

HARMONY OF THE ARMINIAN FAITH

ABSTRACT

The Arminian Confession of 1621, written by Simon Episcopius, is in full harmony with *The Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church*, which is an abridgment of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* created by John Wesley. By giving the first ever comparative analysis between these two Arminian creeds it will be demonstrated that the two confessions are in theological harmony with one another. *The Arminian Confession of 1621* is the much-needed doctrinal supplement to the brief *Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church*, and encapsulates in creedal form, the distinctive Arminian theology espoused by John Wesley's *Notes on the New Testament* and his *Standard Sermons*. The future Global Methodist Church should adopt *The Arminian Confession of 1621* as a new doctrinal standard for itself.

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List of Abbreviations

BOD	Book of Discipline
EUB	Evangelical United Brethren Church
GMC	Global Methodist Church
UMC	United Methodist Church
WCA	Wesleyan Covenant Association
Articles	The Twenty-Five Articles of the Methodist Church
Confession	The Arminian Confession of 1621

Chapter I: Introduction

Methodism is dead, but it is about to be resurrected. Out of the ashes of America's third largest church denomination, the United Methodist Church (UMC), a new more traditional and evangelical Methodism will arise, the Global Methodist Church (GMC). Before the GMC officially formed on May 1st 2022, the new Methodist denomination had already released a *Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline*.¹ This transitional prototype of a "Book of Discipline" (i.e., the official "rule book" of Methodism) is very similar, and at times even completely identical to, the earlier *Draft Book of Doctrines and Discipline for a New Methodist Church* created by the Wesleyan Covenant Association (WCA).² These two documents will govern the future GMC until such a time that a new *official* "Book of Doctrines and Discipline" is made.³

Both transitional prototypes state verbatim: "Recognizing the complementary streams of the Methodist and the Evangelical United Brethren faith communities, both the Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith define the doctrinal boundaries of our church, until such time as a combined Articles of Faith may be approved by the church."⁴

However, no details have been given on the meaning of the phrase, "until such time as a *combined* Articles of Faith may be approved by the church" (emphasis added). What does this

¹ *Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline*, https://peopleneedjesus.files.wordpress.com/2021/02/82948-englishtransitionalbookofdoctrinesanddiscipline_.pdf

² Thomas Lambrecht, *Comparing The United Methodist Church with the Global Methodist Church (in Formation)*, <https://wesleyancovenant.org/2021/09/07/comparing-the-united-methodist-church-with-the-global-methodist-church-in-formation/>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Wesleyan Covenant Association, "Doctrines and Doctrinal Standards 105 Constitutive Standards," *Draft Book of Doctrines and Discipline for a New Methodist Church*, <https://wesleyancovenant.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Doctrines-and-Discipline-Version-1.pdf>

Global Methodist Church, "Part One Doctrine 106 Constitutive Standards," *Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline of the Global Methodist Church*, <https://globalmethodist.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Transitional-Discipline.20211010-1.pdf>

combination entail? Is this merely a stitched together concoction, copying and pasting statements from the *Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church* and the *Confession of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren Church* (EUB) together? Or will this new “Articles of Faith” be an entirely different document created out of nothing, but incorporating ideas from, and the theology of, the two former creeds of the UMC? Or will the GMC act more liberally and create a new creed that is more independent from its theological heritage? What will be the theology of this new *evangelical* Methodism?

I. The Problem: The Arminian movement lacks a definite creed.

There is a crisis in Methodism and in Arminianism in general. The Arminian branch of Christianity lacks a definitive creed or confession of faith that clearly defines the content of Arminian theology. Where is the Arminian equivalent of the *Augsburg Confession of Faith* or the *Westminster Confession of Faith*? This flaw is even seen by those who are not Methodist, thus the Rev. E. P. Humphrey in a sermon delivered on May 25th, 1852, before the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church stated:

It is to be remembered, also, that the Arminian scheme has yet to be reduced to a systematic and logical form. Where are its written formularies, pushing boldly forth to their final and inevitable conclusions; all its doctrines touching predestination, free will, and efficacious grace? We have its brief and informal creed in some five and twenty articles; but where is its complete confession of faith in thirty or forty chapters? Nay, where is even its shorter catechism? Where is its whole body of divinity, from under the hand of a master, sharply defining terms, accurately stating its belief, laying down the conclusions logically involved therein, trying these conclusions, no less than their premises, by the Word of God, refuting objections, and adjusting all its parts into a consistent and systematic whole? ...It is clear that an exposition of this theology which shall satisfy the logical consciousness is indispensable to its perpetuity, otherwise it cannot take possession of educated and disciplined minds educated by the Word and Spirit of God and disciplined to exact analysis and argument; otherwise again, although it may exert a temporary influence, it will retire before advancing spiritual and intellectual culture. It is also clear, that the first century of its existence has not produced that exposition. Another century may clearly demonstrate that such a

production is clearly impossible, by showing that the logical and Scriptural element is not in the Arminian system...⁵

