the substance of Christ's presence to isolate him from those who might disagree metaphysically with him but agreed on the principle of God's saving act in Christ exhibited in the Supper. Having established the function of the Supper as a symbol of Christ's presence in justifying grace, as an aid to faith and as a sign of evangelical unity, Melanchthon proceeded in the 1530's and 1540's to work for union between the Lutherans and the Reformed both in Germany and Switzerland.⁴⁴¹

With regard to the doctrine of unconditional election it is possible to document a transition in the thinking of Melanchthon from a strong to a moderated predestinarian stance. The views of the later Melanchthon on this subject and topics related to it such as free will and perseverance were very similar to those expressed on these issues by James Arminius, half a century after Melanchthon's death.

In the first edition of Melanchthon's *Loci Communes* (1521), the stress was definitely upon a strong predestinarianism;⁴⁴² original sin is described in such a way as to preclude any notion of human ability to respond or to resist the overtures of God's grace. The Spirit teaches, he said, "that all things happen necessarily by predestination."⁴⁴³ Because this is so man possesses no free will with regard to spiritual matters.

Erasmus's *De Libero Arbitrio* (1524), seems to have impressed Melanchthon and helped to alter his thinking in this area.⁴⁴⁴ Melanchthon spoke approvingly of the moderate tone of Erasmus' work and seems to have agreed with its content: "Your case," he asserted, "is clearly supported by the Holy Scripture."⁴⁴⁵ Evidently Melanchthon's beliefs regarding free will were strongly influenced by Erasmus' *De Libero Arbitrio*. At this juncture Melanchthon expressed more than a little annoyance at the intemperate, ecumenically unhelpful, attitude of Luther:

I have again besought him [Luther]... if he replies to do so briefly, simply and without abuse. At once after Luther published his book [*De Servo Arbitrio*] I said this controversy would end in the most serious alienation.

440 Stupperich, *Melanchthon*, 96, "in the *Loci*, Melanchthon spoke only of the spiritual presence of Christ and of inner communion with him. Of the connection of Christ with the elements he said nothing further. He had no desire to initiate disputation over these questions."

441 The Wittenberg Concord, Regensburg Accord, etc.

442 Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 87.

443 Melanchthon, quoted by Manschreck, *Ibid.*

444 Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 117.

445 Melanchthon quoted by Manschreck, *Ibid.* 617.

It has come ... O that Luther would keep silent! I did hope that with age, experience, and so many troubles, he would grow more moderate; but I see he becomes the more violent... This matter grievously vexes my soul.⁴⁴⁶

At the same time he wrote, “Will there be no end to this controversy? If only God would give us the grace to teach only those things in the church which serve to build, rather than those things that stir up hate and division.”⁴⁴⁷ Wilhelm Pauck notes this difference in temperament between Luther and Melanchthon and Melanchthon’s attitude toward it.

Melanchthon was pained by Luther’s violent temper and argumentativeness, by his monkish uncouthness, by his prophetic certainty of faith which was always dynamic and occasionally rumbling, and especially by his stubborn way of persisting in judgements once formed, and reacting to his opponents’ criticism of himself with an irreconcilability which lacked all considerateness.⁴⁴⁸

In tracing the evolution of Melanchthon’s thinking regarding predestination and free will, one might compare the statements of the 1521 *Loci* with statements in the *Apology* of the Augsburg Confession, where Melanchthon stresses that salvation is offered to believers as opposed to being available only to the elect:

For the gospel is itself the command which bids us believe that God pardons and saves on account of Christ... He that believeth in Him is not condemned... Because we hear that mercy is the cause of election and yet that few are elected, we are even more distressed, and wonder whether there is respect of persons with God, and why he does not have mercy on all. To such temptation ought to be opposed the universal promises of the gospel, which teach that God, for Christ’s sake, and gratuitously, pardons... These universal statements must be opposed to the temptation in regard to particularity... As in justification, so in election, we must judge not according to reason or according to law, but according to the gospel.⁴⁴⁹

446 Melanchthon, quoted by Richard, *Melanchthon*, 120, 121.

447 Ibid.

448 Wilhelm Pauck, “Luther and Melanchthon,” *Luther and Melanchthon in the History and Theology of the Reformation*, Vilmos Vajta, ed., 26. Stupperich notes, (op. cit. 66), that Melanchthon’s relations with Erasmus were always cordial; the two carried on a continued correspondence until Erasmus’ death. Also, says Stupperich, “Melanchthon also testified to Erasmus in a letter that in judging dogmas he took his guidance from Erasmus and that in judging most controversial questions he still was attached to him.” 103. Stupperich speculates that it is not improbable that Erasmus was moved by Melanchthon’s letter to him to write, *De Sarcinda Ecclesiae Concordia*.

449 Ibid. Melanchthon, *Apology*, quoted by Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 293.

It is clear from this selection that Melanchthon is coming close to a concept of a universally available atonement, rather than holding to the limited atonement view. A similar emphasis upon the universal offer of salvation and an unwillingness to be dogmatic about predestination comes through in a statement of Melanchthon from 1532.

As the preaching of repentance appertains to all so also the promise. Let us not allow our faith to be shaken by unreasonable discussions about predestination; but let us begin with the word of God, and let us remember that the promises appertain to all, and let us be assured that those things truly belong to us which God set forth and promised in his word.⁴⁵⁰

In the same year, Melanchthon's *Commentary on Romans* revealed an alteration in his earlier thinking. Clyde Manschreck provides this quotation, "In receiving faith there is a struggle in us ... there is some cause in the recipient in that he does not reject the promise extended."⁴⁵¹ Grace, Melanchthon implied here, is possible of being rejected by an active, free human choice. The quote continues, "All the old writers, except Augustine, place some cause of election in us."⁴⁵² Lest this idea be confused with a new Pelagianism, Melanchthon added these words which are similar to Arminius' disclaimers of following the same heresy:

The promise of mercy cannot be accepted, nor can confidence be conceived except as the Holy Spirit by the word moves hearts... Moreover, let the will do all that it can, it must never be thought that salvation depends upon the measure or value of our action, but upon the promise, so that justification be not separated from trust and mercy.⁴⁵³

Nowhere is the transition in Melanchthon's thinking more obvious than in the succeeding editions of the *Loci Communes*.⁴⁵⁴ There were no changes of significance after the 1555 *Loci*: its contents reflect Melanchthon's mature convictions. Instead of the brief dogmatic statements on free will and predestination of the 1521 *Loci*, whole chapters are devoted to these topics in the 1555 edition.⁴⁵⁵ Several observations can be made on the basis of a study of these chapters.

450 Ibid.

451 Melanchthon, *Commentary on Romans*, quoted by Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 295.

452 Ibid.

453 Ibid.

454 Melanchthon, *Loci Communes, 1521, Melanchthon and Bucer, LCC, XIX* (Wm. Pauck, ed); *Loci Communes 1555*, (C. Manschreck, tr.), New York: 1965.

455 Melanchthon, "Of Human Strength and Free Will," *Loci 1555*, (Manschreck tr.), 51-69; "Of Eternal Predestination and Reprobation," Ibid. 187-192.

First, Melanchthon goes beyond asserting as he did in 1521 that free will applies only to external aspects of human living. He teaches that there is free will in internal, spiritual activities as well – including the experience of conversion.⁴⁵⁶ Second, he makes it very clear that no one is justified by free will. Men are justified freely by God’s grace through the merits of Christ. Free will is operative only insofar as it appropriates or refuses grace: this is essentially the position of Arminius; for the gospel to be good news man must be able to receive it. Manschreck summarized, “Man could not be the author of his salvation and could not thwart the plan of God for the world. But Melanchthon ... came more and more to believe that man has the power to accept or reject God’s gift of salvation. Otherwise it would not be a gift, and man would not be ethically responsible.”⁴⁵⁷ If then there was a shift in Melanchthon’s thinking with regard to election, predestination, and free will, it was because he came to believe that soteriologically a change was demanded; to become less rigid with regard to election was for Melanchthon evangelically necessary:

We should not think that a man is a piece of wood or stone, but as we hear the word of God, in which punishment and comfort are put forth, we should neither despise nor resist it. We should arouse our hearts to earnest prayer, for the Lord Christ says, How much more will your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to you if you ask him?⁴⁵⁸

As an illustration of the human will in action, Melanchthon related the parable of the prodigal son’s return: “Here the son does not run back, does not scorn his father, but instead goes also toward him, acknowledges his sin and begs for grace. From this illustration we should learn how this teaching is to be used and how this passage from Basil is to be taken, ‘*tantum veils, et Deus praeoccurit*’,⁴⁵⁹ (‘we need only to will, and God has come to us’).”

Regarding predestination, the 1555 *Loci* taught that the elect are those who believe, and there is a hint that Melanchthon believed that Christians could apostasize: “the source of sin our rejection, that is, whosoever is not turned to the Lord’s Christ is certainly rejected ... Assuredly all are elected to eternal blessedness who, through faith in

456 Ibid. Melanchthon, *Loci 1555*, 57, 58.

457 Manschreck, *Melanchthon*, 121.

458 Melanchthon, *Loci 1555*, 56.

459 Ibid. 60.

the Lord Christ in the conversion in this life receive comfort and do not fall away before their death; for thus saith the text, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."⁴⁶⁰ This hint of the possibility of apostasy is repeated:

Election to eternal salvation is not on account of the law but for the sake of Christ through faith ... We are predestined to eternal blessedness for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ out of grace through faith without any merit on our part, and not on account of the law. We are, however, finally to be found in this faith.⁴⁶¹

Responsible human choice responding willingly to the divine initiative of grace – the position of Melanchthon on free will and predestination as correlatives in a universally available scheme of salvation was very similar to that of James Arminius. An almost identical evangelical doctrine and emphasis, coupled with a kindred spirit of toleration and desire for Christian unity place both men within the boundaries of evangelical ecumenism. The following words of Melanchthon could have been penned by Arminius two generations after Melanchthon wrote them.

Is the promise offered to *all*? Here we should firmly conclude that preaching is *universales*, both the preaching of punishment and the preaching of grace; God is just ... He has offered his promise to *all* who will turn to him and seek comfort in the Lord Jesus.⁴⁶²

Having noted these close similarities between the evangelicalism and the ecumenism of Melanchthon and Arminius the question may now be raised as to the possible links which may have existed between their ideologies. Is there evidence that Arminius may have consciously been building his theological edifice upon a Melanchthonian foundation? It must be said that there are no explicit statements to this effect in Arminius' writings, but there are some implicit suggestions that such was the case.

For instance, mention has already been made in the introduction to this thesis with regard to the influence of Anastasius Veluanus upon early Dutch reform thinking, of which Arminius was to become chief spokesman. Veluanus' *Guidebook* had been published under Melanchthon's auspices, and was widely circulated in the Netherlands.

460 Ibid. 187.

461 Ibid.

462 Ibid.

The theology of the *Guidebook* was that of Melanchthon, and was to become that of Arminius.⁴⁶³

In his funeral oration for Arminius, Petrus Bertius said that Arminius' view on predestination "was that of Melanchthon, and the Danish Lutheran theologian Nicholas Hemingius."⁴⁶⁴ This is no direct proof of indebtedness of course, but does indicate the opinion of one of Arminius' close friends and contemporary colleagues.

Again, in *Analysis Capitis IX ad Romanos*, Arminius included a letter to Gellius Snecanus, praising Snecanus for his interpretation of that chapter and indicating help received from it.⁴⁶⁵ Gerhard Brandt, Bangs asserts, spoke of Snecanus as holding views on predestination (which was the topic of Arminius' and Snecanus' considerations regarding the ninth chapter of Romans), "according to the sentiments of Melanchthon, asserting the doctrine of conditional predestination."⁴⁶⁶ Here is some evidence of indebtedness through identification with the ideas of one of Melanchthon's followers.

Arminius became involved in English theological struggles through his *Examen Libelli Perkinsius*.⁴⁶⁷ William Perkins of Cambridge had written against the ideas of Peter Baro who became Professor of Divinity at Cambridge in 1574. Baro had written to Hemingius (who had already been mentioned and who had studied earlier under Melanchthon), a kindred spirit to Arminius, and Baros arguments "were almost precisely the same as Arminius would set forth in his Declaration in 1608."⁴⁶⁸ Perkins wrote against Baro, and Arminius, who does not mention Baro, wrote at length to challenge the arguments of Perkins. Again, this is indirect evidence, but it does suggest tentative links regarding the influence of Melanchthonianism upon Arminius.

Direct references to Melanchthon by Arminius are few but significant. For example, in asserting his conviction that the supralapsarian position was not held by the majority of Protestant thinkers, Arminius noted, "However highly Luther and Melanchthon might at the very commencement of the Reformation have approved of this doctrine, they afterward deserted it."⁴⁶⁹ This seems to suggest that Melanchthon and

463 Carl Bangs, *Arminius*, 21, 22.

464 Bangs, *Arminius*, 139.

465 Ibid. 193. Arminius, *Analysis Capitis IX ad Romanos, Opera Theologica*, 778, 823.

466 Ibid.

467 Arminius, *Examen Libelli Perkinsius, Opera Theologica*, 634-781.

468 Bangs, *Arminius*, 207.

469 Arminius, *Declaratio Sententiae, Opera Theologica*, 115, *Writings*, I, 239.

Luther both altered their view with regard to this doctrine, but Arminius revealed his historical understanding; “This change in Melanchthon is quite apparent in his later writings.”⁴⁷⁰

Speaking of the nature of the church as he understood it, Arminius included the Lutherans, Zwinglians, and the Reformed in his description of true churches as opposed to those which have seceded from the truth. “Wyclif and Hus, Luther, Melanchthon, Zwingli, Oecolampad, Bucer, Calvin ...”⁴⁷¹ are mentioned as being in the succession of the truth.

Another reference to Melanchthon occurred when Arminius urged modification of doctrine and the need for flexibility with regard to confessions in order that confessional statements might be often examined to ascertain their conformity to evangelical and scriptural norm. If there should be an unwillingness to continually re-examine creeds and confessions, he asked,

where would be the Reformation? The Lutherans were wise in revising the Augsburg Confession. Nor would those who adhere to the Augustan Confession have considered it improper to submit that formulary again to a new and complete revision and to alter it in some particulars. This deed of theirs is an object of our praise and approval. And we conclude that when Luther toward the close of his life was advised by Philip Melanchthon to bring the Eucharistic controversy on the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper to some better state of concord... he acted very improperly in rejecting that counsel and in casting it back as a reproach on Philip for this reason ... lest by such an attempt to affect an amicable conclusion, the whole doctrine would be called in question.⁴⁷²

Close similarity of ideology and some evidence of influence of the one upon the other support our thesis of the influence of Melanchthon upon Arminius and of the continuance of the tradition of evangelical ecumenism based upon Arminius’ conscious adherence to Melanchthon’s principles.

In the introduction to this dissertation and several times in this chapter mention has been made of the ecumenical activities of Martin Bucer of Strasburg. Was Bucer and *evangelical* ecumenist? The following arguments will defend the thesis that he was.

470 Ibid.

471 Bangs, *Arminius*, 334.

472 Arminius, *Declaratio Sententiae, Opera Theologica*, 131, *Writings*, I. 271.

The Bucer whom the ecumenical century has been discovering is above all else the ironical Reformer, who, while Luther and Calvin were laying a foundation for confessional and structured churches, hurried around from conference to conference in the tireless pursuit of Protestant unity and even that hardly less elusive objective of concord between Catholic and Protestant Germany.⁴⁷³

Between 1530 and 1545, Bucer was continually involved in colloquies aimed at uniting the Zwinglians, the South German Reformed and the Lutherans on the one hand, and the Protestants and Catholics on the other. For these pacific efforts polemic historians as well as his own contemporaries have been critical of him. The Lutheran Leonard Hutter regarded to Bucer as “crafty and disingenuous;” the Catholic Bishop of Meaux called him an “equivocator;” Anglican Dean Hook used the unflattering adjectives “inconsistent and hostile;” and one of the closest friends to his family, Margaret Blaurer of Constance, called him “the dear *politicus* and *fanaticus* of unity.”⁴⁷⁴ What, indeed, were the motives behind Bucer’s unitive efforts? Was it merely to impress his novel eucharistic views upon others and thus to present himself as the originator and promoter of a doctrinal stance on Communion which came to be universally held that he labored? Or were Bucer’s aspirations wider and more altruistic, aimed at effecting genuine concord among divided Christians for the sake of ecumenical principles? And if the latter is the case, as the following arguments will seek to demonstrate, how did Bucer perceive of himself in relation to the evangelical centrality of Reformation thought? So much that he wrote and so much written about him concerns liturgical reform, and especially Bucer’s concern for the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper that the question arises, did he seek union among Christians primarily upon liturgical and eucharistic grounds? Or does Martin Bucer belong in the tradition we are describing as ‘evangelical ecumenism’?

While a student monk at Heidelberg, Bucer had been won for the Reformation by Luther during the latter’s disputation there in 1518. Gradually becoming more Protestantized, Bucer left the monastery, married, and eventually became the leading evangelical preacher in Strasburg. There is no doubt of his commitment to the genuine

473 D. F. Wright, “Martin Bucer: Ecumenical Theologian,” *Common Places*, 18. Note also J. Atkinson, “Martin Bucer (1491-1551); Ecumenical Pioneer,” *The Churchman*, 79, (1965), 19-28.

474 All cited by Wright, “Martin Bucer,” 50.

evangelical doctrines such as justification by faith, the supremacy of grace etc. throughout his career as will be demonstrated from his writings below.