The problem with the *25 Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church* is that the creed is Arminian simply because John Wesley stripped the Calvinism out of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England* when he abridged the document. Thus the *25 Articles* spell out a Wesleyan-Arminian theology simply because the *25 Articles* do not affirm Calvinism! Contrast this to the *Augsburg Confession*, the *Formula of Concord*, the *Westminster Confession*, the *Belgic Confession*, and the *Cannons of Dort*, all of which, *positively assert and define the contents* of Lutheranism and Calvinism respectively.⁶ The Methodist theologian, Thomas C. Oden, acknowledged the problem:

If one possessed only the *Articles of Religion* without the *Minutes, Sermons, or Notes*, one would have general Anglican teaching without specific Methodist teaching. The *Articles of Religion* affirm what is commonly held in Protestant

⁵ Allan A. Jameson, *Notes on the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion as Received and Taught by Methodist in the United States* (Cincinnati, OH: Applegate & Co, 1853), ix–x.

⁶ For more on the history of the Lutheran and Reformed confessions and the confessions themselves, see Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 3 vols. The best place to find the doctrinal standards of Lutheranism together in a single volume, see *Concordia The Lutheran Confessions- A Reader's Edition of the Book of Concord* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2006). For studies, defenses, and explanations of the Lutheran creeds, see Philip Melancthon's *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*; Martin Chemnitz, *Chemnitz's Works Volume 10 Apology or Vindication of the Christian Book of Concord in Which the True, Christian Doctrine, Drawn up in the Book of Concord is Defended with Good Reasons from God's Holy Scriptures, Whereas the Sophistry and Calumnies Which Have Been Dispersed in Print By Turbulent People Against this Christian Book Are Refuted*, (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2018). For more modern studies, see: Robert D. Preus, *A Contemporary look at the Formula of Concord* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1978); John P. Meyer, *Studies in the Augsburg Confession* (Waukesha, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995); Arnold J. Koelpin, *No Other Gospel Essays in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Formula of Concord 1580-1980* (Waukesha, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 1980).

For studies on the Reformed creeds, see: Zacharias Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, <https://www.monergism.com/threshold/sdg/ursinus/Commentary%20on%20the%20Heidelberg%20Ca%20-%20Zacharias%20Ursinus.pdf>; Theodore VanderGroe, *The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 2 vols; David J. Engelsma, *The Belgic Confession: A Commentary* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2018), 2 vols; Thomas Scott, *The Articles of the Synod of Dort* (Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1841); A. A. Hodge, *The Westminster Confession: A Commentary* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2004); Johannes Geerhardus Vos, *The Westminster Larger Catechism: A Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002); and R. C. Sproul, *Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2019).

religion...these *Articles* are not the best place to discover doctrine that is distinctively Methodist...⁷

This lack of theological distinctiveness was recognized early on. Thus, in the 1806 Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in England, Joseph Benson, Adam Clarke, and Thomas Coke were appointed “to draw up a Digest or Form, expressive of Methodist doctrine.”⁸ Benson and Clarke created thirty-eight articles, and Coke, working separately because he was away in the United States, produced twenty-nine articles. Both works were failures.⁹

Regrettably, Mr. Wesley never gave in writing an official explanation on why he abridged the *39 Articles* the way that he did. To continue the compounding of our Methodist mistakes, when the *25 Articles* were sent over by Mr. Wesley to the Methodists in America,¹⁰ the abridged creed replaced the *Larger Minutes*.¹¹ The *Larger Minutes*, being the minutes of conversations between John Wesley and other Methodist ministers, does lay out in question-and-answer format, the distinctives of Methodism. But these theological distinctives were lost when Wesley himself replaced the *Larger Minutes* with the *25 Articles*! However, minutes of a conversation is not the best way to lay out propositional statements positively stating, defining, and affirming what a particular church denomination believes in. In Mr. Wesley’s defense, it was only logical to replace the *Minutes* with a creed.

⁷ Thomas C. Oden, *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1988), 26.

⁸ Horace Mellard Du Bose, *The Symbol of Methodism Being an Inquiry into the History, Authority, Inclusions, and Uses of the Twenty-Five Articles* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1907), 21.

⁹ Bose explains that they were poorly written, lacked certain key doctrinal points, and that confessions of faith are created in times of controversy, something Methodism was not going through at that time. *Ibid.*, 21–23.

¹⁰ Note: Originally, when Wesley abridged the *39 Articles*, he reduced the Anglican creed to 24 Articles. However, when the American Methodist adopted the 24 Articles, they added another article, numbered 23rd, “Of the Rulers of the United States.” Thus, bringing the number of Articles to 25, from which they have been ever since. See, Thomas Neeley, *Doctrinal Standards of Methodism including the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1918), 173–185.

¹¹ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley Complete and Unabridged* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), VIII:275–338.

The lack of theological distinctiveness in our creed was also demonstrated by Bishop John J. Tigert, who passionately argued for the inclusion of the *Six Tracts*¹² in our doctrinal standards and even published them himself, in two volumes in 1902.¹³ However, the *Six Tracts* have never been published in the *Book of Discipline* since 1808, have never been republished since Bishop Tigert's 1902 republication and have never been a part of our doctrinal standards and therefore have *no authoritative* doctrinal standing.¹⁴ Couple this with the fact that the *Six Tracts* do not systematically define the Methodist faith, rather they just address five random topics from a Wesleyan-Arminian perspective.

Traditionally, the solution to our lack of theological distinctives in our Methodist creed was resolved by a collection of fifty-two sermons by Mr. Wesley, commonly called the *Standard Sermons*. The *Standard Sermons*, along with John Wesley's *Notes on the New Testament*, are the other two parts of our three-fold system of doctrinal standards. Wesley inherited this triad of doctrinal standards from his Anglican heritage which likewise had a trio of doctrinal standards: the creedal, the homiletical (sermons) and the exegetical. Thus, for Methodism the trio of doctrinal standards became the *25 Articles* (the creedal), the *Standard Sermons* (the homiletical) and the *Notes on the New Testament* (the exegetical).

While Mr. Wesley's sermons and New Testament notes do contain our theological distinctives, history has proven that one man's sermons and exceedingly brief notes to be an insufficient and ineffective way of maintaining doctrinal integrity. Sermons, even sermons that

¹² The *Six Tracts* are a set of six theological tracts, some written by, and others abridged by, John Wesley that appeared at various times in the official *Book of Discipline* from 1788–1808. These *Six Tracts* do encapsulate Wesleyan distinctives. The *Six Tracts* are one tract on Predestination, one on Perseverance of the Saints, two tracts on Christian Perfection, one on Baptism and one tract against Antinomianism.

¹³ John J. Tigert, *The Doctrines of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings and Pye, 1902), 2 vols.

¹⁴ For a very brief but sufficient refutation against Bishop Tigert's assertion that the *Six Tracts* were once a part of the official doctrinal standards of Methodism; see Oden, *Doctrinal Standards*, 49–50.

appear to be very academically orientated by watered down 21st century standards, cannot function as doctrinal standards. It is impossible to impose on the minds of every clergyman every sentence, paragraph -or even every idea- in one man's sermons. Sermons by their very nature, cannot compete academically with theological treatises and massive Bible commentaries. Thus, during the late 19th century, when German Liberalism made its way to America, the *Standard Sermons* and *Notes* could not compete with the more academically orientated works of Liberal Germany. Not surprisingly, Methodism was carried away by the new scholarship and abandoned its own theological heritage.

Thus, the words cited above by the Rev. Humphrey at the 1852 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, in which he sneered at the lack of a well-defined confession of faith among the Arminians in general and the Methodist in particular, proved to be prophetic:

It is clear that an exposition of this theology which shall satisfy the logical consciousness is indispensable to its perpetuity, otherwise it cannot take possession of educated and disciplined minds educated by the Word and Spirit of God and disciplined to exact analysis and argument; otherwise again, although it may exert a temporary influence, it will retire before advancing spiritual and intellectual culture.¹⁵

History proved his words true. The hearts and minds of the Methodist clergy were swept away by the newer scholarship of Theological Liberalism. To add the final death nail to Wesley's *Standard Sermons* and *Notes on the New Testament*, consider the following: only the *25 Articles* were considered the "basis for testing correct doctrine"¹⁶ and "the charge of doctrinal irregularity against preachers or members was for disseminating doctrines contrary to our Articles of Religion"¹⁷ and not the sermons and notes. Thus, when George W. Wilson demonstrated in his

¹⁵ Jameson, *Notes on the Twenty-Five Articles* ix-x.

¹⁶ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2016* (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 103. Henceforth, all citations of the official Methodist Book of Discipline will be referred to as BOD.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

book, *Methodist Theology vs. Methodist Theologians, A Review of Several Methodist Writers*,¹⁸ that the Boston Personalist and other theological liberals within Methodism were disseminating doctrines contrary to Wesley's *Standard Sermons* and *Notes*, no action was taken.