Bucer was well aware of the differences between Luther and Zwingli on the doctrine of the Lord's Supper living as he did midway between Wittenberg and Zurich. Until 1524 it seems as though he had no interest in the issues of that dispute, being implicitly Lutheran in his Eucharistic conception. However, in 1524 Carlstadt came to Strasburg from Wittenberg and his teaching regarding the sacrament convinced many, including Bucer.⁴⁷⁵ Bucer became, as his *Apology* of 1526 reveals, a committed Zwinglian in the matter of the divine presence in the Supper. It seems from his introduction to the *Apology* that Bucer was concerned and troubled because he realized that differences over the Supper were ironically smothering the spirit of Christian concord.⁴⁷⁶

In 1528, Bucer studied Luther's explanation of Eucharistic ideology carefully, coming eventually to the conclusion that he had been wrong about Luther's views.⁴⁷⁷ In fact there was a misunderstanding on both sides he concluded; Zwingli and Luther were closer together in thought than each realized. If only each side would listen carefully to the other it would be discovered that no essential difference existed between them; since they already agreed on all other essential evangelical truth, total concord was possible if each party would accept Bucer's explanation of the Eucharist, which he honestly seemed to believe provided a resolution to their conflict. G. J. Van De Poll is convinced of the honesty of Bucer and of the integrity of his position:

The bulk of Bucer's writings is concerned with the question of the Eucharist. On this point he has often been wrongly judged. Some claimed him to be a Lutheran, others who believed they detected lines of thought similar to those of Zwingli, called him a Zwinglian. Definitely wrong is Koehler's judgement, who stigmatizes his doctrine as a chaotic tissue of contrasted ideas... Bucer's attitude towards the opposing parties in the Supper-strife of the sixteenth century cannot be described as merely conciliatory, in search of a formula which could be accepted by both parties; on the contrary, we are here confronted with a third factor in the

475 Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer* (New Haven: Princeton University Press, 1931), 72, 73.

476 Martin Bucer, "The Eucharist: Apology, 1526," *Common Places* (D. F. Wright ed.), 316. See also H. Eells, "The Genesis of Martin Bucer's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," *P.T.R.*, 24 (1926), 225-51.

477 Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 85-90.

Protestant doctrine on the Eucharist, in which Bucer gradually developed a doctrine that distinctly loosened itself from Luther and Zwingli.⁴⁷⁸

This new approach, combining elements of Lutheranism and Zwinglianism and excluding the contentious intricacies of each, Bucer saw as serving a conciliatory function. Bucer had come to the conclusion that certain aspects of truth cannot be described adequately so there ought to be flexibility of definition allowed as long as the Supper as a celebration of Christ being received by his people in communion is not sacrificed: “though he asserted that Christ was at the right hand of God in his humanity, he left unsettled the question whether he had bodily left the world and decided he was present as a mediator of salvation both in the Eucharist and in the hearts of believers.”⁴⁷⁹

By the time of the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, Bucer had come to the conclusion that concessions on both the Lutheran and the Zwinglian side would have to be made if unity were to be achieved. He wrote, “no one surely errs consciously, and no one, however holy [Luther? Zwingli?] is immune from error.”⁴⁸⁰ At Marburg, says Hastings Eells, Bucer “rose to the realization that it was necessary to make some sacrifices for the sake of concord.”⁴⁸¹ That he was so willing was demonstrated in the production of the *Tetrapolitan Confession* of June 30, 1530. To the Brethren at Strasburg, Bucer wrote describing the concessions made at Augsburg, “It was necessary to say many things more gently than not only we, but also our deputies would have preferred.”⁴⁸² Of the article on the Lord’s Supper in the *Tetrapolitan Confession*, Eells says,

Practically no explanation of the manner of Christ’s presence was given outside the ambiguous word ‘truly.’ It was an effort to state what no Protestant would condemn ... the main purpose was to show the Lutherans and the Zwinglians what an ideal system of belief, especially upon the Supper, was practiced at Strasburg, and to offer that as a platform upon which they could unite.⁴⁸³

478 G.J. Van De Poll, *Martin Bucer’s Liturgical Ideas* (Aussen, The Netherlands: Van Gorkum, 1954), 81.

479 Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 91.

480 M. Bucer, quoted by Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 97.

481 Ibid., 99.

482 M. Bucer, quoted by Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 100.

483 Ibid., 99, 100. The Tetrapolitan article on the Supper: “In this Sacrament, his true body and true blood are truly given to eat and drink, as food for their souls and to eternal life that they may remain in him and he in them... The people of Strasbourg are also turned aside very diligently from all dispute and unnecessary and proud contention in this matter.” Ibid.

From that point on he gave himself to the task of striving to bring the Germans and the Swiss together demonstrating again and again as he toured the cities of South Germany and Switzerland his conviction of the essential agreement of the parties especially on the Supper doctrine. “On April 15, 1538, he entered a new period of his life, the period of unpartisan efforts for concord on the Supper.”⁴⁸⁴ Eells chronicles the journeys of Bucer through the cities of South-west Germany and Switzerland seeking to gain their confidence in peace negotiations with the Lutherans.⁴⁸⁵ Bucer and Melancthon met at Cassel on December 28, 29, 1534, and worked out a jointly acceptable formula of concord. It was at this time that Margaret Blaurer referred to Bucer as “that fanatic of unity,” referred to above. The Cassel conference was understood to be preliminary to a meeting with Luther, which finally convened at Wittenberg in the spring of 1536. Bucer had met with the Zwinglians previous to this at Basel to hammer out a statement which he could take to Wittenberg on their behalf. After prolonged negotiations at Wittenberg agreement was reached on a statement of faith regarding the Supper. Bucer had worked hard to accommodate Luther’s insistence upon the Supper’s efficacy in communicating Christ even to the unworthy. With what seemed to many Zwinglians afterward as equivocation, Bucer asserted that there is a distinction between unbelievers and the unworthy. The unworthy are Christians who come to the Supper thoughtlessly and therefore unworthily. However they do possess faith, so they do receive Christ but only to their discipline rather than to their edification. Luther agreed to this distinction. “They gave each other the hand of fellowship recognizing each other as brothers in the Lord, while Bucer and Capito shed tears of joy at a sight that years before seemed all but impossible.”⁴⁸⁶ However, the apparent dissembling of Bucer in the matter of ‘the unworthy’ antagonized the Zurich Swiss believers and they maintained their isolationism.

But within Germany Wittenberg signified almost total harmony. Despite hesitations and reservations from both sides, especially from some of the free imperial cities, Luther’s prestige and Bucer’s persistence won the day, and German Protestantism was able to present a more united front than at any stage in the Reformation. And the credit was largely Bucer’s.⁴⁸⁷

484 Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 90.

485 Ibid., 142-145.

486 Ibid., 201.

487 Wright, “Martin Bucer: Ecumenical Theologian,” *Common Places*, 38.

Mention has already been made of Melancthon's invitation from Francis I to participate in the reform of the French Church. Bucer, too, became involved in this endeavor, sending a memorial on unity to France in 1534 which was extremely concessionist. The fact that Bucer was concerned in this memorial for the primacy of evangelical doctrine) he insisted on the teaching of justification by faith even if many other areas were conceded as indifferent) is evidence that his Eucharistic concern within Germany and Switzerland was probably due to this doctrine being the issue separating those already united on evangelical beliefs and that his ecumenism can properly be called evangelical.

In the same naïve way he said that justification by faith must first be conceded and that ceremonies should offer no serious obstacle to peace. Throughout the document he took an attitude laying himself open to the charge of apostasy by approving the good principle and purpose beneath Romist practices and condemning the existing conditions. For example, he stated that private masses must be corrected in some way; he condemned monasticism and celibacy not as institutions but only as applied to people unfitted for them. He found in vows a custom that should be retained where it serves to increase piety, and most important of all he expressed a qualified willingness to retain the pope and his hierarch. "we are willing," he said, "that the Roman pope and the other bishops should retain all their power and jurisdiction in so far as they use their power to the edification of the church, not of course for its destruction."⁴⁸⁸

D. F. Wright agrees with the conclusion of Eells regarding the conciliatory nature of these memoranda, and adds that Bucer at this time revealed the influence of Christian humanism upon his teaching:

Throughout his memorandum regarding reform of the Church in France, Bucer is confident that in the teaching of the Fathers and the canon of the primitive Church will be found an adequate basis for resolving doctrinal conflicts and reforming clerical disorder. In dealing with Catholics, Bucer made constant reference to the Fathers as rallying points for unity. "We have made no innovations in religion, and as far as the necessary dogmas are concerned, we do not depart at all from the ancient and apostolic Church."⁴⁸⁹

488 H. Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 168, 169.

489 Wright, "Martin Bucer: Ecumenical Theologian," 39. See F. Kruger, *Bucer and Erasmus: Eine Untersuchung zum Einfluss des Erasmus auf die Theologie Martin Bucers* (Wiesbaden, 1970).

Evangelical essentials insisted upon, concessions allowed regarding what is not deemed necessary evangelically, reference made to the evangelical consensus of primitive Christianity – all of these elements combined within a program of Christian unity and aimed at the promotion of reform: these characteristics render Bucer worthy of consideration as an evangelical ecumenist.

One of the major ecumenical projects Bucer engaged in involved his participation at the Diet of Regensburg in 1540, 1541, where major Protestant and Catholic theologians met in dialogue and sought a basis for concord. This ambitious attempt was important for political reasons – if theological agreement could not be achieved, armed conflict between Catholic and Protestant princes was inevitable. Bucer, Melancthon and Pistorius represented the Protestant position, while John Eck, John Gropper and Cardinal Contarini represented Catholicism. After long discussions an agreement was reached on justification by faith. Says Wright, “Eventually to the incredulous astonishment of some of the Protestants present for the Diet, it was announced that agreement had been attained on the subject of justification.”⁴⁹⁰ In the agreed-upon article, faith is described as:

the movement wrought by the Holy Spirit, whereby, truly repenting of their old life, men are turned to God and truly apprehend his mercy promised in Christ, so that now they truly believe that they have received forgiveness of sins and reconciliation through the merits of Christ by the free gift of God’s goodness, and they cry out to God, “Abba, Father;” but this happens to no one unless there is also at the same time infused into him that love which heals the will, so that the healed will, as Augustine says, may begin to fulfill the law. Therefore, living faith is that which apprehends God’s mercy in Christ and believes that the righteousness of Christ is freely imparted to oneself and at the same time receives the promise of the Holy Spirit and also love.⁴⁹¹

In the binding together of faith and love the influence of Bucer upon the writing of this article may be detected. For this reason Wright says, “Hence, it was Bucer more than anyone else on the Protestant side who was responsible for this concord.”⁴⁹²

490 Wright, “Martin Bucer,” 43. See Eells, Martin Bucer, Chapter XXIX, “The Diet of Regensburg,” 290 ff. Also see Eells, “The Origins of the Regensburg Book,” *P.T.R.* 26 (1928): 355-72.

491 Wright, “Martin Bucer,” 43.

492 Ibid. 44. Eells, Martin Bucer, 293. Wright earlier (p. 21) described Bucer’s treatise entitled, “That No One Should Live for Himself but for Others and How to Attain This Ideal”: “It foretells the greater weight placed by Bucer than, say, Luther, on the necessity for faith to be operative through love in order for it to be true faith. Bucer develops this in an Augustinian direction so that the love and good works which for Luther remain the fruits of justifying faith tend to be embraced within the very concept of justifying faith.

Hastings Eells, commenting upon Bucer's explanation of the Regensburg Accord, written by the latter some time after the event, demonstrates that the evangelical supremacy of justification was essential to Bucer's thinking, while the details of Eucharistic Theology were important but subsidiary. Speaking of the justification article arrived at in the Accord, Bucer said that it contained "all the necessary doctrines." As for what was not agreed upon, he said that it was not necessary to know this, and such issues "may remain unknown and unprofessed." Among these unagreed articles was the doctrine of the Eucharist, and for that reason Bucer went on to say, "if we are now agreed that, if we celebrate the Supper according to the Lord, we receive his true body and blood, and he is present, how shall it trouble us what happens to the bread?"⁴⁹³

In this same vein of stressing essentials and allowing flexibility in non-essentials Bucer wrote regarding the Supper:

Shun battles over words. While in all faith is placed in Christ, the thing is safe. It is not given to all to see the same thing at the same time. If we believe and act in this simple manner, we shall be true disciples of the Lord... and easily avoid lofty and vain speculations, which avail only for empty glory and contention.⁴⁹⁴

This discussion of the importance which Bucer placed on the Reformation teaching of justification by faith assists in an understanding of Bucer's willingness to concede so much in ecumenical dialogues. He can be accused of duplicity in his statements regarding the efficacy of the Supper for the unworthy at Wittenberg; his concessions to the French in his reform memorandum were scandalous; Regensburg too, won him enemies for his apparent eagerness to give away too much to the other side. Bucer came dangerously close to sacrificing truth on the altar of unity. Yet after all Eell's conclusion is correct, "It goes without saying that Bucer never contemplated any compromise of the essentials of the Reformation gospel..."⁴⁹⁵ Bucer himself stated, "where there is pure teaching on justification and faith in Christ, there will be no peril which may not be easily suppressed."⁴⁹⁶

This development, which no doubt owes something to Erasmus as well, lies behind the remarkable ease with which Bucer managed to come to terms with Catholics on the doctrine of justification." See Eells, "The Contribution of Martin Bucer to the Reformation," *Harvard Theological Review* 24 (1931): 29-42.

493 Martin Bucer, quoted by Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 160.

494 Wright, "Martin Bucer," 51. Quoting Bucer's letter to some Italian Brethren, August 17, 1541.

495 Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 169.

496 Martin Bucer, quoted by Hastings Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 169.

An analysis of Bucer's theological treatises reveals his consistent evangelicalism. His treatment on justification and faith are expressed in language typical of the Reformers, one of whom he cites:

... the early Fathers are at one with us and do not conflict either with Philip Melanchthon or with all the others who duly proclaim that the heart of our salvation that is our justification is our free acceptance before God whereby he pardons our sins, imputes righteousness to us and bestows on us eternal life; this life is begun here and now and is duly increased in us by the Spirit who is the planter and cultivator of righteousness and good works. For where the foundation of all godliness is concerned, it behooves us to be united in our teaching.⁴⁹⁷

Melanchthon is again quoted as Bucer defines faith: "Faith is not merely knowledge of history, but assent to promises."⁴⁹⁸ Faith is "unwavering persuasion," and "the assent we give to what God says."⁴⁹⁹ Faith is "uniquely the faculty given to the saints by God whereby they assent to his promises concerning the salvation accomplished for us through the Lord Jesus Christ."⁵⁰⁰ Note the place of man's will in faith, "believing is the work of God and Christ wrought in us by him though not without us."⁵⁰¹

In 1548 Bucer wrote a brief summary of his theology, the occasion for which is described in the not so brief title: "A Brief Summary of Christian Doctrine and Religious Truth Taught at Strasbourg for the past twenty eight years. Together with a Reply from the Preachers of Strasbourg to a Defamatory Writing Accusing Them Without a Shadow of Truth of the Spirit and Teaching of the Anabaptists: And Who is Competent to Reform the External Ceremonies of Divine Worship."⁵⁰² This orthodox and evangelical summary ends with a plea for tolerant ecumenism on the part of those reading his work:

We believe and teach that all who choose to discern and judge in accordance with the Word of God must of necessity recognize and account our congregation and all others which conform to the above mentioned doctrine and observances of religion as true and certain congregations of Christ in the true fellowship and Christ in company with all true Christians and Churches of Christ, despite the fact that our practices with regard to

497 Martin Bucer, *Common Places*, (Wright, ed.), 161. From preface to *Commentary on Romans* (1562).

498 Martin Bucer, *Common places*, (Wright tr), 173.

499 Ibid., 170.

500 Ibid., 177.

501 Ibid., 178.

502 Martin Bucer, *Common Places*, (Wright ed.), 75-94. For the historical setting of this document see H. Eells, *Martin Bucer*, 393-400.

outward signs and ceremonies about which we have no command from the Lord may differ from other churches.⁵⁰³

Of note in this late statement from Bucer is that he makes no mention of predestination, election or free will as being part of the major emphases at Strasbourg. In fact he hints that those saved by baptism can cast away this salvation through willful transgression: “It is certain that this inheritance is also received and enjoyed in its entirety by all who do not themselves subsequently, by their own wanton sins, cast away this grace which is committed to them in baptism.”⁵⁰⁴

Bucer does stand in the Reformed tradition in his stress on predestination elsewhere. As part of his *Romans Commentary* he included a section (following his exegesis of Romans 8:28-32) entitled “An Inquiry Concerning Predestination: What It Is, Why We Should Consider It, And Whether It Destroys the Freedom of the Will.”⁵⁰⁵ He describes predestination in terms which would have been acceptable to Arminius: “it is the principle whereby God assigns each and every thing to its own use.”⁵⁰⁶ With regard to the ninth chapter of Romans, Bucer says, “In this passage the predestination of which Paul speaks is the marking out of the saints for participation in salvation.”⁵⁰⁷ As far as the wicked are concerned, “they share in their damnation freely.”⁵⁰⁸ Bucer speaks strongly of his convictions regarding election,⁵⁰⁹ but election and predestination must purport that in salvation “we are not to be totally inactive, but to work it out, both in ourselves and among our fellows according to the means of the grace of God in us.”⁵¹⁰ His concept of the gospel’s availability seems universal, “Bet let all believe, let all repent, let all hear the words of the gospel... and let their faith in this infallible election be steadfast...”⁵¹¹ Of free will, Bucer asserted that a man is free to choose evil. Free will “can never assent to and appropriate true godliness unless it is sustained and moved by the Spirit of Christ.