Even in the conservative leaning WCA and GMC, both of which are rightly restoring our traditional trio of doctrinal standards, do not follow Wesley in all details found in his sermons and notes.¹⁹ I myself do not adhere to the postmillennial eschatology espoused in Wesley's *Notes*. Not surprisingly, the GMC has correctly made a distinction between our creeds, "The Constitutive Standards," and Wesley's sermons and notes, the "Normative Standards."²⁰

In conclusion, the *Standard Sermons*, *Notes on the New Testament*, the *Larger Minutes*, the *Six Tracts*, Clarke and Benson's *Articles* and Coke's *Articles* cannot properly function as our confession of faith. Right now, the only solution is to abolish the *25 Articles* and create a new creed. I submit to the candid reader a better solution. Instead of creating a new creed by abolishing the *25 Articles*,²¹ the GMC should take a larger and more profound step; a step that

¹⁸ George W. Wilson, *Methodist Theology vs. Methodist Theologians, A Review of Several Methodist Writers* (Cincinnati, OH: Jennings and Pye, 1904).

¹⁹ The most perfect example of this is the WCA and GMC stringent affirmation of woman ordination. When the WCA was formed and when I joined the organization, the WCA made it clear that any changes to woman ordination was off the table. Thus, while they pride themselves in being open about future possibilities of doctrinal and ecclesiastical changes in creating a new Methodism, they inexplicably made this one issue as some sort of untouchable truth that cannot be reconsidered. Thus, they contradict the very doctrinal standards that they themselves are trying to resuscitate, Mr. Wesley's *Notes on the New Testament*. On his note on 1 Cor 14:34, Mr. Wesley states that it is "to the man whose proper office it is to lead and to instruct the congregation." John Wesley, *Notes on the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1986), II: page unknown. Note: the page numbers, for unknown reasons, are not given in the edition of this book that I own. For citation purposes, I will list the Biblical passage Wesley cites.

²⁰ See *Transitional Book of Doctrines and Discipline of the Global Methodist Church Part One Doctrine*.

²¹ Make no mistake, any stitched together creation combining the EUB's *Confession* and the *25 Articles*, even if the combination at times draws verbatim from the two creeds, will nevertheless be a revocation of the *25 Articles*. The *25 Articles* have been the creed of Methodism since its very founding and have gone through little to almost no change since their creation. Unlike Wesley's *Standard Sermons* and *Notes on the New Testament* which nearly faded out of existence at end of the 19th century and almost went extinct in the first half of the 20th century, the *25 Articles* have always appeared in the official Book of Discipline and have always been the official (and enforceable) creed of Methodism- even when this was merely given lip service in our darkest of years. Can the Presbyterians abolish the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and still be Presbyterian? Can the Lutherans abolish the *Augsburg Confession of Faith* and still be Lutheran? If the Global Methodist abolish the *25 Articles*- and everyone

will simultaneously restore the traditional theology of early Methodism and correct a wrong that has plagued one of the largest branches of Christian theology for 400 years: the Global Methodist Church should adopt as its own creed, the *Arminian Confession of 1621* written and ratified by the Remonstrants, the early Dutch Arminians.²² Let it be resolved then, my thesis is this: *The Arminian Confession of 1621, written by Simon Episcopius, is in full harmony with The Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church, which is an abridgment of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England created by John Wesley.*

II. The Solution: Rediscovering a lost Arminian Confession of Faith.

This whole time, for four hundred years, there has been an Arminian Confession of Faith that is on par with the *Augsburg Confession of Faith* and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. This Arminian Confession of Faith is the *Arminian Confession of 1621* which was written by Simon Episcopius who was the leader of the Arminian party condemned at the Synod of Dort.

The *Confession* is brilliantly written, Orthodox, and captures Methodism's emphasis on practical divinity and holiness. It espouses the same evangelical Arminian soteriology of Wesley's *Standard Sermons and Notes* and is in full harmony with the *25 Articles*. By harmony, I mean that every article and statement in the two creeds are reconcilable with one another. They can be standardized as doctrinal standards in a church denomination without plunging the

knows the *25 Articles* will be even more meaningless in the liberal remnants of the UMC- then the Methodism founded by John Wesley will finally become extinct. If the GMC repeals and replaces its *Articles*, then it will set a dangerous precedent in Methodism and will destroy the conservative forward momentum that is wanting to relearn what traditional Methodism means.

²² Mark A. Ellis, *The Arminian Confession of 1621* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2005). This is the only modern English translation of Episcopius' *Confession*. Episcopius' colleague and fellow Remonstrant leader, Johannes Wtenbogaert, published a Dutch translation in 1622. The first English translation was given in 1676; Simon Episcopius, *The Confession or Declaration of the Ministers or Pastors which in the United Provinces are Called Remonstrants, Concerning the Chief Points of Christian Religion* (London, England: Francis Smith, 1676). This longer title is the original title of Episcopius' work and not the shorter title given by Dr. Ellis. For the purposes of the Global Methodist Church, the *Confession* should be renamed as "The Arminian Confession of Faith."

denomination that adopts them into internal contradiction. Creeds and confessions are not meant to define every minute detail that a person must believe in regarding the Bible. Rather, they draw a circle or fence by which one must operate within. Together, the *Confession* and *Articles* can build a sound and coherent perimeter.