503 Martin Bucer, *Common Places* (Wright ed.), 92.

504 Ibid., 85.

505 Ibid., 55.

506 Ibid., 96.

507 Ibid.

508 Ibid., 98.

509 Ibid., 112.

510 Ibid.

511 Ibid., 113.

For as long as the Spirit is lacking the man is dead in his sins, bereft of every awareness of true life...⁵¹² But note his qualifications:

But yet the fact of the matter shows that those whom Satan still holds prisoner also see and do many things in the course of the concerns of this life which are true and right. It is therefore undeniable that in such men free will does have some power to make a choice based on a true act of judgement.⁵¹³

All man does is ultimately within the dominance of God's sovereignty, but "if God works in us, that is, causes us to will and to work, surely we do will and work, and do act when acted upon."⁵¹⁴

This discussion on predestination, election and free will indicates that Bucer was a long way from the hyper-predestinarian position against which Arminius argued. Bucer, Arminius and Melancthon were aligned in this area of theological concern; they did not wish to make a primary issue of it. Bucer is an illustration of a Reformed thinker before Arminius who majored on evangelicalism and laboured for ecclesiastical concord. The moderate evangelical ecumenism of Bucer is summed up by Constantin Hopf who speaks in reference to Bucer's Eucharistic thought:

By the repeated and constant stress on Christ's presence by faith, Bucer attempted to avoid controversies and contentions which endangered the *Koinonia* of the Christian Church. The solution of the problems theology had to face at his time, of the question of the relation between the Elements and Christ's Body (Transubstantiation, Consubstantiation, *communicatio idiomatum*, or elements = signs), of the question how a body could be present at different places at the same time, and of the question how the recipient could be in communion with the risen Lord, Bucer found by insisting on the approach to the sacrament by faith. No 'worldly' reasoning would help to explain the 'mystery of Christ,' nor would it help to bring together all the Christians in the various camps who desired and needed *Koinonia* and remission of sins.⁵¹⁵

512 Ibid., 150.

513 Ibid., 151.

514 Ibid., 152.

515 Constantin Hopf, *Martin Bucer and the English Reformation*, 49. Note similar sentiments in B. Hall, "Diakonia in Martin Butzer," *Service in Christ* (Essays presented to Karl Barth on his 80th Birthday), ed. J. I. McCord, T.H.L. Parker (London: 1966), 89-100.

Primary emphasis upon remission of sins, the avoidance of controversy, and a stress upon *Koinonia* (fellowship) in unity: these elements constitute the evangelical ecumenism of Martin Bucer.

Arminius, Erasmus and the Tradition of Evangelical Ecumenism

Arminius has been linked by Hugh Trevor-Roper with Erasmus in an article suggesting that Arminius was a later Erasmian whose movement along with Socinianism was the immediate religious forerunner of the rationalistic Enlightenment.⁵¹⁶

Calvinism, Trevor-Roper says, has often been given credit for being the intellectual catalyst in the process of Europe's transition from medievalism to modernity. Trevor-Roper disagrees, seeking to show that Enlightenment thinkers may have arisen in predominantly Calvinist lands, but this transpired only when Calvinist beliefs had been discarded and the rationalistic spirit of the Renaissance was able to assert itself triumphantly.⁵¹⁷ Those proponents of this rationalist spirit had allied themselves with Calvinism for political reasons during the days of the Reformation. For them it was a matter of either remaining within the confines of orthodox Catholicism and allowing their ideals to be smothered in repression, or taking the chance that Calvinism (by which Trevor-Roper seems to mean Protestantism in general),⁵¹⁸ would free men's minds from the medieval bondage of scholasticism, simultaneously, if unwittingly, releasing rationalist tendencies which could then seek a legitimate existence of their own in the marketplace of ideas.⁵¹⁹

Erasmus to Trevor-Roper was the father of this Renaissance, pre-enlightenment, rational scepticism,⁵²⁰ and Arminius was one of his children. Erasmus' ideals were shared by many of his contemporaries but the quarrels of the Reformation prevented them from becoming dominant in the world of thought. The early period of Erasmus, just prior to the Lutheran revolt, gave birth to a movement which might have issued in a genuinely universal enlightenment; religious wars intervened, however, and aborted this

516 Hugh R. Trevor-Roper, "The Religious Origins of the Enlightenment," *The European Witch Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and other Essays* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 193-236. This book by Trevor-Roper represents the first four chapters of his earlier work, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, 1968.

517 Ibid., 194-198.

518 Ibid., esp. 207.

519 Ibid., 198, 199.

520 Trevor-Roper quotes Gibbon, and proceeds to accept Gibbon's judgement without question; Gibbon's words, "Erasmus may be considered the father of rationalist theology," Ibid., 203.

possibility.⁵²¹ The political situation surrounding the independence of the Netherlands was a second period of opportunity for the Erasmian spirit to reassert itself, as it did in the movement of Arminianism, which Trevor-Roper claims produced genuine precursors of the Enlightenment.⁵²² “From Arminius and Grotius, the spiritual and the secular disciplines of Erasmus, the line of descent leads through Episcopius, Limborch and Leclerc, unmistakably to the Enlightenment.”⁵²³ But the first generation of Arminians was intercepted in its progress toward modernity by the tragedy of the Thirty Years’ War. Finally, the secular, sceptical rationalism of Erasmus-Arminius was set free when this war ended in 1648, to blossom and flower in the thought of Descartes, Voltaire, Gibbon et al.⁵²⁴ As for Calvinism, in the Netherlands, and elsewhere, “the doctrine of Calvinism, so far as we can see, had no direct influence on any of the ideas which led to the Enlightenment.”⁵²⁵ The religious antecedents of the Enlightenment were, to Trevor-Roper, clearly Arminianism and Socinianism.⁵²⁶

Arminianism, to Trevor-Roper, was a heretical movement vis-à-vis Calvinism in the Netherlands and helped to bring about the demise of Calvinism and thus aided in the resurgence of the pre-Reformation spirit of Renaissance scepticism there. Similar developments evolved in England. Trevor-Roper describes the victory of the Independents over the Presbyterians in the Puritan struggles of the Civil War as a victory of what he calls English Arminianism over English Calvinism, whose clergy he describes in most unflattering terms: “increasingly narrow and rigid, crabbed prudes and Puritans; haters of literature and the arts, stuck in postures of defense...”⁵²⁷ Surely this Arminian triumph was the “victory of the laity over the clergy and therefore in intellectual matters the victory of lay ideas over clerical ideas... Scholastic Aristotelianism, the old philosophy of the Catholic Church which Reformation and Counter-reformation had alike refurbished and reimposed, went down in England.”⁵²⁸ In France, the expulsion of the Huguenots by Louis XIV freed them from clerical Calvinist bondage in that land, and

521 Ibid., 199, 200.

522 Ibid., 200. He sees three eras as giving birth to the Enlightenment tendencies, “the age of Erasmus, the age of Bacon and the age of Newton.”

523 Ibid., 206.

524 Ibid., 205.

525 Ibid., 204.

526 Ibid., 206.

527 Ibid., 209.

528 Ibid., 207.

many of them became anti-Calvinist “Arminians or Socinians,” free-thinking rationalists, the true, “forerunners of the Enlightenment.”⁵²⁹ Trevor-Roper goes on in similar vein to describe the victory of these anti-Calvinist Arminians-Socinians in Scotland and Switzerland, which heralded the coming of the Enlightenment in these areas.⁵³⁰

Of interest here of course is the use Trevor-Roper makes of terms like Erasmianism, Arminianism, and Socinianism, for the last movement according to him was but another anti-Calvinist, localistic expression of rationalistic Erasmianism: “Socinianism is only the application of secular critical human reason to religious texts and religious problems.”⁵³¹ This loose categorization of a movement which had its own particular ideology and history, and this manner of defining diverse ideological movements quite without reference to their own self definitions or self understandings comes through in this quote which equates Erasmianism, Arminianism and Socinianism:

Thus the Arminian-Socinian movement which by breaking Calvinist rule in one society after another released the forces of the new philosophy, was, if anything, a right wing movement ... nor is this in any way surprising. For in fact this movement is not an extension of Calvinism as is so often supposed, nor a deviation from it, either to right or left. It is an independent movement with a distinct origin, a continuous tradition, and a pedigree longer than that of Calvinism. Indeed, Calvinism can be seen as an outgrowth of it, an obscurantist deviation from it rather than vice-versa ... The figure who stands at the source of both of them as of so much else ... is Erasmus.⁵³²

Thus Hugh Trevor-Roper places Arminianism in the Erasmian tradition: this dissertation is in agreement with this conclusion although on entirely different grounds. To link Socinianism with Erasmianism and thus with Arminianism, however, is hardly acceptable:

If Arminianism is free will in theory, tolerance in practice, within a reformed, primitive, visible Christian Church, Erasmus is the first Arminian... Equally, if Socinianism is the application of critical solvent

529 Ibid., 209, 210.

530 Ibid., 214, “Thus we see now that if the new philosophy was forwarded in successive Calvinist societies, it was forwarded in each instance not by Calvinism but by the defeat of Calvinism. Arminianism or Socinianism, not Calvinism, was the religion of the pre-Enlightenment. Calvinism, that fierce and narrow recreation of medieval scholasticism, was its enemy, which died in the last ditches of Holland, England, Switzerland and Scotland.”

531 Ibid., 217.

532 Ibid., 217.

reason to religious texts and religious problems within a similar church, Erasmus is the first Socinian.⁵³³

This statement seems far too reductionistic, as though the doctrines of the Socinians, which were worlds apart from those of the Arminians regarding the Trinity, for example, are not really important for the understanding of the meaning and significance of this religious movement. With regard to Erasmus' trinitarianism, Trevor-Roper makes the preposterous assertion that Erasmus as much as denied belief in the trinity when he rejected as spurious a trinitarian text in 1 John.⁵³⁴ To accept Trevor-Roper's thesis here is to believe that Arminius and Sozzini were really unimportant individuals – they were merely leaders of local, brief manifestations of Erasmus' spirit, and the details of their thought systems were inconsequential and irrelevant. This Trevor-Roper does not deny: “It can be said that Sozzini and Arminius merely gave their names to particular developments of a philosophy which they had received from Erasmus.”⁵³⁵ Calvinism, to Trevor-Roper, was not a system of faith, it was merely an intellectual posture, “intolerant, fundamentalist, scholastic, determinist ... that fierce and narrow recreation of medieval scholasticism.”⁵³⁶ Erasmianism, too, was primarily not an ideology, but an approach to learning, “tolerant, sceptical, mystical, liberal.”⁵³⁷

Once this distinction is recognized, the relationship between Arminianism and Calvinism becomes much clearer. Arminianism is not a Calvinist heresy. Inherently, it has nothing to do with Calvinism. It is only accidentally connected with Arminius. Essentially it is an independent movement which precedes Calvinism. Its apparent emergence out of Calvinism in Holland, Switzerland, Scotland, its appearance as a movement in the Anglican Church in opposition to the Calvinism of the Elizabethan clergy, is in fact merely the assertion of independence by an earlier tradition that had been temporarily merged with Calvinism.⁵³⁸

Far from being the precursor of the Enlightenment, Trevor-Roper concludes that Calvinism was useful in that it provided the revolutionary spirit which freed society from the strictures of Catholic and Tridentine backwardness, but in fact, Calvinism was merely

533 Ibid., 219.

534 Ibid., 220, as though the doctrine of the Trinity were alleged to hang or fall on one biblical reference!

535 Ibid., 220.

536 Ibid., 221.

537 Ibid.

538 Ibid., 224.

a suit of armour worn uncomfortably through times of stress by Erasmians who were glad to climb out of it when the stress came to an end and the Enlightenment could emerge.⁵³⁹

As far as Arminius is concerned this dissertation is successfully defended has refuted the Trevor-Roper thesis although this has not been its conscious purpose. Arminianism was hardly a sceptical, liberal movement which was consciously anti-Calvinist in the sense of wishing to free itself from the major thought forms of the Protestant Reformation. It is difficult to see how Arminianism as Arminius represented it and as it has been described in the preceding chapters could be held responsible for the triumph of secular, sceptical rationalistic thought in the Netherlands.

But what of Erasmus? Is there evidence to refute Trevor-Roper's assessment of him as the father of the Enlightenment? If there is not, then Arminius is not to be identified as an Erasmian. If on the other hand, documentary evidence can be put forward to show that Erasmus was conservatively Christian and sceptical only in a sense unrelated to Trevor-Roper's meaning of the term, indeed to show that Erasmus' Christian humanism has much more to do with establishing Erasmus' place within the tradition of evangelical ecumenism than of identifying him with the tradition of liberal scepticism then Trevor-Roper's thesis stands in question, and another thesis respecting the ideological relationship between Erasmus and Arminius can be postulated. The following pages will attempt to demonstrate the evangelical ecumenism of Desiderius Erasmus and the ideological parallels between Arminius and Erasmus.

Many texts can be gleaned from the writings of Erasmus to defend his Christ-centred evangelicalism. He was above all a Christian interested in articulating the heart of the gospel, embellishing the philosophy of Christ with the finest fruits of humanist scholarship. In 1498 he wrote to Arnold Bostius, "I desire nothing except to secure leisure to live wholly to our God... to pore over the Holy Scriptures."⁵⁴⁰ Of Richard Fox, Bishop of Winchester he asked, "What is religion?" and he answered his own question, "Is it anything else but true and perfect love? Is it not to die with Christ? Is it not to live with Him? Is it not to be only a body, only a soul with Christ?"⁵⁴¹ That he lived and wrote not to satisfy some secular quest for greatness and fame he confesses to Colet when

539 Ibid., 235, 236.

540 Quoted by Robert Murray, in *Erasmus and Luther: Their Attitude Toward Toleration* (New York: Burt Franklin Press, 1972), 7. P. Allen, *The Correspondence of Erasmus*, II, 202.

541 Erasmus, quoted in Murray, *Erasmus and Luther*, 8; Allen, I, 417.

writing of the motive behind his writing the *Enchiridion*, “I wrote it to display neither genius nor eloquence, but simply for this, to counteract the error which makes religion depend on ceremonies, and in more than Jewish observances, while strangely neglecting all that pertains to true piety.”⁵⁴² In introducing his version of the Greek New Testament, he stated, “The *viaticum* [provision for the journey], is simple and at hand for all. Only bring a pious and open heart imbued above all things with a pure and simple faith ... Other philosophies by the very difficulty of their precepts, are removed out of the range of most minds. The Bible rejects no age, sex, condition. Salvation is common ... and left open to all...”⁵⁴³

The Christian humanism of Erasmus has been used as a label to indicate his liberal sceptical tendencies. But it would seem that the use he makes of the classical Greek and Roman authors is always subservient to their use as indicators of the truths of the revelation of Christ; they are to be used as educational instruments with special consideration for the value they possess as revealing the essence of Christian virtue and piety. This comes through most strongly in the *Enchiridion*. Stoicism, he states, teaches the virtue of serenity, the history of Sparta teaches the importance of devotion to one’s country, while “The holiness of Phocion, the poverty of Fabricius, the magnanimity of Camillus, the severity of Brutus, the modesty of Pythagoras, the integrity of Cato (are) ... plainly written in the annals of Greece and Rome.”⁵⁴⁴ Caution, he warned, must be used when prescribing the teaching of the classics, “It is useful to taste profane literature but as I have said, to a certain age, with measure, with prudence, and with careful choice ... in short what is vital in the closest intimacy with Christ.”⁵⁴⁵

The early writings of Erasmus sound sometimes very much like Luther as they stress salvation, faith and the grace of God. In fact, Erasmus was later to say, “It seems to me that I have taught well nigh all that Luther teaches, only less violently and without so many enigmas and paradoxes.”⁵⁴⁶ For instance, in the *Paraphrases*, he notes that, “I call the gospel the justification by faith in Jesus and the Son of God, that the law has

542 Erasmus, quoted in Murray, *Erasmus and Luther*, 9.

543 Erasmus, quoted in Murray, 21.

544 Erasmus, quoted in Murray, 11. See also Erasmus, “The Handbook of the Militant Christian,” in *The Essential Erasmus*, John Dolan, ed. (New York: American Library, 1964), 36, 39.

545 Erasmus, quoted in Murray, *Erasmus and Luther*, 11.

546 Erasmus, quoted in Murray, 183.

promised and prefigured.”⁵⁴⁷ And again, “What does Christ ask of his own but faith ... through his faith they are justified.”⁵⁴⁸ Or these sentences, “When Christ forgives sins, he speaks neither of our satisfaction nor our works ... it suffices to come to the feet of Jesus;”⁵⁴⁹ “All that is bestowed on us for the good life by divine goodness is bestowed on us by faith alone ... We are only the organ of the Divine power which works within us.”⁵⁵⁰ This justification by faith is for Erasmus but the entrance into a life of good works well pleasing to God; his evangelicalism is eminently practical – Christlike behaviour is always the goal of new life in Christianity: “the sap that Christ infuses in us must reveal itself by flowers.”⁵⁵¹ In 1524 Erasmus wrote to Camerarius concerning the constancy of his evangelical commitment: “I have always written, have always taught the same things.” His aim has been to “restore the kingdom of God, that is, evangelical doctrine.”⁵⁵² As he stresses in the *Enchiridion*, “the goal of all our efforts is Christ, and the road to him is faith ... faith is the only door which leads to Christ. (*Fides unica est ad Christum janua*). There is no compelling force, but by it, that is, by faith, all are invited to come to Him.”⁵⁵³ That Erasmus propounded the primacy of grace in the work of salvation is clear from such texts as this one:

Those who are farthest from Pelagius attribute the utmost of grace, almost nothing to free will, without, however, suppressing it; they deny that man can will good without a particular grace, that he can take it in hand, make progress, and accomplish it completely without the essential and continual help of his grace. Their view seems right to me.⁵⁵⁴

Not only can Erasmus’ evangelicalism be substantiated from his writings but his ecumenical spirit comes through again and again as well. “The sum of our religion,” he wrote to Condorelet, “is peace and unanimity,”⁵⁵⁵ and this peace he seemed determined to strive for throughout the turbulent era of the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation. Erasmus felt that the matters of the gospel, as Murray has aptly said,⁵⁵⁶ must be treated in

547 Erasmus, quoted in Murray, 25; Erasmus’ Paraphrase on Rom 1:13.

548 Erasmus, quoted in Murray, 26.

549 Ibid., 26.

550 Ibid.

551 Ibid., 28.

552 Ibid., 82.

553 Ibid., 9.

554 Ibid., 29.

555 Ibid., 26, 27.

556 Ibid.

the spirit of the gospel and the spirit of Jesus and his followers was one of pacific concord:

If Paul speaks to the Athenians, he does not present himself to them as a censor who accuses them, but as a stranger who seeks instruction. Does he write to the Romans? He recommends them not to reject but to welcome the feeble in faith, to receive them as Christ has received them. Does he write to the Corinthians? He advises them to seek what is useful to their brethren not to themselves. Does he write to the Galatians? He does not blame them for having preferred a pseudo-apostle to himself, but writes as a mother who is distressed and disquieted by the idleness of her child. Has this mildness been a danger? Has it not been a force and a power on behalf of truth? This mildness has renewed the world, has done what no harshness could do.⁵⁵⁷