The *Confession* is written in twenty-five chapters whereas the *Articles* is merely twenty-five articles, so naturally, the *Confession* addresses more than the *Articles*. But this should not be seen as a contradiction. When one addresses a topic, another does not, then the lacking creed is being *supplemented not contradicted*. Together they make a coherent whole.

Portrait of Simon Episcopus

Published in the *Arminian Magazine* by the Rev. John Wesley (1781)



However, due to the limitations of this thesis paper, I am forced to curtail major portions from my original intentions.²³

1. *I must bypass important historical analyses:*
 - a. I will not be able to explore the Reformed background that the Remonstrants grew out of. Thus, no examination of the *Heidelberg Catechism* or *Belgic Confession* will be given.
 - b. I will not be able to explore the Anglican background that the Methodist grew out of. Thus, no examination of the *39 Articles of Religion of the Church of England* will be given. Nor will I be able to explore the relationship between the Episcopal Arminianism of England with that of the Dutch Arminianism of Holland. Thus, I will not explore William Laud's reading of Remonstrant literature, Anglican defenses of the Remonstrants, the strong praise given to the *Arminian Confession of 1621* by Jeremy Taylor, or the great influence of Hugo Grotius on John Wesley's father, the Rev. Samuel Wesley.
 - c. While I have already mentioned some of the background, development, and problems of Methodism's trio of doctrinal standards, much more can be said about it but for the purposes of this thesis paper I must move on.
2. *I must bypass Methodist views of Remonstrant theology.* I will not be able to spend the amount of time that I originally intended but suffice it for this thesis paper to say, upon reading 19th century Methodist theologians' writings, a clear pattern emerged: Methodist think very highly of early Remonstrant theology, but they regret that the Remonstrants fell into heresy later on, and at a very quick rate.
3. *I must bypass discussions on the importance of creeds and confessions.* My thesis paper will merely assume that a church denomination, such as the GMC, should have a confession of faith to begin with. I will not explore the relationship between confessionalism and *Sola Scriptura*, nor will I explore the profound consequences that fell upon Arminianism of all stripes precisely because the Arminians lacked a confession of faith that was owned by a church denomination or movement. It is this lack of a clearly acknowledged creed that led to a greater diversity and stronger sense of doctrinal confusion among the Arminians; an internal confusion not found among the Lutherans and Calvinists precisely because they did have a plainly acknowledged creed that clearly defined the contents of their faith. By not embracing and maintaining their own confession, the Remonstrants fell into heresy and guaranteed that the *Arminian Confession of 1621* would be forgotten in the pages of history, leading Arminianism to be ill defined and never codified like Lutheranism or Calvinism. This was further compounded by Methodism's failure to create their own creed when they embraced the Arminian faith and separated from the Church of England. Both of these mistakes, the anti-confessionalism of the Remonstrants and the lack of a clearly defined creed among the Methodists, directly

²³ However, I fully intend on expanding this thesis paper into a full length book that is much longer and much more in depth.

led to the collapse of Evangelical Arminian theology and a profound confusion on what Arminianism is.

4. *I must bypass contrasts between the Confession and Articles with that of the later Remonstrant and Methodist theologies.* Thus, while I am examining the creeds doctrine by doctrine, I will not include later theological deviations. Originally, I intended on doing this as a vindication of the *Confession and Articles* by demonstrating that the fall of the Remonstrants and the Methodists was not due to any internal errors in their creeds or early theology.
5. *I must bypass discussions on the Evangelical United Brethren Church all together.* Thus, I will ignore the EUB's *Confession of Faith*, which is a part of the doctrinal standards of the United Methodist Church and the future Global Methodist Church. This is unfortunate since the EUB sets up two important precedents:
 - a. When the Methodist adopted the EUB's *Confession of Faith* in the 1968 merger, creating the UMC, they set the precedent that it was okay to adopt another church denomination's *Confession*, so long as it was in theological harmony with our own confession. Thus, the EUB's *Confession* sets the precedent that it is okay for Methodist to adopt another tradition's confession (such as the *Arminian Confession of 1621*) as their own, provided that it is in harmony with our doctrinal standards.
 - b. The history of the EUB, and how it has a precedent of constantly abolishing its old creed and replacing it by creating a new creed, every time it merges with another church or undergoes immense changes, sets the precedent of abolishing its own *Confession of Faith* and replacing it with a different confession. Now that the UMC is undergoing a massive schism and creating a new Methodism, the precedent set by the EUB itself, allows for the complete repeal of the EUB's *Confession*; thus, the GMC should replace the EUB's *Confession* with the *Arminian Confession of 1621*. Contrast this to the highly conservative disposition of Methodism that has constantly resisted, *and rightly so*, any changes to its doctrinal standards. By preserving the original trio of doctrinal standards, Methodism's wise and conservative disposition is honored on the one hand, while on the other hand, by replacing the EUB *Confession* with the *Arminian Confession*, those who have longed for a standardization of our Arminian theology will finally have their wishes fulfilled. Thus, both sides will have their wishes fulfilled without either side having to make any compromises!