Erasmus' great desire was to see a Christendom united and peaceful, with individual Christians following the tenets of Christ from the heart. When the possibility and later the reality of schism manifested themselves, Erasmus was keenly distressed, and gave himself to the task of seeking to promote peace through correspondence and literary endeavour. His reasons for not siding with factions within the era of the Reformation will be discussed and analysed at length below; suffice it to say here that he felt he could do more for peace by remaining aloof from the fray. To Luther he said, "I hold myself, as far as possible, aloof, that I may be of greater service to the revival of learning. More is gained by well mannered modesty than by storming."⁵⁵⁸

The ecumenical activities of Erasmus included attempts on his part to urge extremists (as he saw them) in the Lutheran and anti-Lutheran camps to moderation and pacification. As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, he wrote to Luther urging not a cessation of the call to reform, but of the kind of vitriolic attacks Luther seemed to be making through his writing. At the same time Erasmus was writing to Luther's Catholic antagonists urging them to ignore Luther's violence and to pay attention to the positive reform measures he was advocating. To the Rector of Erfurt he wrote in 1518 demonstrating his fear of the repercussions of immoderate attacks on abuses:

Was it not better to correct little by little the old theology, than to destroy it? Was it not better to keep it until the peaceful arrival of the new theology? Luther must take care of exaggerations of every kind; he must

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid., 32,
⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., 73.

avoid provoking sedition. He has plainly warned us of many things; would to God he had done so with more moderation.⁵⁵⁹

But while holding to the conviction of the need for gradual evolutionary reform, Erasmus nevertheless supported Luther's right to be heard. He wrote to Oecolamodius in 1520 that "Luther's books were near being burnt in England; nor was there a remedy. The remedy came from a very humble friend, who was watchful at the right time. I cannot judge of the writings of Luther, but this tyranny pleases me in no wise."⁵⁶⁰ The "humble friend" was of course none other than Erasmus himself. Robert Murray describes how Erasmus wrote to Duke Frederick the Wise asking that Luther be protected in Saxony. "This pressure," writes Murray, "secured for Luther comparative peace during the critical years of 1519, 1520 and 1521."⁵⁶¹ Later in this chapter Erasmus' correspondence during the 1520's (at least as much as has a bearing upon our subject), will be discussed in detail. During the Augsburg crisis of 1530, Erasmus, though absent from the scene of action, employed his pen in writing many letters urging that Lutheran opinions and practices be tolerated and that force be avoided at all costs. Murray lists the letters of Erasmus to Bonifilus; Christopher von Stadion, Bishop of Augsburg; the Bishop of Wurzburg; the Chancellor of Poland, the Cardinal of Trent; Cardinal Campeggio, etc., all in 1530,⁵⁶² all directly related to the Lutheran problem. The letter to Campeggion serves as an illustration of the content of these epistles:

I know and hate the impudence of those who join and favor sects. But at present we must consider the peace of the Church, not the deserts of the heretics. And we must not despair of the church. It was formerly disturbed by greater storms. What was the condition of the world then? The same state had Arians, Pagans, and Orthodox. The Donatist raged in Africa and the Circumcellions; in many places the heresy of the Manichaeans flourished and the infection of Marcionism and the invasions of the barbarians. And yet the emperor held the reins without bloodshed and gradually weeded out the heretics. Time itself is sometimes a remedy for obstinate diseases. If the sects were permitted under certain conditions (as the Bohemians are winked at) it would be a serious evil, but better than war. In this state of things I should like to be in Italy but the fates call me

559 Ibid., 72.

560 Ibid., 73.

561 Ibid., 75, 76.

562 Ibid., 319.

elsewhere. But where they call me, it will not be from the counsels of peace.⁵⁶³

Thought carefully worded, this is a call for genuine religious liberty for the dissenting Protestants. Erasmus seemed to believe that the Christian Church should not be divided; let the various factions make concessions and compromises in order to keep “the seamless coat of Jesus” unrent.⁵⁶⁴ But if schism transpires, let the sects at least be tolerated. The way of forceful destruction of heresy is to be completely discouraged.

Several characteristics of Erasmus’ attitude toward reform and unity can be discerned from a study of a series of his letters written between 1519 and 1532. The first of these letters indicates a measure of support for the early pronouncements of Luther, while the last one indicates his disillusionment with the Protestant movement. The intervening correspondence makes clear the reasons for Erasmus’ gradual change in attitude toward the reformers; equally discernible is his unchanging quest for improvement and unity within the life of the Catholic Church.⁵⁶⁵

To Albert of Brandenburg, Archbishop of Mainz, Erasmus wrote from Louvain (October 1519), “I think it is a Christian act to countenance Luther as, if he is innocent, I should not want him oppressed by a party of scoundrels; if he is guilty of error, I want him to be brought back to the path, not destroyed.”⁵⁶⁶ Erasmus fears that the enemies of Luther will subject him to an unjust condemnation, which would be tragic in that Luther is to be commended for his daring in making many abuses in the church manifest. He himself, he admits, is concerned about the indulgence abuse, the exaggerated claims of papal authority, and the sterility of Scholasticism, and the evils which have crept into the practice of auricular confession; Luther is to be admired for writing against these malpractices. Those denouncing Luther as a heretic should read and seek to understand him, not condemn him without a proper hearing.⁵⁶⁷

563 Ibid., 324.

564 Erasmus’ reference to the “seamless coat of Jesus” first appeared in his *Puerpera* in 1526. The phrase was used in the title of Raymond Himelick’s translation of the *Liber De Sarcinda Ecclesiae Concorida, Erasmus and the Seamless Coat of Jesus* (Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Studies, 1971).

565 “Selections from the Letters,” *Erasmus and the Seamless Coat of Jesus*, R. Himelick tr., 110-212. These are selections from nineteen letters of Erasmus from 1518 to 1533. Himelick’s translation of these letters will be used throughout the next section, and will be abbreviated to “Letters”.

566 Erasmus, “Letters,” 133.

567 “Letters,” 134-140.

It is clear from this early letter that Erasmus is already concerned about the tone in which Luther is attacking these errors, however, Fearing the “uproar” which may result from an invective approach,⁵⁶⁸ he has warned Luther to tone down his style and write with more moderation. He is, therefore, somewhat sympathetic to Luther at this point; certainly he feels a kinship with Luther regarding areas of life and belief within Christianity which are in need of improvement. He is equally hard on those who are anti-Lutheran in a way which indicates their lack of comprehension concerning the issues being raised by the Wittenberg reformer. Nevertheless, there is a note of apprehension in Erasmus’ qualified commendation. Luther’s strident militancy obviously has him concerned.

In the same year, 1519, Erasmus wrote to John Slechta, a Bohemian nobleman, on the subject of divisions among Christians in that land and what Erasmus would counsel concerning them.⁵⁶⁹ This epistle reveals Erasmus’ view that differences in practice among Christians can be allowed as long as evangelical essentials are insisted upon. “In my opinion,” he wrote, “the fact is that the pope would win most people to the Roman Church ... if everything under the sun were not precisely defined in terms of matters of faith, but only those things that have been plainly laid out in scripture or without which the basis of our salvation is not made clear.”⁵⁷⁰ Just what Erasmus considered to be essential is outlined in this letter and so is worthy of extended citation:

a few principles would suffice for this purpose, and a few are more persuasive than many. Now ... furthermore, the essence of the Christian philosophy consists of this, that we understand that our whole hope resides in God, who freely bestows on us all things through his Son Jesus. By his death we have been redeemed; on his body we have been ingrafted through baptism; so that, once dead to the lusts of this world we may live in accordance with his teaching and example in such a way that not only are we guiltless of sin but also serve him well in every way; and if misfortune befalls us we bear up stoutly in the expectation of the coming reward which unequivocally awaits all good men at the coming of Christ and continually advance from virtue to virtue in such a way that we attribute nothing to ourselves but give God credit for anything good.⁵⁷¹

568 “Letters,” 133.

569 “Letters,” 141-149.

570 “Letters,” 147, 148.

571 Ibid., 148.

Hope through the mercy of God, redemption through the sacrifice of Christ, the fruit of salvation consisting in conformity to the character of Christ, bright hope for the future based on Christ's promises, and growth in Christian character through the efficacy of divine grace alone – this is the Christian philosophy of Erasmus: simple, evangelical in terms of the centrality of Christ and salvation, practical in terms of a life of useful and unselfish service. Arguing over deeper mysteries is foolish, he indicates, and produces only tension and dissension.

In 1520 Erasmus wrote to Lorenzo Campeggio, again indicating his sympathy with the content of Luther's reform platform, but revealing his concern with the intractable spirit manifest in Luther's writing. He has written Luther urging him to be more restrained, and to adopt a milder approach, to use "close, cogent arguments, to ignore insults, reply with evidence, and refrain altogether from polemical interpretation."⁵⁷² This reference to correspondence with Luther would suggest strongly that Erasmus felt an intellectual and spiritual kinship with the reformer at this time but again is worried about the results of an approach that was immoderate and contentious. "I did this to urge upon him a more moderate and temperate approach by which he would be more acceptable to the judgement of all good men and to write with restraint – those things that would merit the lasting approval of the devout and the learned."⁵⁷³ To Campeggio Erasmus repeats what he had said to Albert with regard to his desire for fair treatment to be accorded Luther. He has heard of the papal bulls which had been issued against Luther and the calls for burning Luther's works, and these events have caused him to be "disquieted," and "heartsick."⁵⁷⁴

It would seem from these letters that Erasmus was trying to steer a middle course between extremists in both the Lutheran and anti-Lutheran camps. He will not denounce Luther, because legitimate complaints regarding unevangelical beliefs are being raised by the Wittenberg professor. He will not support him totally, because Luther's immoderation foreshadows schism and worse trouble for Christendom. The dilemma of striving to follow the middle way is reflected in Erasmus' letter to Louis Marlian, physician of Milan, who had written against Luther.⁵⁷⁵ He (Erasmus) did not approve of Luther's tone

572 Ibid., 150.

573 Ibid., 153.

574 Ibid., 159.

575 Ibid., 161-164.

of “seditious agitation.” Nevertheless, he refuses to side with those who condemn Luther. “In sum, I am urging that we avoid the Lutheran Scylla in such a way as not to be pushed headlong into the Charybdis of belligerent sectarianism.”⁵⁷⁶ Here then is Erasmus pressing for evangelical reform, acting as moderator in the era of nascent reformation, seeking to keep the peace among those who are at opposite poles within the church. Do these epistles not reveal the evangelical ecumenism of Erasmus?

In May of 1521, Erasmus reveals his growing impatience with Luther’s spirit in a letter to Jodocus Jonas, one of Luther’s disciples. Luther’s “manner and method of achieving the purpose was not at all agreeable to me,” he wrote.⁵⁷⁷ It concerned him that Luther “frequently ... swept beyond what is right by a kind of uncontrolled impetuosity.”⁵⁷⁸ Erasmus was convinced that the proper approach to deal with irregularities and to bring about change was one of moderation and temperateness. This he told Jonas, would be in line with “the evangelical spirit of Christ,” which has “its own peculiar courtesy and mildness.”⁵⁷⁹ Jesus was respectful of his adversaries; so was Peter in addressing the multitudes who had crucified Christ; so was Paul in preaching to the pagan Greeks; kindness marked the writings of Augustine against the Donatists and the Manichaeans. “This gentleness in teaching, this sensibleness in dispensing of divine instruction captured the world and sent it under the yoke of Christ – something no arms, no philosophical subtlety, no rhetorical skill, no human force or art could do.”⁵⁸⁰ One method of reconciling religious dissensions is called for then – that is the way of Christ, the way of peace, the way of moderation and sensitivity. AS the years of the early reformation passed, Erasmus did not depart from that way. This letter reveals that he is convinced that things have not become so bad in the church that a peaceful solution cannot be achieved:

Nor do I agree with those who say that the sickness of these times is too critical to be cured by mild remedies ... It is better to let an evil be as it is than make it worse by inept treatment ... I do not agree, my dear Jonas, with those men who say that Luther could not maintain a Christian moderation because he had been provoked by the unbearable effrontery of his opponents. Regardless of how others behave, any one who is taking

576 Ibid., 163.

577 Ibid., 165.

578 Ibid., 165.

579 Ibid., 166.

580 Ibid., 168.

such a role upon himself ought to be consistent with himself and indifferent to all other matters ... Now what a host of ills this rashness has created.⁵⁸¹

That Erasmus became greatly aggravated because of Luther's violent language as more of his works were published is revealed in his words to Duke George of Saxony in 1526.⁵⁸² "I never marvel enough," he lamented, "at the spirit and character of the man. If he is moved by an evil and perverse genius, what has ever arisen more deadly to the Catholic Church? If by a good one, I miss in many respects the fruits of the spirit of the Gospel. If he is drawn by a composite of good and bad traits, who can have had such enormous vitality of two types within the same heart?"⁵⁸³ But a letter to Simon Pistorius sent from Basel at the same time as that to Duke George indicates that his exasperation with Luther has not tempered his own desire to see reforms instituted within the Church.⁵⁸⁴ The spirit of adiaphorism, of allowing for flexibility within the practice of the church in areas where flexibility is allowable, the spirit of making concessions and compromises in areas where such leniency will not hinder the propagation of the truth of Christ – this remains the spirit of Erasmus:

In regard to there being no immediate necessity of burning Luther's books, this seemed, considering the times, more politic in terms of the public situation. If the Church were to allow the use of the sacrament in both kinds, I don't see the least bit of harm from it; she once did allow this to the Bohemians. I don't approve, however, of anyone's stirring up a hubbub among Christian people by this dispensation. I do not condone marriage for priests, nor would I soften the vows for monastic life unless this comes about by the authority of the pontiffs with the intention of strengthening the church, not destroying it. I consider it barbarous to force boys and girls into it, and an act of piety to free those imprisoned in it by fraud. In the early church priests and monastics had to prefer celibacy and an ascetic life. Now, since practices have become so corrupt, perhaps we should choose the lesser evil.⁵⁸⁵

The sacrament received by the laity in both kinds, the possibility of married clergy, and a thorough renovation of monasticism – these changes would be agreeable to Erasmus; but they must come gradually, be properly authorized, and result in strengthening

581 Ibid., 170.

582 Ibid., 174, 175.

583 Ibid., 174.

584 Ibid., 176, 177.

585 Ibid., 177.

Catholicism, not weakening it and bringing it into disrepute. Erasmus was quite well aware that these changes had been instituted by Protestants; his quarrel with them concerned the suddenness and the violence through which these changes had come about.

Gradual change where change is needed, especially in the area of theological methodology, continued to be advocated by Erasmus. In 1528 he wrote to John Longland, Bishop of Lincoln, denouncing arid Scholasticism and elevating the authority of the scriptures and the early Fathers.⁵⁸⁶ “I am not sorry,” he confessed, “for the fact that I have tried to recall the theology of the schoolmen to the founts of Scripture and the interpretations of the early Fathers, especially when I think of the frivolous nit picking it has succumbed to. If they would like to restore theology to her pristine dignity, let them do it, not by ranting at others but by revealing a sensible theology, worthy of Christ ... What Luther has sanely taught and advocated, let us follow, not because he taught it but because it was sound and in accord with holy Scripture.”⁵⁸⁷

To the Polish Justus Decius, Erasmus wrote in 1529 indicating similar sentiments to those expressed in the missive to Longland.⁵⁸⁸ “The things Luther is upbraiding us with are truer than I should like ... And those things which Luther advocates, if pursued with moderation, would in my opinion approach more closely the meaning of the gospels.”⁵⁸⁹ Again, it is not the evangelical sentiments of Luther which Erasmus finds at all offensive; he is in basic agreement with them. It is the bellicose spirit of Luther to which he objects, because he fears its consequences. In the same year he wrote to John Botzheim placing himself clearly on the side of Roman Catholicism, vis-à-vis the Protestants, but stating that abuses must be corrected and the harmony of Christendom restored.⁵⁹⁰ “I do not mention these things, my dear Botzheim, to support those who because of the culpability of evil practitioners assail things good in themselves and prefer to overthrow just institutions rather than improve them; rather, I bring them up partly so that we may on this account react with more restraint toward those to whom we ourselves have given

586 Ibid., 185, 186.

587 Ibid., 186.

588 Ibid., 188.

589 Ibid.

590 Ibid., 189.

provocation, and partly so that I may indicate means by which this turbulent situation may be restored to tranquillity.”⁵⁹¹

Erasmus’ adiaphorism is revealed again in his words to the Archbishop of Cologne, Hermann von Weid, penned in 1528.⁵⁹² Again there is a call for emphasizing the evangelical essentials, and the suggestion that to do so is to pave the way for ecumenical concord:

There is no point in prying into everything, much less in making pronouncements about them. It is enough to deal with those matters which are particularly relevant to gospel teaching ... Nothing should be disseminated among the people except that which is not open to question, is essential to matters of faith and conducive to righteous living ... This would be done if, purging ourselves of private interests, we all fixed our sights on one target, the glory of Christ. At present most people are pursuing their own advantage and thus it happens that neither privately nor publicly is it well with us ... If we would all take refuge in Him, He would easily turn this storm in human affairs into peaceful calm.”⁵⁹³

In 1531 and 1532, two letters from Erasmus reveal his constancy in calling for reform of abuses, and his modified view of Luther compared to that held in 1519. To Jacopo Sadoletto, Erasmus wrote in 1531 of his campaign against the superstitions connected with the practices of convoking saints and venerating images.⁵⁹⁴ His words sound almost Protestant, but a letter to Martin Bucer in 1532 disclaims all allegiance to the Protestant cause.⁵⁹⁵ Why is Erasmus so anxious to disavow his connection with the Protestant cause at this point? Two reasons stand out. First, the contentious spirit of the reformers has produced division, schism and forbodes war and bloodshed within Christendom. The seamless robe of Jesus is being rent to tatters, and this causes Erasmus great grief.⁵⁹⁶ Second, and most revealingly, Erasmus informs Bucer, as he had in an earlier letter, that he has not seen the fruit of Christlikeness revealed in the lives of those who have loudly professed the superiority of the Evangelical (protestant) theology. “I have known no one who has himself become better through this Evangelicalism .. I have known many, though, who have been made worse.”⁵⁹⁷

591 Ibid., 190.

592 Ibid., 192, 193.

593 Ibid., 193.

594 Ibid., 203, 204.

595 Ibid., 205-209.

596 Ibid., 205.

597 Ibid., 208.

This stinging rebuke of the consequences of the Protestant way of violent revolt came through in Erasmus' 1527 letter to Bucer.⁵⁹⁸ "... I have known some who before they joined your faith were very fine men; what kind of men they are now I do not know. At any rate, I have discovered that several of them have been made worse, none of them better, so far as human judgement can ascertain."⁵⁹⁹ Here perhaps is a clue to the reason why Luther and Erasmus parted company – at least part of the reason. Erasmus clearly taught that the purpose of Christ's redeeming work was to provide mankind with access to God through forgiveness of sins. The new Christian, forgiven by God, was then empowered by God to overcome sin and become more and more like Christ. Faith is essential to becoming and remaining a Christian to Erasmus; good works (the imitation of Christ) are the fruits of faith, and practical Christian piety is an essential concomitant or rather an inevitable result of genuine faith-in-action. Not only was Erasmus opposed to the immoderate violence of the protestant way of seeking change, but apparently he failed to see the stress on faith and grace followed by an equal stress on holy, righteous, Christlike living.