Since the *Arminian Confession of 1621* is much larger than the brief *25 Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church* and because they address doctrinal points in a different order, I will categorize the articles from the two creeds by *doctrinal topic* and will examine them in the doctrinal order common in systematic theologies.

In chapter two, I will draw on all relevant material in the two statements of faith on the doctrines of Bibliology and Theology Proper. In chapter three I will examine the doctrines of Christology and Pneumatology in the *Confession* and *Articles*. Chapter four will examine the topic of Anthropology and chapter five will address Soteriology. The sixth chapter will investigate the Ecclesiology and Eschatology of the *Confession* and *Articles*. The last chapter, chapter seven, will contain my concluding remarks.

Chapter II Bibliology and Theology Proper

Part 1: Bibliology

I. The Remonstrants

Whoever desires to duly honor God, and certainly and undoubtedly obtain eternal salvation, before all else it is necessary that he believe that God is, and that he is a generous rewarder of those who seek him. Therefore, he must conform himself to the rule and square which was given and prescribed by the true God himself, the supreme legislator, and stand firm upon the promise of eternal life through undoubting faith.²⁴ (*Confession* 1.1)²⁵

Episcopius continues, that there is a God, and that God has spoken through the prophets, and in the last days, revealed himself through his Son, is “attested by so many and so great proofs,”²⁶ by signs, works of the Spirit, fulfilled prophecy, sound and valid testimony, “that no more certain, solid or perfect reason for faith can be given, or justly desired.”²⁷ (*Confession* 1.2). After declaring that there is no reason to doubt that the canonical books were written by inspired men, Episcopius then identifies the thirty-nine books commonly found in the Protestant Old Testament (*Confession* 1.3)²⁸ and the twenty-seven books of the New Testament (*Confession* 1.4).²⁹

Episcopius acknowledges that even though there are some doubts about the authorship of some of the canonical books,³⁰ the authority and inspiration of those disputed books are not

²⁴ Mark A. Ellis, *The Arminian Confession of 1621* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2005), 35. This quotation is from the first paragraph of the first chapter, “On the Sacred Scripture, its authority, perfection, and perspicuity,” in the *Confession* by Simon Episcopius.

²⁵ All citations of *The Arminian Confession of 1621* will henceforth be cited, in the body of the text, as “Confession” followed by chapter number, period, paragraph number. In the footnotes, Episcopius’ work will be cited as Ellis, *Confession*, page number -since I am using Dr. Mark Ellis’ translation of Simon Episcopius’ *Confession*.

²⁶ Ellis, *Confession* 35.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 35–36.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Episcopius does not specifically list or identify which books have disputed authorship.

negated or affected (*Confession 1.5*).³¹ Episcopius rejects the canonicity of the Apocrypha and their use for establishing doctrines, but nevertheless acknowledges that they can be read with some benefits, “some more, some less” (*Confession 1.6*).³²

Proof of the truthfulness and divinity of Sacred Scriptures is not merely proven by the miracles, deeds, signs, and wonders -or even by the resurrection of Jesus Christ- but by the teachings which the Bible contains; teachings that could not have arisen from, and cannot come from, the minds of men or angels. This is further demonstrated when one considers the historic facts: the biblical authors were simple but upright men who, despite all their disadvantages, *successfully* disseminated doctrines contrary to the fleshly desires of humanity, the wisdom of this world and the power of Satan’s kingdom. Thus, against all odds, Christianity prevailed because it was of God, it was of divine origins (*Confession 1.7*).³³

Episcopius rejects the notion that the Bible derives its authority or canonicity from any church councils or decrees (*Confession 1.8*).³⁴ The Bible derives its authenticity and authority “by reason of the infallible veracity of God,”³⁵ human and angelic authority can never equal that of divine authority (*Confession 1.9*).³⁶ All theological debates are to be settled by the Word of God alone (*Confession 1.10-11*).³⁷ Thus, the decisions of councils or synods, the writings of the Early Church Fathers, creeds, confessions, “conclusions of the universities”, writings of eminent men, no matter how holy or learned, do not settle theological disputes or determine doctrine, but

³¹ Ellis, *Confession 35–36*.

³² *Ibid.*, 36–37.

³³ *Ibid.*, 37–38.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 38–39.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 39–40.

only “he who is before all and who alone can neither deceive nor be deceived, our Lord Jesus Christ, has said and prescribed in his Word” (*Confession* 1.12).³⁸

Everything that is necessary for salvation is clearly taught in Scriptures and can be understood by those who diligently search for it with piety and the fear of God in their hearts (*Confession* 1.13-14).³⁹ However sin and careless attention can hinder understanding of what the Bible teaches (*Confession* 1.15). The literal interpretation of the Bible is to be preferred unless the context warrants otherwise, Scripture interprets Scripture (*Confession* 1.16.).⁴⁰ The meaning of a passage in the Bible is not to be determined by a creed, confession, Early Church Father or source outside of the Bible itself (*Confession* 1.17).⁴¹ Yet Episcopius does not believe that the ancient interpretations, especially that of the early Greek and Latin Fathers, is to be despised and outright rejected; rather they should be accepted insofar as they are in agreement with the Word of God (*Confession* 1.18).⁴²

II. The Methodist

Article V

Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation

The Holy Scripture containeth (sic) all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture, we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the church...⁴³

The *Article* continues and lists out the 39 books common to all Protestant Bibles and then concludes saying, “All the books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do

³⁸ Ellis, *Confession* 40–41.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 41–42.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 43–44.

⁴³ *BOD* 66.

receive and account canonical.”⁴⁴ “The Old Testament is not contrary to the New;” says *Article VI*, “for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and man.”⁴⁵ *Article VI – Of the Old Testament* continues stating that “wherefore they are not to be heard who feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises.”⁴⁶ The *Article* concludes stating that the ceremonial and civil laws of the Old Testament do not apply to the Christian, but the moral laws do remain in force.

In his *Notes on the New Testament*, Mr. Wesley states in his interpretation of Matthew 11:27, “Our Lord here, addressing himself to his disciples, shows why men, wise in other things, do not know this; namely, because none can know it by natural reason; none but those to whom he revealeth (sic) it.”⁴⁷ For Wesley, divine revelation is not a truth discoverable by human reason, emotion, feeling, experience or intuition; rather it is delivered to humanity from outside of, and external from, humanity, i.e. from God.

For the apostles wrote nothing which was not divinely inspired: but with this difference, -sometimes they had a particular revelation, and a special commandment; at other times they wrote from the divine light which abode with them, the standing treasure of the Spirit of God. And this, also, was not their private opinion, but a divine rule of faith and practice. As one whom God hath made faithful in my apostolic office, who therefore faithfully deliver what I receive from him.⁴⁸

Wesley affirms that the “apostles wrote nothing which was not divinely inspired.” According to Mr. Wesley, everything written by the Apostles in the New Testament was either revealed to

⁴⁴ *BOD* 67.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Wesley, *Notes I*: Matt. 11:27.

⁴⁸ Wesley, *Notes II*: I Cor. 7:25.

them by a particular revelation (a special commandment) or by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who resided in, and spoke from, the Apostles.

III. Comparative Analysis

There are three key issues that immediately arise from a comparative analysis between the *25 Articles* and the *Confession*, two of which revolve around the question of Socinianism:

- i. *Is the Bible true because it is authoritative or is the Bible authoritative because it is true?*
- ii. *Can a person, by the use of mere reason, understand the Bible apart from the operations of the Spirit illuminating them?*
- iii. *What is the relationship between the Old and New Testament?*

1) *Is the Bible true because it is authoritative or is the Bible authoritative because it is true?*

The full historical relationship between Faustus Socinus (Fausto Sozzini) book, *De Auctoritate Sacrae Scripturae*,⁴⁹ and the Remonstrants, especially Conrad Vorstius, cannot be treated here. I defer the reader to Kestutis Daugirdas' article, *The Biblical Hermeneutics of Socinians and Remonstrants in the Seventeenth Century*,⁵⁰ for a thorough treatment of the historical relationship between the two theological camps in which he demonstrates that the Remonstrants were dependent upon (and infected by) Socinian thought.

Essentially, Socinus viewed the Bible as authoritative *because* it was historically dependable and historically accurate. As Daugirdas explains:

One of Sozzini's most important services to modern biblical hermeneutics in *De auctoritate sacrae scripturae* is undoubtedly his reasoned exposition of a historical approach to Scripture. Sozzini's stance differed from the Roman

⁴⁹ Faustus Socinus and E. Combe, *An Argument for the Authority of Holy Scripture; from the Latin of Socinus [entitled, "De auctoritate S. Scripturae"]*, after the Steinfurt copy. To which is prefix'd a short account of his life (London, England: W. Meadows, 1731).