What disturbs me deeply is the fact that Luther has abandoned the cause of the Gospel, the fact that he has stirred up princes, etc., against the principles of good men ... And I seem to see ahead a cruel and bloody time if the offended faction gets its breath again, something which it is plainly doing now ... If the husband had found his wife easier to get along with, the teacher his pupil more respectful, the magistrate the citizen more responsible, the contractor his worker more reliable, the customer the merchant less tricky, that would have been the great recommendation for their evangelicalism ... They should have shunned all seditious acts. If they had carried on with moderation and sincerity, they would have enlisted the support of princes and prelates ... Nor should they have heedlessly uprooted anything without having something better ready to take the place of the worse ... And other things could have been changed without such chaos.⁶⁰⁰

In many passages, especially in the *Enchiridion of the Christian Soldier*, Erasmus urges an interiorization and spiritualization of outward forms of Christian practice.⁶⁰¹ The outward rites, ceremonies and practices must never become ends in themselves; their

598 Ibid., 180-182.

599 Ibid., 180.

600 Ibid., 181.

601 Especially his fifth Rule which stresses the inwardness of religious experience, Erasmus, "Handbook of the Militant Christian," *Essential Erasmus*, (Dolan tr.), 61-71.

inward significance must be comprehended to the end that they result in purified, more Christian conduct. A paragraph from the *Enchiridion* expresses this attitude:

Perhaps you are wont to venerate the relics of the saints, yet at the same time you condemn their greatest legacy, the example of their lives. No veneration of Mary is more beautiful than the imitation of her humility. No devotion to the saints is more acceptable to God than the imitation of their virtues. Say you have a great devotion to St. Peter and St. Paul. Then by all means imitate the faith of the former and the charity of the latter. This will certainly be more rewarding than a dozen trips to Rome. Do you really want to honour St. Francis? Then why not give away your wealth to the poor, restrain your evil inclinations, and see in everyone you meet the image of Christ? By avoiding contentions and overcoming evil with good you will shine brighter in the sight of God than a hundred lighted candles ... I have continually emphasized that the only complete example of perfect piety is to be found in the imitation of Christ. Yet I do not condemn the imitation of his saints; emulate them in such a way that each of them prompts you to eradicate one or another vice, and practice their particular virtues.⁶⁰²

Erasmus constantly and consistently attacked superstitious confidence in outward observance; he obviously hoped that some of these practices would be modified as Christians made more practical use of their spiritual significance. But for these practices to be discontinued without a corresponding change in the behaviour of Christians – in fact for them to be discontinued by those whose conduct became thenceforth less Christian, was for Erasmus a tragic development.

Nowadays those who have given up doing the canonical Hours, pray not at all. Many who have taken off the Pharisaical robes are worse in other respects than they were before. Those who scorn the regulations of bishops do not even obey the precepts of God. Those who neglect the selection of foods pamper their palates and their bellies. It is a protracted tragedy...⁶⁰³

The quarrel of Erasmus with the Protestants was not that the latter were too evangelical; on the contrary, it appeared to him that genuinely evangelical ends were not being served by them. Far from being a sceptical rationalist embittered with Protestantism because it was too primitivistically Christian, Erasmus, it appears, was disheartened because it was producing behaviour that was not nearly Christian enough.

602 Erasmus, "Handbook," 66-68.

603 Erasmus, "Letters," 182.

Let me repeat what I have already said: I have known no one who has himself become better through this Evangelicalism, that is, who has become less given to whoring, to gluttony, to dicing, more forgiving of injuries, more indifferent to getting even, less intent upon serving his own interests ... I have known many, though, who have been made worse. I am not basing my judgements on what I know nothing about. All we hear is “The Gospel, the Gospel! Faith, faith!” Now I should like nothing better than that such a state of affairs may chance to have a happy ending, but insofar as I can conjecture and infer the rest of the book from its preface, the situation suggests the complete disaster of Christian authority...⁶⁰⁴

Two documents were written by Erasmus in 1533 which serve as his last plaintive call to peace and concord in the Church. The first was the book, *De Amabile Concordia Ecclesiae*,⁶⁰⁵ and the second, *Liber De Sarcienda Ecclesiae Concordia*.⁶⁰⁶ Robert Murray offers this summary of the former of these treatises:

Both sides were to make concessions. Let the Church suppress in her creed, in her worship, in her Christian life, everything savouring of superstition. On the other hand let the reformers duly recognize the rights of tradition. Let the theologians, leaving to the one side questions as useless as those of the schoolmen, agree on the definition of the necessary matters, grace and nature, the faith which justifies, the works required for salvation, the great love of God which excluded neither reward nor merit. Let the faithful, attending to their duties to their country, allow the bishops and doctors the care of interpreting the Bible. Let all, people and clergy alike, beware of injuring, libelling, excluding, and cursing. Surely God will then take pity on this common effort towards humility, love, and Christian reconciliation on both sides.⁶⁰⁷

These sentiments, so similar in many ways to those expressed by Arminius in the work *De Componendo Dissidio Religiones* are amplified and expanded in the larger work, *De Sarcienda Ecclesiae Concordia* – “On Mending the Peace of the Church,” which will now be given extensive analysis.

The *Concordia* is probably the most important of Erasmus’ works dealing with the subject of the unity of the church. It was written later in Erasmus’ life (1533), after he had witnessed so much within Christendom which was disintegrative. The earlier pleas for moderation in dealing with issues which he had addressed to Protestant and Catholic

604 Ibid., 208.

605 *Opera Omnia Desiderii Erasmi* (Leclerc), V:470.

606 Raymond Himelick’s translation of the *Liber de Sarcienda Ecclesiae Concordia* will be used in the following analysis. It will be abbreviated as *Concordia*.

607 Murray, *Erasmus and Luther*, 340.

leaders alike seemed to have fallen on deaf ears. The *Concordia* was Erasmus' one last attempt to employ persuasive literature in the service of ecumenism. Gone are the sharp barbs of wit and sarcasm typical of early works; this treatise is gracefully written but its underlying tone is one of urgent seriousness.

The first part of the document is a commentary on the eighty-fourth Psalm (numbered eighty-three in the Vulgate), which begins with the familiar words, "How amiable are thy tabernacles O Lord of Hosts..." The security and joy of the Old Testament Psalmist within the sanctuary of Israel's God Erasmus interprets as a type of the safety Christians are to experience within the refuge of the Christian Church.⁶⁰⁸ Peace, safety, indeed salvation itself are the possessions of those who dwell in the tabernacle of God – here is the only safe haven. Apart from the Christian Church one finds only the dangerous insecurity of the "tents of wickedness,"⁶⁰⁹ which Erasmus equates with the thought systems and congregational gatherings of sectaries and heretical schismatics. The Psalm, then, is about the glory of Christian unity, and calls for a celebration of Christian concord within the safety and salvation of the Orthodox faith. The latter part of the tract draws practical implications from this theoretical ecclesiastical imagery, and in this section Erasmus' program for the alleviation of the dissensions which are threatening to tear apart the seamless coat of Jesus is again put forward.⁶¹⁰

At least three themes cogent to our study are revealed in the *Concordia*. The first is the conservative traditionalism of Erasmus, who is supposed, by Trevor-Roper and others, to have been the father of liberal modernity; the second is the centrality of evangelicalism, as we have earlier defined it, in the ecclesiology of Erasmus: the stress he placed upon emphasizing the doctrines necessary for salvation and these alone as the primary function of the church; and the third is the ecumenism of Erasmus, as he offers counsel to all who would save Christianity from further fragmentation. Each of these motifs will now be analyzed, and the similarities and differences between Erasmus and Arminius which can be drawn from this analysis will be noted.

One is immediately impressed upon reading the *Concordia* with the traditionalism of Erasmus. He writes as a convinced member of the established orthodox Roman

608 Erasmus, *Concordia*, 37, 38.

609 Ibid., 38, 39.

610 Ibid., 85-98.

Catholic Church, defends its structures and thought forms (although typically condemning superstition and abuse), and utilises its traditional methods in interpreting the Scriptures which buttress his arguments.⁶¹¹ His approach to the Christian life is ascetic,⁶¹² but at the same time there are sections which are decidedly humanistic, that is, where he handles texts and sources with the tools of historical and literary criticism.

The opening paragraphs of the *Concordia* deal with the heading of Psalm eighty-four (“winepress”), which to Erasmus indicates that this Psalm was composed for cultic use during the Feast of Tabernacles, a time for remembering the goodness of the Lord’s deliverance of His own people from bondage and bringing them into the safety of the land where he would dwell among them.⁶¹³ Here Erasmus uses some strange (at least to modern readers) numerology in relating this Psalm with two others which he felt also were used in the Tabernacles festival:

Jerome has meticulously noted that three psalms have headings which refer to a winepress: the eighth... the eightieth... and this eighty-third... The first day then which Psalm 8 deals with, was an appropriate subject for the praise of man created in the image of God, and showing man thus created as to be nearest to angels. The second one of the three deals with man recalled to innocence through the law, a fact that is pointed up by eight multiplied by ten, symbolizing the Decalogue. The third reveals man elevated by the grace of the Gospel to the point of perfection where he could live corporeally here on earth while, through faith and hope have communion with heaven. To these ten eights is joined a three because by the light of the Gospel the whole world has clearly recognized the mystery of the Holy Trinity.⁶¹⁴

This and other examples of Erasmus’ hermeneutics in the *Concordia* illustrate that he was not at all above employing mystical and allegorical methods of interpretation which

611 Erasmus’ devotion to Roman Catholicism is stressed throughout the *Concordia*, and is the subject of his letter to Wilibald Pirckheimer (1527), “Letters,” 179. “Just how much weight the authority of the Church has with others I do not know; for me certainly it has so much that I could agree with the Arians and the Pelagians if the Church had approved what they taught... I acquiesce in nothing more securely than in the positive judgements of the Church.

612 Note Erasmus’ ascetic description of the ideal religion-centred life which he suggests as normative for all Christians: “But the Christian should have no time devoid of faithfulness. Let the fast be observed on the approach of a feast day, but let it be a devout one; the feast day is a time for rejoicing, but a spiritual rejoicing. In that place some are sad but in accordance with the will of God; here some of us are glad, but in the sight of the Lord.” *Concordia*, 35.

613 Erasmus, *Concordia*, 30-33.

614 Erasmus, *Concordia*, 33.

do not mark his modernity but rather reflect his conscious allegiance to older traditions.⁶¹⁵ Incidentally, the reference to the Trinity is of interest in regard to Trevor-Roper's charge that Erasmus was the first anti-trinitarian Socinian. If he is being honest in this late document, Erasmus has not at all surrendered his convictions with regard to this orthodox tenet of belief.

The Jew had known the Father; but afterwards the Son, who had taken on human nature, was seen on earth and dwelled with men; finally He was received into heaven and the Spirit imparted from above restoring the minds and tongues of all. Then at last the world clearly acknowledged one God in three Persons, three Persons in the same divine nature: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.⁶¹⁶

There are several references to the Trinity within the *Concordia* and all mark Erasmus as thoroughly orthodox and anything but rationally sceptical about this doctrine. "Christ," he said, "was the creator of man unfallen; the Father through the Son made the universe and whatever is in heaven or earth. This no one but the all powerful could do ..." ⁶¹⁷ Erasmus equates the words of Christ with the words of deity, "I am the Way, God declares, the truth, and the life,"⁶¹⁸ and again, "Let us listen to the voice of God as he offers true peace of mind: 'Come to me all you who labour and are heavily burdened, and I will refresh you.'"⁶¹⁹ Speaking of the deity of Christ, Erasmus could say, "And that very one so despised by the world is He in whose name every knee bends in heaven, earth, or hell. He who is one communion in glory with God the Father."⁶²⁰ The scepticism of Erasmus is evident in his reference to trinitarianism, but it is a scepticism which is distrustful of rationalism, not one which promotes the predominance of reason as a faculty within man. There is, he insisted, no way to rationalize one's way to an adequate understanding of the Trinitarian mystery; far wiser is it to accept the doctrine and adore the reality behind it:

Again and again we see people losing their sanity because they so passionately devote themselves to an immoderate enthusiasm for subtleties

615 Note also Erasmus' use of the reference to "sons of Korah" in the eighty-fourth Psalm in an allegorical sense. Christ is the true son of Korah, "who having suffered on the hill of Calvary gathered the whole world unto himself..." Ibid., 35.

616 Ibid., 33.

617 Ibid., 35.

618 Ibid., 51.

619 Ibid., 59.

620 Ibid., 54.

... It is small wonder that those people who, not content to believe what Scripture teaches us about the Holy Trinity, minutely scrutinize questions vastly exceeding the capacity of the human mind, fall to raving, so that wishing to be more than humanly wise they lose ordinary common sense. Solomon has a prediction about them: "He who pries into majesty is overcome by its glory."⁶²¹

Nevertheless, though he is willing to admit the limitations of human rational ability, he still recognizes the real miracle of the Incarnation:

Who would have thought it possible that human nature could thus be made one with the divine nature so that they could be assimilated into one person? But he made the promise and he kept it. Who believed it possible that a man would actually sit at the right hand of God the Father? He made the promise and He kept it.⁶²²

The preceding of course is only a sample of the texts which could be cited from many treatises in defense of Erasmus' Trinitarianism and his catholic orthodoxy.⁶²³ His counsels against the anti-trinitarian heresies ought to be enough to convince one of the falseness of Trevor-Roper's statement that Erasmus found one text supportive of the Trinitarian doctrine to be spurious and consequently abandoned the doctrine altogether.⁶²⁴

The above discussion supports the traditionalism of Erasmus, that is, his identification with the *Via Antiqua* through his use of allegorical and mystical interpretations of the Bible. There are also passages in the *Concordia* which demonstrate his insistence upon using the tools of Renaissance literary and historical criticism in understanding scripture. For instance, his long discursus on the trials of Athanasius,⁶²⁵ the recounting of the historical significance of the Israelite feasts and fasts,⁶²⁶ the use of classical illustrations such as the speech of Alcibiades before the Athenians,⁶²⁷ all mark Erasmus as a scholar in the Christian humanist tradition. How are these two strains, the ancient and the modern, to be reconciled within the ideological approach of Erasmus? Raymond Himelick offers these thoughts which seem to adequately answer the question:

621 Ibid., 48.

622 Ibid., 75.

623 One document which clearly sets forth the evangelical orthodoxy of Erasmus is the little known colloquy, *De Inquisitio Fidei*. See "An Inquiry Concerning the Faith," *The Essential Erasmus* (J. Dolan, ed.), 205-221.

624 Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Religious Origins of the Enlightenment," 220. See note 19 above.

625 *Concordia*, 40, 41.

626 *Concordia*, 30.

627 Ibid., 44.

At the same time though, we need to remind ourselves that the purpose of such textual criticism, of all scholarship and learning for Erasmus was a truer knowledge of God. This meant the restoration as nearly as possible of the true text of scripture and of the early Fathers, the original fonts of that knowledge. Men had to go forward by a backward motion; he did not intend to emancipate men from the old Christian pieties, but to return to them.⁶²⁸

Here in the *Concordia* we meet no “irreverent mocker of things holy.”⁶²⁹ The first part of the *Concordia* ought to dispel any notion of a secular and sceptical Erasmus. One looks in vain for purely secular morality in this work and cannot find

a social gospel drained of any genuine religious content. The Christ one finds here ... is a far cry from a warrant for liberal agitation. Man’s relation to him is an individual relation, with the Church as mediator; it is not man, however, who stands at the centre of this perspective, but Christ, and although Christ is supremely relevant to all sorts of purely human experience, that experience has to be understood in relation to the Christian gospel. The good life in this world is not so much one that uses Christ as one that is used by him.⁶³⁰

This notion of a secularly humanist Erasmus wanes more deeply as one reads in the *Concordia* concerning his confidence in the future joys of heavenly bliss which exist in the world of ultimate reality which, seen with the eye of faith, is at once the model for the harmony after which Christians ought to strive here below, and at the same time a reminder that imperfections here will have to be tolerated until that ‘which is perfect is come’: “The concord of righteous men gives us an image of that celestial church in which there are no warring opinions, for then men see the glory of the Lord, not in shadowy outline but face to face. Perfect harmony of soul and perfect love hymn God’s praises with voice and heart.”⁶³¹ In answer to the question as to whether or not this invisible and triumphant church of glory can ever be seen in existence here on earth, Erasmus provides a qualified positive answer in this picture of what he considers to be an ideal worship service, which in the context of the *Concordia* seems to be Erasmus’ *summum bonum* of human experience:

But this visible church itself, consisting of an admixture of the bad with the good contains the utmost joy and grandeur as often as it unites for the

628 R. Himelick, *Erasmus and the Seamless Coat of Jesus*, 5.

629 Ibid., 7.

630 Ibid., 7, 8.

631 Erasmus, *Concordia*, 42.

achievement of piety. Wherever a man gifted with the power of prophecy talks from the heart and shares the word of God, the people listen to what he says with devout reverence and attention, not as to the words of man but of God. Whenever the person teaching is so inspired that you can see Christ's spirit speaking through human lips, one sees at the same time the power of that spirit operating in the listeners. Some are sighing, others are bursting into tears, still others have smiling faces; in brief, you may say that all are transfigured. Again, when in the established worship each one makes use of his own talent, one gives the scriptural reading, another sings praises to God, a third offers prayer in the name of the whole congregation and discusses the divine mysteries, others assist the one performing these things and the people meanwhile do homage to the whole in reverent silence. Who, watching these things, does not confess that they are the lovely tabernacles of God. In like manner, when a solemn occasion of the Church takes place with the ceremonies fittingly performed even those who are observing only for the sake of observing are stirred by a kind of reverential delight.⁶³²

The church united "for the achievement of piety:" this is the end of the worship experience, a life of blameless piety; but the pious worshipping Christian realizes that these worship experiences and these days spent in pious service to Christ and others, are but a shadow of things to come: "Let us be turtle doves in blamelessness and purity, and knowing that we have here no lasting home, sigh unceasingly for the heavenly Jerusalem."⁶³³ The anteroom of the heavenly home is the earthly church, and here on earth it is in the Church alone where safety and the atmosphere of heaven is to be found. "There is, however, a kind of nest in the anteroom of the church though it is one fixed to and dependent on the hope of things to come. Apart from the Church there is no hope of real felicity. So expansive, so measureless is the human mind that God alone can fill it

...⁶³⁴

Do you wish then to be safe from all evil? You must not be tossed about by every wind of doctrine; let us hold fast with steady faith to what the Catholic Church has handed down to us from the Holy Scriptures. Let us follow in simple obedience what it teaches and await in eager hope what it promises. To those who walk with the straightforward openness mercy will not be lacking, nor will truth or grace or any kind of good that is relevant to eternal blessedness.⁶³⁵

632 Ibid., 43.

633 Ibid., 59.

634 Ibid., 57.

635 Ibid., 81.

With regard to the evangelicalism of the *Concordia* it is evident that Erasmus' sentiments regarding the centrality of the doctrine of salvation and the relationship between faith, grace, and resultant piety have remained consistent with those of earlier works. The Psalm upon which he is commenting celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from captivity, and their confident safety in God's domain. Resting in the safety of the "Tabernacles of the Most High" there is abundant reason for rejoicing. What, he asks, is the New Testament counterpart of this Old Testament experience of gladness? It is the joy of the Christian in the contemplation of the salvation bestowed upon him by God. "When the old man, therefore, has been mortified and buried in baptism, the new man who is assuredly dead to self but, holding the living Christ to himself, is wholly exultant, giving thanks to Him by whose undeserved grace he has been transformed."⁶³⁶ Erasmus' point is that the joy of the Christian in his salvation should cause him to love the tranquillity of the church where salvation can be propounded and appropriated, and to do everything he can to preserve it and promote its peace. But he does not make this point before extolling the reasons for Christian rejoicing because of the saving grace and power of God.

Can anyone, however, adequately comprehend the greatness of the distinction, the bliss that sinful man, caught in the snares of Satan, is without his deserving chosen through faith and baptism, transferred from the devil's slavery to the number of God's children, ingrafted on the body of Christ, made one with him, and changed from heir of hell to heir of the kingdom of heaven, elected to that glorious fellowship of all the saints from the beginning of the world to the end of time, whether in heaven or earth? Such is the honor and glory the new Christian is assured even in the *atrium* or antechamber of the Lord's house, before his admission to the *inner sanctum* ... Why should it be strange, then, that anyone who contemplates, with eyes of the spirit, the majesty of God's dwelling place should be emotionally overwrought and, ravished by helpless longing, be possessed by desire for things divine and surpassing human nature?⁶³⁷

This salvation is nothing less than the object of the philosopher's quest, the fulfilment of man's dream for meaning:

What else do the many books of the ancients look for, books on the *summum bonum*, on the characteristics of the good man, on peace of mind, which the Greeks call *euthymia*? One man builds his nest in knowledge,

636 Ibid., 51.

637 Ibid., 49.

another in freedom from pain, another in pleasure. Some place it in the condition of virtue which they call wisdom, many in the habitual practice of virtue. But all of these people, according to Paul, became vapid in their imaginations, and while their tongues boastfully promised *euthymia* to others, they themselves were restless of heart. Why? Because they did not rejoice in the living God.⁶³⁸

This resting in God was the purpose of creation: “This is the ultimate purpose of man’s creation, that he may recognize, love and sing the praises of his Creator, his Redeemer, his Ruler, his Rewarder.”⁶³⁹

The means of access into this life of rest and rejoicing in the living God is faith: “The means of access to the church is faith without which man can do nothing.”⁶⁴⁰ The language of Erasmus again sounds very Lutheran:

but no one bestows faith on himself. It is the gift of God by which God goes before and draws to Christa his elect. Man, to the extent that he is man, is carnal and smacks of nothing but the world ... It takes strength to triumph over difficulties, but man can do nothing in himself. Faith assuredly gives man personal power so that he fears neither the world nor satan. Those who place their whole trust in God, then, are precisely the ones made hardy enough in the spirit to ascend the mountain of the Lord.⁶⁴¹

Faith is the continuing gift of God to the Christian which makes the steps of believers “resolute and unhesitating.”⁶⁴² To those who would accuse Erasmus of Pelagianism in treating of the subject of man’s part in his salvation, he offers this word: “Anyone who looks complacently at his own wisdom, his own strength, his own merits; any one who is preoccupied only with ceremonialism, with the indulgences and dispensations of popes, has never arrived at that kind of joy.”⁶⁴³ The genuine “candidate for bliss” has scorned these “base concerns of the world” through faith granted him by God.⁶⁴⁴ And all of this is through the gracious concern of God, who looks only upon the merits of Christ, man’s ethical and sacrificial substitute.

Whatever God bestows on us is bestowed through and on account of his son, not on account of the good works we have performed. God our

638 Ibid., 57.

639 Ibid., 63.

640 Ibid., 65.

641 Ibid., 65, 66.

642 Ibid., 66.

643 Ibid., 67.

644 Ibid., 67.

Defender, if our countenance, our conscience that is, offends you, look instead upon the countenance of your son whom you love unexceptionally and grant us what we ourselves do not deserve.⁶⁴⁵

Salvation through Christ the Lamb, the blessings of which are appropriated by man through faith because of God's grace: this is the evangelical message of Erasmus which he strongly suggested is the cement which binds the members of the Lord's tabernacle together in joy and unity. At the end of the life of rejoicing in God's deliverance will come the final prize sought by Christians, "They will appear before the God of gods in Sion. This is the prize of all contests, the answer to all prayers, the height of felicity."⁶⁴⁶ In the meantime, here on earth, Christian grace and faith produce the fruit of piety, and practical self sacrificing service. The steps toward heaven form a genuine ladder of virtues. To the new Christian, Erasmus offers this counsel:

If you have stopped living like a thug, that is no inconsiderable step to devoutness. If you not only return what you got by fraud but in the love of Christ lavish your own wealth on those in need, you have mounted a still higher step. If you have become gentle instead of fierce and violent, you have ascended another rung in your heart; if you are intent on doing good to everyone, you have betaken yourself to a still higher one. Finally, if you not only give no thought to evening the score with those who have deeply offended you, but in the grace of Christ are happy to wish them well and do them good – then you have achieved a truly lofty step.⁶⁴⁷

Christianity, if genuine, will work to improve the man and consequently will improve the world of which he is a part. But is this not a belief in salvation by works? No, says Erasmus, for although this kind of pious living sounds difficult grace provides the resource for carrying it out.

I would call it a hard law and one to be appalled at unless abundance of grace is added which in order to show that it was both free and by no means niggardly, he preferred to call *eulogia* ... rather than by another name. Under Mosaic law grace was distributed rather more meagrely, but as soon as the kindness and good will of our God shone forth, he gave us salvation, not according to the requirements of justice, for what we had done, but according to his mercy, and through the font of rebirth and renewal he poured out his spirit abundantly upon all flesh.⁶⁴⁸

645 Ibid., 74.

646 Ibid., 72, 64.

647 Ibid., 68.

648 Ibid., 69, 70.

Ecumenism in the Concordia

At the beginning of the *Concordia* Erasmus makes it clear that the main thrust of this work was to be a glorification of the peace of the church, at least the peace that ought to exist within the church. The Psalm (Eighty-four) concerns the “lovely peace of the Church,” he says, so his tract is a timely one, “a subject useful and beneficial any time, but in this age of proliferating sects more essential than any other.”⁶⁴⁹

Therefore, whoever loves the kind of peace which according to the blessed Paul surpasses all understanding, and which alone protects and shelters from all evil our hearts and bodies in our Peace Maker Christ Jesus the Lord, let him pay close attention to what I have to say.⁶⁵⁰

The church at peace upon the earth is achieving the perfection of the church in heaen above: “The concord of righteous men gives us an image of that celestial church in which there are no warring opinions, for there men see the glory of the Lord, not in shadowy outline but face to face. Perfect harmony of soul and perfect love hymn God’s praises with voice and heart.”⁶⁵¹

Reflecting on the psalm’s relation to the festival of Tabernacles, Erasmus was reminded first of the pagan contests which often accompanied their festivities, and then of the day of Pentecost in the New Testament when the Christian Church was born, and different kinds of contests ensued. When the Holy Spirit was given during the Pentecost or Tabernacles Feast, believers, said Erasmus, engaged in a contest, with each person seeking to outdo himself in acts which would bring about the edification and unification of the whole Christian body.

One man spoke in tongues, many engaged in the act of prophecy. Nor did unbecoming contention seethe here: if revelation had come to someone eels, the first speaker fell silent. The person outdone was not displeased with himself but gave thanks to the Spirit who was willing to teach him through another that which had escaped him. And the winner was not proud in heart knowing that all this was the vigor of the Holy Spirit, who distributed his gifts, just as he willed.⁶⁵²

Erasmus was convinced even at this stage in his life and in the progress of the Reformation that it was not too late to sue for peace and bring about the true unity of the

649 Ibid., 29.

650 Ibid., 29.

651 Ibid., 42.

652 Ibid., 34.

Christian faith. “The disease,” he said, “has not yet gone so far as to become incurable. The blaze can be put out if we remove the incendiary material.”⁶⁵³ If the proper medication is prescribed the patient might recover. All too often, Erasmus believed, the cures suggested had been worse than the sickness, and had not aided the sick body one whit.⁶⁵⁴ Thus again, Erasmus offers his programme for the reconciling of religious dissensions, and it is at this point in the latter section of the *Concordia* that his arguments remind one strongly of those of Arminius, especially as developed in the *De Componendo Dissidio Religionis* document.

Broadly speaking the remedies suggested by Erasmus can be summarized as follows: First, Christian leaders are to give up their personal interests in squabbles, and give up their personal prejudices in dealing with contenders on the other side of the theological fence.⁶⁵⁵ Tolerance of others’ opinions where these do not prejudice the central truths of the gospel must be fostered and flexibility allowed for a variety of practices and if necessary non-essential doctrines within the various churches.⁶⁵⁶ All sides should recognize the limitations of human understanding and allow dogmatic certainty to be held in abeyance in the interest of unity.⁶⁵⁷ Leave the knotty questions of theology to the scholars, and let the preachers offer to the common people only that which possesses salvific certainty and biblical authority.⁶⁵⁸ Finally let a general council of the church be called to deal with the issues now dividing the body of Christ.⁶⁵⁹ In the meantime, in the interval before such a council can be convened, let all villification cease; the council is to be the strong medicine and will do its healing work only if preparations for it is made by the administration of milder medications.⁶⁶⁰ Some suggestions regarding certain contentious practices and issues (invocation of saints, images, mass, confession etc.), regarding which compromises can be made by both sides without sundering the church further are prescribed by Erasmus as just such “mild syrup.”⁶⁶¹ Similarities to sentiments

653 Ibid., 85.

654 Ibid., 86.

655 Ibid., 85.

656 Ibid., 82, 83.

657 Ibid., 85.

658 Ibid., 85, 86.

659 Ibid., 95.

660 Ibid., 95, 96.

661 Ibid., 87-94.

of Arminius on this theme are striking, as will be seen in the following chart of comparative dialogue.

Erasmus	Arminius
<p>Since we have all aroused the wrath of God, it behoves us all together to be converted to him with sincere hearts. He is influenced by prayers, he in turn will be converted to us and will turn these disordered commotions of affairs to peace if we exert ourselves in that direction... <i>Concordia</i>, 85</p>	<p>In the first place (let) prayers and supplications to God (be made), that we may obtain a knowledge of the truth, and that the peace of the Church may be preserved: and these religious acts are to be performed ... with fasting, and in dust and ashes with seriousness, in faith and with assiduity. <i>De Componendo Dissidio, Writings I</i>, 179</p>
<p>Just how will this happen? Let every man personally be what he ought to be ... <i>Concordia</i>, 85</p>	<p>Let a serious amendment of life and conscientious course of conduct be added. For without these all our prayers are rendered ineffectual ... <i>De Componendo Dissidio, Writings I</i>, 180</p>
<p>One will be more tolerant of others' mistakes if he has first stressed his own. A special occasion for discord is our scrutinizing the errant ways of our neighbors with only the left eye ... Let that eye be closed and the right then opened to their good points. If we have been honest appraisers of their virtues, we will be the more lightly distressed by their faults. <i>Concordia</i>, 82, 83</p>	<p>It is possible that they who entertain these mistaken sentiments are of the number of the elect ... how then can we indulge ourselves in any harsh or unmerciful resolutions against these persons ... Let us place ourselves in the circumstances of the adversary and let him in return assume the character we sustain... <i>De Componendo Dissidio, Writings I</i>, 181</p>
<p>Let your itch for advancement be put aside and your obstinate determination to get the better of others; let biases depart along with personal grudges; let the heedless clamor of lunatic contention subside so that peace making truth can be heard. Let both factions make some concessions to the other without which no harmony can exist. <i>Concordia</i>, 86.</p>	<p>But amongst the very first removals, let those causes be put away which ... have their origin in the affections, and which are not only the instigators of this dissension, but tend to perpetuate it and keep it alive. Let humility overcome pride; let a mind contented with its condition become the successor of avarice ... <i>De Componendo Dissidio, Writings I</i>, 180</p>
<p>Therefore, when one group will permit no innovation at all, and the other side will suffer nothing established to remain, a virtually uncontrollable storm has been stirred up. <i>Concordia</i>, 85</p>	<p>The other cause (of perpetual dissension), is that the parties individually think, if they concede even the smallest particle of the matter of discord, such a concession is nearly connected with the peril of their own salvation ... <i>De Componendo Dissidio, Writings I</i>, 152</p>

<p>But it ought to be a deep conviction of everyone that it is neither safe nor helpful in fostering peace to brashly abandon those positions that have been established by the authority of our ancestors and confirmed by the practice and agreement of generation after generation. Nothing should be altered unless necessity compel the change or a signal advantage invites it. <i>Concordia, 86</i></p>	<p>(there must be) a consideration of all those articles of religion respecting which there exists on both sides a perfect agreement. These will perhaps be found to be so numerous and of such great importance, that when a comparison is instituted between them and the others which may properly be made the subjects of controversy, the latter will be found to be few in number and of small consequence. <i>De Componendo Dissidio, Writings I, 182</i></p>
<p>Agreement over freedom of the will is more likely to produce briars than fruit. If there is anything to be looked for here, let it be objectively discussed in the discourses of the theologians. Meanwhile, it is sufficient to agree among ourselves that man can do nothing through his own powers; if he can do anything, he owes it all to the grace by whose gift we are whatever we are. Thus in all matters we may recognize our own frailty and give the praise to the Lord's mercy... <i>Concordia, 86</i></p>	<p>That remedy is an orderly and free convention of the parties that differ from each other. In such an assembly after the different sentiments have been expressed ... let the members deliberate ... and determine what the word of God declares ... and let them by common consent ... declare the result to the churches... <i>De Componendo Dissidio, Writings I, 183</i></p>
<p>While awaiting a council, we must cut off so far as in us lies the causes of dissension. Let us not do anything by force and certainly do unto others what we would wish them to do unto us. Let us beseech heaven and earth but in no way force anyone into a religion that repels him. It is equally important that those who do not want to be forced in the matter of religion refrain from attacking the religion of others especially when that religion is sheltered behind ancient practice. <i>Concordia, 95</i></p>	<p>It is my special wish that there may now be among us a similar cessation from the asperities of religious warfare, and that both parties would abstain from writings full of bitterness, from sermons remarkable only for the invectives which they contain ... Instead let the controversialists substitute writings full of moderation... which may inflame the minds ill with a desire of concluding a pacification, and may make them willing to carry into effect such a remedy as is, of all others, the best accommodated... The remedy is an orderly</p>

	<p>and free council of the parties that differ from each other... <i>De Componendo Dissidio, Writings I, 182, 183</i></p>
<p>Augustine’s reading (of the first verse of Psalm 84) is more felicitous: ‘How lovely <i>amabilia</i> (and in Greek <i>agapeta</i>). Nothing is more lovely, more agreeable, nothing more secure or stable than the concord of good men in good deeds ... <i>Concordia, 38</i></p>	<p>Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. And from a sight of the orderly walk and peaceable conduct of the faithful in the house of God, filled with the hopes of consummating these acts of pacification in heaven, we may conclude in these words of the Apostle, ‘And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy upon the Israel of God.’ Mercy, therefore, and peace, be upon the Israel of God. <i>De Componendo Dissidio, Writings I, 192</i></p> <p>It is my sincere wish that God would place his angel ... at the entrance of this paradise in which divine truth and the LOVELY CONCORD OF THE CHURCH will be the subjects of discussion. <i>De Componendo Dissidio, Writings I, 184</i></p>

As well as these similarities of sentiment, one would expect that there would be significant differences between the Catholic Erasmus and the Protestant Arminius. At a time in history when it still seemed remotely possible to reunite Protestantism and Catholicism, Erasmus could call for tolerance and patience in allowing the continuance of such practices as the invocation of saints, veneration of images, observance of the feasts and fasts of Catholic tradition, private confession, and the Mass as traditionally celebrated within Catholicism. He appeals to the Protestant reader by playing down the objectionable (to Protestant minds) aspects of these practices, emphasizing their value and rationale if observed with understanding and moderation and if justification is given priority. For example, when he speaks of the Mass, he does not approach such ideas as transubstantiation or the definition of the presence of Christ in the Super, or the value accruing to the communicant. His description of the Mass is in terms of a simple service of Eucharist; if this is all that is meant by the term “Mass,” he implies, what possible reason can there be to discard the term or radically change the form of its observance?

Surely, compromises such as this can be reached on many matters and harmony achieved.

Of the Mass he had this to say:

It consists of a psalmody, or Introit, glorifying of God, prayers, sacred songs, the reading of words of the Prophets or the Apostles, called the Epistles, the reading of the Gospel, the profession of the Catholic faith, the giving of thanks called the Eucharist, and the reverent commemoration of the death of our Lord, more prayers including the Lord's prayer. Then follows a token of Christian peace, next communion, a sacred canticle again, and more prayer. AT the conclusion the priest with his benediction entrusts to God all the people received into his care and urges them to persist in the spirit of piety and mutual charity. What is there here that is not good and worthy of veneration?⁶⁶²

Regarding the veneration of images he leaves aside all arguments concerning possible idolatry and superstition, indicating that to the mind of the unlearned and the unsophisticated, there is educational value in the image, which after all is a kind of silent poem.⁶⁶³ With respect to the presence of Christ in the supper, he urges that quibbling over words be laid aside; let it simply be recognized that Christ is present – this is enough: "... the other questions which are causing anxiety, such as, precisely how it comes about that the Lord's body and blood are there in the substance of bread and in the guise of bread and wine and what happens to the body once it has been received and like problems, they should be settled by a council."⁶⁶⁴

Arminius lived in another age. Many of these practices had disappeared from the life of the Reformed Church or had been severely altered by dissenting Protestantism. Nevertheless, the spirit of tolerance in the realm of theological ideas was carried forward by Arminius even though the adiaphorism he called for was less in the realm of practices and more in that of ideology.

In drawing comparisons between the thought of Erasmus and Arminius, it would not do to omit their considerations of the doctrine of free will and predestination: both men treated these aspects of theology in a remarkably similar way. Arminius nowhere alludes to the influence of Erasmus upon his thought, yet when writings of both men are compared as above and when the sentiments of each concerning free will are placed side

662 Ibid., 91.

663 Ibid., 88.

664 Ibid., 92.

by side the question of Arminius' indebtedness to Erasmus cannot help but be raised.⁶⁶⁵ The motivation of both men seems clearly evangelical and ecumenical in orientation.

With regard to these doctrines, Erasmus and Arminius have been accused of being Pelagian, of championing human ability and defending the ideas of meritorious Christian endeavour and works of righteousness in the pursuit of salvation. If each man did indeed support this kind of soteriology, he must have played down the concept of the place of grace in human redemption, suggesting that man may bring about his own salvation through his own unaided efforts. This, indeed, is how J. I. Packer views the two men:

It was man's total inability to save himself and the sovereignty of divine grace in his salvation that Luther was affirming when he denied free will, and it was the contrary that Erasmus was affirming when he maintained free will ... Standing in the semi-Pelagian scholastic tradition, Erasmus championed the view that though sin has weakened man it has not made him incapable of meritorious action; in fact, says Erasmus, the salvation of those who are saved is actually determined by a particular meritorious act which they perform in their own strength without divine assistance.⁶⁶⁶

Packer then seeks to place Erasmus' view of man and grace in the scholastic scheme of the cooperation between divine grace and human merit.⁶⁶⁷ Man makes himself worthy of salvation by earnestly desiring it through his best efforts of goodness. These efforts are rewarded by saving grace and subsequent grace is given to accomplish further good works which in themselves are meritorious, putting the Christian into God's debt to supply more grace and more strength to do more good works etc. In essence, this means, to Packer at any rate, that Erasmus believed a man could save himself, the part being played by God's grace being very small. Packer purports that Luther attacked this meritorious attitude with as much vehemence as he could. Arminianism is seen by Packer as standing within the Erasmian tradition of Pelagianism and thus he strongly castigates it:

665 Arminius' works dealing specifically with this doctrine include is *Collatio cum Junio*, 458-633, *Examen Libelli Perkinsius* 634-781, and the *Analysis Capitis IX ad Romanos*, 782-811. Arminius' apologetic treatment of his antisupralapsarianism (the position of the hyper-predestinarianians), is found in the *Declaratio Sententiae*, 91-133. Erasmus' work on free will is his *De Libero Arbitrio*, Ernst F. Winter tr. (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing House, 1961). Luther's strong response to Erasmus' *Libero* was of course the *De Servo Arbitrio*. J. I. Packer and O. R. Johnston, trs. (New York: Fleming Revell Company, 1958).

666 Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio* (Packer tr.), 48.

667 From J. I. Packer's Introduction to Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio*, 59.

Is our salvation wholly of God or does it ultimately depend on something that we do for ourselves? Those who say the latter (as the Arminians later did) thereby deny man's utter helplessness in sin, and affirm that a form of semi-pelagianism is true after all. It is no wonder that the later Reformed Theology condemned Arminianism as being in principle a return to Rome (because in effect it turned faith into a meritorious work), and a betrayal of the Reformation (because it denied the sovereignty of God in the salvation of sinners) ... Arminianism was indeed in Reformed eyes a renunciation of New Testament Christianity in favour of New Testament Judaism; for to rely on oneself for faith is no different in principle from relying on oneself for works and the one is as unchristian and anti-christian as the other. In the light of what Luther says to Erasmus, there is no doubt that he would have endorsed this judgment.⁶⁶⁸

But was Erasmus a proponent of salvation through merit? Is Packer correct in asserting that "Erasmus affirms that God's mercy is won by works"?⁶⁶⁹ From a study of the *De Libero Arbitrio* the answer would appear to be negative. Salvation for Erasmus was not the work of man; it is God's work in man. If man's will is free to accept the grace of God in salvation it is only so because grace has set it free. This seems to be the heart of the argument of the *Libero*:

The solution seems to me to be manifest in the doctrine which attributes entirely to grace the first impulsion which stimulates the soul, but which leaves to the human will when it does not lack divine grace, a certain place in the unfolding of the act. Since all things have three parts, a beginning, a development, and a completion, those who hold this doctrine ascribe the two extremes to grace, and admit that free will does something only in the development. But even this it does in such a way that two causes work together in the same individual act: namely the grace of God and the will of man. Grace is the principal cause, and the will is the secondary cause, which can do nothing without the principal cause while this cause suffices in itself alone ... By reason of this working together man owes all his salvation to the reception of divine grace, since the share which pertains directly to the free will is so small and it even derives finally from the grace of God who in the beginning created the free will, and then delivered it, and restored it to health. Thus those men who would be reassured ... for whom man can have no good which he does not owe to God.⁶⁷⁰

Arminius spoke in a very similar vein: "In this manner I ascribe to grace the commencement, the continuance and the consummation of all good, and to such an extent

668 Ibid., 53.

669 Ibid.

670 Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, (Winter tr.), 80.

do I carry its influence, that a man, though already regenerate, can neither conceive, will, nor do any good at all, nor resist any evil temptation without this preventing, exciting, this following and cooperating grace.⁶⁷¹ But is it not true, as Packer says, that Erasmus speaks of the value of good works and merit? Admittedly such phrases as “there may be some good works ...”⁶⁷² suggest that he is humanistic in a non-evangelical sense, but Erasmus immediately qualified himself, “... but for them man cannot arrogate anything to himself.”⁶⁷³ Again, “there may be some merit, but its achievement is owing to God.”⁶⁷⁴ Here Erasmus was speaking of the justified Christian, not the unrepentant sinner: “We do not assert that man, however justified, can only be sinful, especially since Christ spoke of a rebirth, and Paul of a ‘new man’.” Free will to Erasmus is genuine, but is “ineffectual without the grace of God.”⁶⁷⁵ Neither Erasmus nor Arminius was a champion of humanistic Pelagianism, asserting man’s independent effort in salvation. Nor were they merely semi-pelagian, urging equal cooperation between man’s unassisted will and God’s helping grace. Each man, it appears, was a champion of grace – the kind of grace that takes human responsibility seriously. Free will is involved only in responding to the overtures of grace. Faith is free will responding positively to grace, unbelief is man’s negative response. The ability to respond (not the coerced necessity to respond) is what each man seems to have wanted to defend; once a positive response is forthcoming (and the ability to so respond is God-given), grace effects regeneration. The human will cooperates only in allowing God to do his work of transforming character. Arminius could insist upon this small work of the will, which must be maintained in order to substantiate a position of human responsibility before God:

I by no means do injustice to grace, by attributing as it is reported of me, too much to man’s free will. For the whole controversy reduces itself to the solution of this question, “is the grace of God a certain irresistible force?” That is, the controversy does not relate to those actions or operations which may be ascribed to grace, (for I acknowledge and inculcate as many of these actions or operations as any man ever did), but it relates solely to the mode of the operation whether it is irresistible or not.⁶⁷⁶

671 Arminius, *Declaratio Sententiae, Opera Theologica*, 122.

672 Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*,

673 Ibid.

674 Ibid., 82, 83.

675 Ibid.

Both Erasmus and Arminius defended the freedom of the will. It ought to be clear, however, that their motivation was more theological than it was humanistic. It was to defend God, not man, that they argued. God's nature, not man's intrinsic worth, appear to have been at issue in their presentations. Erasmus the Christian apologist is more discernible in the *De Libero Arbitrio* than Erasmus the Renaissance liberal humanist.

But why you say should anything be allowed to free will? In order to charge with something by way of deserts the wicked who willingly reject the grace of God, in order to spare God the reproaches of cruelty and injustice, to deliver ourselves from despair so that we might be incited to effort...⁶⁷⁷

It is not difficult for pious ears to admit the goodness of Him who imputes to us his own good; on the other hand it is difficult to explain how it is just (I do not say merciful), to condemn to eternal punishment those in whom he has not deigned to work good. For it would have been impossible for them to do anything good by themselves ...⁶⁷⁸

On the other hand, those who deny absolutely the existence of free will, and claim that everything is done by pure necessity assert that God produces in all men not only good works but also bad. It follows then that if man has no claim to be considered the author of his good works he also cannot be regarded as the author of his bad works. This conclusion seems manifestly to attribute injustice and cruelty to God.⁶⁷⁹

Virtually the same arguments in defense of the character of God and the responsibility of man with regard to the gospel are offered by Arminius: "I affirm that this doctrine is repugnant to the nature of God, but particularly to those attributes of his nature by which he performs and manages all things, his wisdom, judgment and goodness ..."⁶⁸⁰ The doctrine of unconditional predestination he protested "is injurious to the glory of God,"⁶⁸¹ and if carried to its logical conclusion leads to theological absurdity:

From these premises we deduce as a further conclusion that God really sins. Because according to this doctrine, he moves to sin by an act that is unavoidable. From the same position we might also infer that God is the

676 In the light of this statement, Pieter Geyl's accusation seems rather unfair. "It is obvious that the doctrine of Arminius, which ascribed to man a capacity to contribute something to his own salvation might in a way bridge a chasm separating Protestantism and Catholicism." *The Netherlands in the Seventeenth Century* (London: 1961).

677 Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, 93.

678 Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, 90.

679 Ibid., 88.

680 Arminius, *Declaratio Sententiae, Opera Theologia*, 105.

681 Ibid., 109.

only sinner, for man who is impelled by an irresistible force to commit sin cannot be said to sin himself. As a legitimate consequence, it also follows that sin is not sin since whatever that be which God does it neither can be sin ...⁶⁸²

Both Arminius and Erasmus were theologically and apologetically oriented. Both men employed philosophical and biblical arguments competently and deserve to be called able evangelical theologians. It is difficult to understand why Erasmus has so often been labelled untheological; writers seem determined to emphasize the humanistic side of Erasmus, playing down his contribution to theological literature and thought. "Luther's part in the debate," wrote E. F. Winter, "is the emphasis of Christianity as dogmatic religion. He wants to solve the issue theologically. For Erasmus Christianity is morality, a simplicity of life and of doctrine. In current terminology, Erasmus displays an anthropological concern but employs essentially theological tools without being or ever wanting to be a theologian."⁶⁸³ When one examines Erasmus' treatment of biblical texts on both sides of the free will issue in the *Liberio* this interpretation is seen as a misunderstanding of Erasmus, who demonstrated abilities as an exegete and an expositor, and a biblical theologian.

When compared, the arguments used by Arminius in interpreting the scripture passages which deal with predestination are very similar to those of Erasmus. For example, Erasmus asserted that the unregenerate can naturally will to do the good, but without grace they cannot perform it. Thus he conjectured, "it seems probably that they [the ancient philosophers] had a will tending to moral good but incapable of eternal salvation unless grace be added through faith."⁶⁸⁴ Arminius expounded this same idea in his treatment of the seventh chapter of Romans, a chapter which he believed has reference to unbelievers: by nature they could desire to do good and not be able to do it and they could desire to refrain from evil and not have the power of resistance. This dilemma Arminius believed could only be solved by being enabled through faith in Christ to do the good and avoid the evil. Apparently the Bezan position applied Romans Seven

682 Ibid., 110.

683 E. F. Winter, in his introduction to the *De Libero Arbitrio*, x.

684 Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, 24.

to believers indicating that the unresolved tension between desire and the fulfilment characterized normal Christian experience.⁶⁸⁵

Both men similarly treated the passages in the ninth chapter of Romans which deal with election.⁶⁸⁶ They each brought to these verses principles of interpretation which when applied removed the seeming determinism of the chapter. Briefly stated these principles included first, an insistence upon determining the author's purpose in presenting the arguments of the chapter, and second, a recognition of the use of figurative language on the part of the author and a willingness not to press figures of speech beyond their capacity to serve the intended purpose. Each man approached the Bible with what might be termed an objective hermeneutic, rather than coming to the scriptures with a predetermined doctrine to be defended no matter how offensive this might be to reason or the canons of literary criticism. Note the similarities in these two quotations:

Erasmus: Paul aims not at completely excluding free will, but aims at rebuffing the godlessly grumbling Jews... Such parables used in Holy Scripture are very instructive but are not applicable in all instances... Let us therefore interpret the parable as one employed for explaining grace. Because if we wish to apply all parts of it to one opinion we would be saying many ridiculous things. ...⁶⁸⁷
I believe it to be an excellent key to the understanding of Holy Scriptures if we pay attention to what is meant in each passage. Once we recognize this, one will find it proper to select from the parables and examples such as are to the point.⁶⁸⁸

Arminius: Here we must repeat what was said before as a general remark that Jacob and Esau are to be considered not in themselves, but as types, so that what is attributed to them is to be accommodated to the antitypes ... What these antitypes are may be gathered from the end or design which the apostle has added in these words...⁶⁸⁹

The attitude of both Arminius and Erasmus to the whole free will debate was one of moderation which called for a recognition that this was an area of thought about which there are statements in the Bible which seemingly support two sides of an argument and thus must provoke careful handling on the part of biblical interpreters. Both men call for

685 Arminius, *Diss. cap. VIII ad Rom., Writings II*, 824-947.

686 Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, 46-58. Arminius, *Analysis capituli IX ad Romanos*, 778-823.

687 Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, 56.

688 Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, 74.

689 Arminius, *Analysis capituli IX ad Romanos*, 535, 536.

a measure of toleration of others' convictions in this as in other debatable areas; there ought to be an agreement to disagree, and openness to debate, a refusal to be inflexibly dogmatic and a spirit of pacific harmony between proponents of different positions as long as they agree on Christian essentials especially in regard to salvation. In other words, the two men share the conviction we have labelled evangelical ecumenism.

This, Erasmus insisted, was his reason for writing *De Libero Arbitrio*. He was speaking out regarding an area of theological concern where leeway for discussion and debate ought to be allowed lest polarization widen the gap between proponents of different persuasions. "I am intervening in the hope that my little work may contribute to the progress of truth," he wrote.⁶⁹⁰ With regard to approaching the Bible with a realization that it sometimes seems to defend both sides of an argument he stated, "Nobody can deny that sacred scripture contains many passages stating the obvious freedom of the human will. On the other hand there are some passages which seem to deny the former. Yet it is certain that the scripture cannot contradict itself since all passages are inspired by the same Spirit."⁶⁹¹ Erasmus is obviously in search of an interpretation of the Bible which will reconcile these two 'sets' of texts. It was not his intent merely to suggest the internal self contradiction of scripture for sceptical purposes: his view of inspiration was too high to allow that. Without this willingness on both sides to debate matters which have not been clearly defined by biblical scholarship, dialogue between factions is impossible; and if there can be no peaceful dialogue, how can the truth ever be discovered? Peace among Christians is a prerequisite for the discovery of the truth about God and man; this is the burden of Erasmus' ecumenical quest:

I shall take issue with but a single thesis of Luther's with no other aim than to make the truth more clearly manifest, if it is possible, by comparing the scriptural texts and the arguments ... The affair will be conducted without abuse because this is more fitting for Christians, and because in this way the truth may be attained more surely as it is often lost in the violence of argument...⁶⁹²

I know for certain that I am not resisting the truth, that I love from the bottom of my heart true evangelical liberty, and that I detest everything adverse to the gospels.⁶⁹³

690 Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, 6.

691 Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, 20.

692 Ibid., 6.

693 Ibid., 94.

It is at this point that Erasmus became very critical of Luther's approach. Indeed he characterized the immoderation of Luther as a major issue driving the two scholars, so alike in their desire for a purer Christianity, apart, as we have earlier noted. To Erasmus, Luther seemed to be willing to go to illogical lengths to promote the primacy of grace.

Luther seems to delight in this kind of extravagance so that he might, as the saying goes, split the evil knot of others' excesses with an evil wedge ... There is a popular saying that in order to straighten a curved stick it is necessary to bend it to the other side; this is perhaps applicable in the reformation of morals, but I am not sure it should be applied in the case of doctrine.⁶⁹⁴

Surely by taking such a strong dogmatic stand in this area where there is room for debate Luther was urging the church toward dissension and schism; Erasmus warned of this in shuddering tones:

It is from the collision of such excesses that the lightnings and thunders arise which today violently shake the world. And if each side continues to defend its exaggerations so bitterly, I see a struggle between them as that between Achilles and Hector, who since they were so equal in savagery could only be separated by death.⁶⁹⁵

It ought to be noted that Erasmus is equally hard on Catholic extremists who are excessive in their attacks on Protestants.⁶⁹⁶ There is no one-sidedness in Erasmus here, nor can it be asserted that he was cowardly, unwilling to express himself boldly, or remained aloof from disputes (although he chose not to become identified with extreme positions). John L. Motely is typical of those who describe an Erasmus softer-than-life: "But if Erasmus showed the road, he certainly did not tread far upon it himself. A perpetual type of the quietist, the moderate man, he censured the errors of the church with discrimination and gentleness ... as the mild rebuker."⁶⁹⁷ Luther, too, accused Erasmus of

694 Ibid., 92. Luther freely admits this immoderation, *De Servo Arbitrio*, 271: "I will not accept or tolerate that moderate middle way which Erasmus would, with good intention, I think, recommend to me: to allow a little to free will in order to remove the contradictions of scripture and the difficulties ... the case is not bettered, nor anything gained by the middle way. Therefore we must go to extremes, deny free will altogether, and ascribe everything to God... Now the highest degree of faith is to believe that He is merciful though he saves so few and damns so many; to believe that He is just, though of his own will he makes us perforce proper subjects for damnation and seems to delight in the torments of poor wretches and to be a fitter object for hate than for love." This illustrates the kind of exaggerated prose to which Erasmus objected.

695 Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, 92.

696 Ibid.

697 John L. Motely, *The Rise of the Dutch Republic* (New York: Harper and Row, 1900), 90, 91.

promoting peace at any price, and in the process betrayed the very spirit Erasmus reacted against: “You make it clear that this carnal peace and quiet seems to you far more important than faith, conscience, salvation, the word of God, the glory of Christ, and God Himself... I hold that a solemn and vital truth, of eternal consequence is at stake in this discussion, one so crucial and fundamental that it ought to be maintained and defended even at the cost of life, though as a result the whole world should not just be thrown into turmoil and uproar, but shattered in chaos and reduced to nothingness.”⁶⁹⁸

The history of the writing of the *Declaratio Sententiae* illustrates the fact that Arminius stands in this pacific tradition of Erasmus. As noted earlier the preface to the *Declaratio* tells the story of how his opponents had long sought to get Arminius to declare his sentiments on predestination publicly.⁶⁹⁹ This he steadfastly refused to do, fearing that this might provoke further division in the church. Rather, he insisted that the issue of predestination ought to be thoroughly debated in a national synod; there agreement could be achieved among pious believers, even if only the agreement to disagree amicably, and the harmony of Dutch Christianity could be maintained.

Nowhere does the emphasis upon moderation in Arminius come through more strongly than in his work *De Componendo Dissidio Religionis Inter Christianos*.⁷⁰⁰ This writing was a call for harmony and concord among the churches of the Netherlands similar in tone to Erasmus’ *Querela Pacis*,⁷⁰¹ which, a generation or two before Arminius, had called upon the princes and prelates of Europe to devise means to establish universal pacification in the name of Christian charity. Writing at the beginning of the seventeenth century with the Thirty Years’ War imminent, the words of Arminius were pathetically prophetic as were those of Erasmus at the beginning of the sixteenth. If Christians insist upon majoring in a dogmatic way upon those beliefs which are important enough to debate but which are not cardinal for Christian salvation and piety, the end result can only be religious and social chaos. That Arminius considered it possible that his moderate position could coexist with the more rigid Calvinism in the Dutch Church is clear from a statement he made toward the end of the *Declaratio*:

698 Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, 92.

699 Arminius, *Declaratio Sententiae*, 105.

700 Arminius, *De Componendo Dissidio Religionis Inter Christianos*, *Opera Theologia*, 71-91.

701 Erasmus, *Querela Pacis*, *The Essential Erasmus*, John Dolan ed., 174-204.

Since such are the statements of our confession and catechism, no reason whatever exists why those who embrace and defend such sentiments on predestination should either violently endeavor to obtrude them upon their colleagues and on the Church of Christ; or why they should take it amiss and put the worst construction upon it when anything is taught in the church or the university which is not exactly accordant with their doctrine or that is opposed to it.⁷⁰²

There is room for a peaceful division of opinion on the matter of predestination as well as on other matters of non-essential belief. Arminius pleaded for this kind of peace. A call for moderation, for calmness and openness in debating contrary opinions, for strong convictions with regard to scriptural and evangelical certainties amid an atmosphere of Christian tolerance – this call came plaintively from two Dutch reformers of the evangelical ecumenical tradition: Desiderius Erasmus and James Arminius.

⁷⁰² Arminius, *Declaratio Sententiae*, 105.

Summary and Conclusion

As stated in the Introduction, the purpose of this dissertation has been to define, demonstrate and historically contextualize the evangelical ecumenism of James Arminius. Throughout the paper an attempt has been made to sharpen the focus of this definition and to show that the ecumenism of Arminius was rooted in his conviction of the centrality of the major orthodox tenets of the Christian faith, and especially of the primacy of the doctrine of human salvation expressed in terms of justification by grace through faith. Christian peace based upon agreement of evangelical fundamentals and a willingness to disagree amicably regarding non-essentials in the church: this is basically the definition of evangelical ecumenism. The dissertation has sought through an examination of the writings and biography of Arminius to show that from the standpoint of ideology and practice, he deserves to be called a theologian of the evangelical ecumenical tradition.

In order to contextualize historically the evangelical ecumenism of Arminius it has been thought necessary to answer such questions as whether or not there were other sixteenth century theologians who possessed an approach similar to his own; and to determine whether or not there was any conscious perception on the part of Arminius that he belonged to a stream of historical and theological emphasis which included any of these others. It has been shown that there are definite ideological links between Arminius and the later Philip Melancthon, and certainly both men were indebted to the great Erasmus for their moderate evangelical stance and pacific attitude toward cooperation and interaction with other believers. Martin Bucer, too, although he did not have a direct impact upon the life and thought of Arminius, demonstrated that this tradition of evangelical ecumenism was represented by other Reformed theologians.

The values of this study lie in an improved understanding of the part Arminius played in the history of the Reformation and indeed in the history of Christianity as a whole. If accepted, this thesis will modify previously held interpretations and assessments of Arminius. Surely the idea of an Arminius who defected from strong Calvinism and initiated a novel approach to the study of Christian theology has been banished. Altered, too, is the Bangs' thesis which sought to rescue Arminius for

Reformed Theology, but in the process narrowed the possibility of assessing his contribution to the whole of genuine *Reformation* Theology.

It is hoped that the identification of Melanchthon, Bucer and Erasmus with the spirit of Arminius will contribute positively to historical judgments pertaining to these individuals as well. A strong corrective has been offered here to the view of Erasmus as a liberal sceptic *a la* Trevor-Roper. Erasmus the proponent of grace and the propounder of genuine evangelicalism has been described through an analysis of his writings which called for a genuine reformation and unification of Christianity. Melanchthon, too, is revealed in these pages as a patient advocate of evangelical reform and pacific concord. Martin Bucer was an impatient ecumenism; his concern for unity among Christians bordered on the fanatical, but his criteria for ecumenism remained steadfastly evangelical. All of this material should soften the view of the sixteenth century as being composed entirely of theologians in search of schism, division, or mere conformity. It is clear that there were major thinkers in the Reformation era who combined a pious, biblical evangelicalism with a moderate, inclusivistic ecumenism without being conscious of any discrepancy between the two.

Some questions have been raised in the preceding study, and the limited scope of the dissertation has not allowed them to be explored. These might include the possibility and identity of other representatives of the evangelical ecumenist tradition. The major representatives of this stream of Christian thought have been treated here, but what of their disciples and their influence? Again, how, if at all, did the Anabaptist movement in the Netherlands influence the development of the tradition we have called evangelical ecumenism? The silence of Arminius in relation to his studies of Anabaptism is intriguing, and somewhat exasperating. Is it possible to trace the influence of either of these movements upon the other? Further study is called for in these areas if it is granted that such a tradition as evangelical ecumenism did indeed exist.

With relation to the present state of the history of the Christian Church this dissertation would seem to possess some useful insights. Examples of men of strong conviction who simultaneously manifest tolerance and good will are valuable in every age. Christianity, moreover, in spite of the idealism of many of its adherents, remains divided and fragmented. There is much to be learned from these ecumenical thinkers of

the Reformation age with regard to principles and practices which might be adopted and followed if at least some of this spirit of division is to be eradicated and if a greater sense of unity is to be achieved. The concept of the organizational unity of churches which places little or no emphasis upon doctrinal agreement seems to be floundering. For those committed to its basic teachings, however, the Christian Church may yet present to the world a more united front. It may not yet be too late for evangelical ecumenism to be understood, to be practised, and to prevail.

Appendix A
Editions of the Works of Arminius Used in This Dissertation

*Table of Cross-References*⁷⁰³

The following table of cross-references is provided as a guide to the use of the three major editions used in this dissertation. For each writing there is given first the abbreviated Latin title used in the footnotes, this is followed by a more complete Latin title, and finally an English translation of the title. Page numbers refer to the page on which each item begins in the given edition. The individual works are listed in the arbitrary order in which they are found in the *Opera* of 1629, with the *Examen thesium Gomari* appended. *Opera* refers to the edition of 1629; *Works* to the English edition of 1825, 1828, and 1875; and *Writings* to the American editions of 1853 and 1956.

Item	Opera	Works	Writings
<i>Oratio de sacerdotio Christi</i> ; Oration on the Priesthood of Christ.	9	I, 339	I, 17
<i>Oration ... de objecto theologia</i> ; Oration on the Object of Theology.	26	I, 257	I, 25
<i>Oratio ... de authore et fine theologiae</i> ; Oration on the Author and End of Theology.	41	I, 284	I, 83
<i>Oratio ... de certitudine s. sanctae theologiae</i> ; Oration on the Certainty of Sacred Theology.	56	I, 310	I, 113
<i>Oratio de componendo dissidio religionis inter Christianos</i> ; Oration on Reconciling Religious Dissensions among Christians.	71	I, 370	I, 146
<i>Declaratio Sententiae: Declaratio sententiae ad novalies et praepotentes D. D. ordines Hollandiae et West-Frisiae</i> ; Declaration of Sentiments to the Noble and Most Potent the States of Holland and West Friesland.	91	I, 516	I, 193
<i>Apologia Adversus Articulos; Apologia D. Iacobi Arminii adversus articulos quosdam theologicos in vulgus sparsos ...</i> ; Apology ... against ... certain Defamatory Articles.	134	I, 669	I, 276
<i>Quaest, novem; Quaestiones novem, nobilissimis dominis curatoribus Academiae Leidensis exhibita a deputatis synodi ...</i> ; Nine Questions, Exhibited by the Deputies of the Synod to their Lordships the Curators.	184	II, 64	I, 380
<i>Disputationes publicae</i> ; Public Disputations.	197	II, 72	I, 390
<i>Disputationes privatae</i> ; Private Disputations.	339	II, 318	II, 9

⁷⁰³ This material is adapted from Appendix A of Carl Bangs' thesis *Arminius and Reformed Theology*, 250-257.

<i>Collatio cum Junio; Amica cum D. Francisco Junio Praedestinatione per literas habita collatio: Friendly Conference with Francis Junius about Predestination, Carried on by Means of Letters</i>	458	III, 1	III, 7
<i>Examen Libelli Perkinsius; Examen modestum libelli, quem D. Gulielmus Perkinsius apprime doctus theologus edidit ante aliquot annos, de praedestinationis modo et ordine, tumque de amplitudine gratiae divinae; Modest Examination of a Pamphlet which that very learned divine, Dr. William Perkins, published some years ago on the mode and order of predestination and on the amplitude of divine grace.</i>	634	III, 249	III, 279
<i>Analysis capitatis IX ad Romanos; Analysis of Romans 9</i>	782	III, 485	III, 527
<i>Diss. cap. vii ad Rom.; De vero et genuino sensu cap. VII epistolae ad Romanos dissertatio; Dissertation on the True and Genuine Sense of the Seventh Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.</i>	812	II, 471	II, 195
<i>Epistola ad Hippolytum a Collibus; A Letter to Hippolytus a Collibus.</i>	937	II, 685	II, 451
<i>Art. nonnulli; Articuli nonnulli diligenti examine perpendende; Certain Articles to be Diligently Examined and Weighed.</i>	948	II, 706	II, 479
<i>Examen thesium Gomari; Examen thesium d. Francisci Gomari de praedestinatione; Examination of the Theses of Dr. Francis Gomarus on Predestination.</i>		III, 521	

Appendix B

A Brief Theological and Biographical Glossary

Beza, Theodore, (1519-1605): “Arminius travelled to Geneva in late 1581 ... He was now to encounter the head of the academy, Calvin’s epigone and successor, Theodore Beza. Beza was sixty-two years old. A native of Veزالay, he had studied at Orleans under Melchior Volmer, and at Paris. After an early career of brilliance and dissipation, he joined forces with the Reformed Church, arriving at Geneva the first time in 1547. From 1549 to 1559 he was at Lausanne as a professor of Greek; in 1559 he became preacher and then professor in Geneva. He became Calvin’s heir apparent then his successor, and by the time Arminius studied under him, Beza was the aged and honoured patriarch of the Reformed Churches.” (Bangs, *Arminius*, 66).

Oldenbarneveldt, Johannes van: “After Arminius’ death, in 1609, the leadership of the party was taken by the court preacher Johan Wtenbogaert (1557-1644), and by Simon Episcopius (1583-1643), Arminius’ friend and pupil, and soon to be professor of theology in Leyden. By them, ‘Arminian’ views were systematized and developed and both opposed the current emphasis on minutiae of doctrine... In 1610, they and other sympathizers of the number of forty-one, at the instance of the eminent Dutch statesman, Johan van Oldenbarneveldt (1547-1619), a lover of religious toleration, drew up a statement of their faith called the ‘Remonstrance,’ from which the party gained the name ‘Remonstrants’ ... All the Protestant Netherlands speedily filled with conflict. The vast majority of the people were Calvinists, and that view had the support of the Stadholder Maurice. The Remonstrants were favored by Oldenbarneveldt, the leader of the province of Holland, and by the great jurist and historian, ... Hugo Grotius. The dispute soon became involved in politics. The Netherlands were divided between the supporters of ‘states rights,’ which included the wealthier merchant classes and of which Oldenbarneveldt and Grotius were leaders, and the national party of which Maurice was the head. The national party now wished a national synod to decide the controversy. The province of Holland under Oldenbarneveldt held that each province could decide its religious affairs and resisted the proposal. Maurice, by a coup d’état in July 1618,

overthrew the 'states rights' party. Oldenbarneveltdt, in spite of the great service, was beheaded on May 13, 1619, and Grotius condemned to life imprisonment, from which he escaped in 1621." (W. Walker, *A History of the Christian Church*, 399, 400).

Pelagianism: The belief which places great emphasis upon man's moral ability with regard to obtaining God's favour. Pelagius (d. ca. 420), a British monk, taught in Rome that men can please God by their own efforts, God aiding them somewhat by means of grace. Augustine (354-430) strongly opposed this view, asserting the primacy and indispensability of God's grace in man's redemption and salvation.

Socinianism: An anti-trinitarian movement in Poland named for Faustus Sozzini, (1539-1604), an Italian scholar who laboured in Florence, Basel and Transylvania, before settling down to a twenty-five year residence in Poland and giving leadership to the Socinian movement. Socinians adhered to the Racovian Catechism, named for the Polish town in which it was formulated. See K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1953), 792-795.

Supralapsarianism: The scheme of predestination as understood by High Calvinism and attributed to Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor at Geneva. (See Carl Bangs, *Arminius*, 67-70). This view threatened in Arminius' time to become a necessary element in the system of orthodox Reformed theology, and to this Arminius objected.

Simply stated, Supralapsarianism is the view that the choice of individuals to salvation or damnation preceded (*supra*) the Fall (*lapsus*) of man into sin. Thus the decree of election was not based upon man as fallen; rather the Fall was a necessary consequence of the choice of some to be damned. Sublapsarianism, also called infralapsarianism, modified supralapsarianism by stating that the choice of individuals to salvation or damnation was made by God on the basis of the Fall having occurred. From the mass of fallen humanity God arbitrarily chose those whom he would irresistibly save. This was the decree of election. The remainder, God chose to leave in their sins, and thus to bring upon themselves eternal punishment. This was the decree of reprobation. Arminius objected to all of these variations on the theme of unconditional election and predestination.

Supralapsarianism was, in his view, unacceptable because it asserted the necessity of the fall of man, thereby making God the author of sin. Sublapsarianism softened this doctrine, allowing that man fell into sin by his own free choice; but Arminius maintained that the view was still objectionable in that the arbitrary decree of God to save some and to reprobate others still presented the dilemma of man's salvation not based upon the biblical criteria of a responsible exercise of repentance and faith. Arminius' fears that unconditional election would come to be a primary emphasis within the Dutch Reformed Church were realized in 1618: the first doctrine discussed in the Canons of the Synod of Dort was predestination. "*Primum doctrinae Caput, De Divina Praedestinatione...*" – "The first head of Doctrine: of Divine Predestination." The ninth article: "*Ac proinde electio est fons omnis salutaris boni.*" – "Therefore, election is the fountain of every saving good; from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself as its fruits and effects according to that of the apostles..." P. Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, III, 551, 583.

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