⁵⁰ Kestutis Daugirdas, "The Biblical Hermeneutics of Socinians and Remonstrants in the Seventeenth Century" *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe: Jacobus Arminius (1559/60–1609)*. Brill, 2009. EBSCOhost, search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.regent.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=312686&site=ehost-live.

Catholic position, which derived the authority of the Bible from that of the church. It also differed from the doctrine of verbal inspiration that was gradually developing in both Lutheran and Reformed theology at the universities: in regarding the Bible as a directly inspired collection of non-contradictory teachings, this was increasingly removing the Bible from the historical dimension. Sozzini, by contrast, attributed the authority of Scripture largely to its historical reliability.⁵¹

Socinus creates four criteria for historical verification that any book, including the Bible (especially the New Testament), must pass in order to be credible:

- I.) “The author of the book is not very credible, or at least not credible beyond all doubt”
- II.) “The author is unknown”
- III.) “There is good reason to suspect that the book has been falsified or altered”
- IV.) “There is definite proof that the book cannot be trusted”⁵²

Since the Bible is able to pass this four-folded historicity test, humanity can accept the Bible as reliable and credible. Yet Socinus does not make the Bible entirely dependent upon its historical accuracy and even titles chapter one of his book on *The Authority of Holy Scripture* as “In this it is demonstrated to those who already believe that the Christian religion is true, that they cannot rightfully doubt the authority of the books of the Old and New Testament.”⁵³ It is Episcopius that goes a step further and makes the historicity of the New Testament the criterion by which the truthfulness of Christianity stands or falls.⁵⁴ “Strictly speaking, in (Episcopius’) eyes no further proof is required, whether it be based on reason or something else, such as the superiority of the teachings or the rapid dissemination of the Christian faith.”⁵⁵ But it was Socinus prioritization of, and emphasis upon, the historical reliability of the New Testament that set the wrong ward trajectory. The historical evidence demonstrated the credibility of the New Testament which in turn proved the Old Testament. Again, the credibility of the Old Testament depended upon the

⁵¹ Daugirdas, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 101.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 106.

credibility of the New Testament which in turn depended upon the historic evidence. This three-step reasoning is partly found in the *Arminian Confession of 1621*, for Episcopius says, "...the doctrine contained in the books of the New Testament (by which also the truth and dignity of the Old Testament is abundantly established and confirmed) ..." ⁵⁶ (*Confession 1.7*) i.e., the truth of the Old Testament is "established" by the New Testament.

It should be noted that in Daugirdas' article, he is mostly citing Simon Episcopius later work *Theological Institutes* (1650) and not the *Confession* (1621). In fact, some, but not all, of Episcopius' thoughts stand in direct opposition to his earlier *Confession*. In the *Confession* (1.7), Episcopius, contrary to his later work, does appeal to 1.) the rapid dissemination of the Gospel and 2.) the perfection and holiness of its teachings as a proof for the validity of the New Testament and even places these two things above the arguments from miracles and even above arguments concerning the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ!⁵⁷ Episcopius likewise grounds the authority and authenticity of the Bible in the "infallible veracity of God" (*Confession 1.9*).⁵⁸

Thus, in the *Confession*, one finds mostly the classical apologetics of the Church along with a single (i.e., one and only one) Socinian argument, namely the New Testament establishes the truthfulness of the Old Testament. "So it is not surprising that Nicolaus Bodecherus, who had signed the (*Remonstrance*) (1610) but changed sides to join the Contra-Remonstrants in 1623, took the (*Confession*) as an opportunity to accuse the Remonstrants, in his *Sociniano Remonstrantismus*, printed in 1624, of adopting Sozzini's methods, as well as other "false

⁵⁶ Ellis, *Confession* 37.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

doctrines.”⁵⁹ Episcopius responded with a pamphlet entitled, *Bodecherus the Simple: of, A Clear Demonstration, that Nicholas Bodecherus has displayed more than ordinary flattering servility, for the purpose of gaining the favor of the Contra-Remonstrants, and has lately very foolishly and weakly attempted to charge the Confession of the Remonstrants with Socinianism.*⁶⁰

In Episcopius’ response he argued that the Remonstrants differed from the Socinians in their views of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the atonement, and the role of civil authorities.⁶¹ He likewise argued that there is nothing wrong with agreeing with a heretic if the heretic happens to be orthodox on a particular point, such as Socinius’ belief that the New Testament is historically credible.⁶² For Episcopius, truth is independent of the one who asserts it;⁶³ thus, if the Bible is the word of God, then it does not matter if it is an Arminian, a Calvinist, a Socinian or a Catholic who asserts it. In a similar matter, a modern-day Evangelical can acknowledge agreement with a Jehovah Witness on the authority of the Bible and yet have nothing to do with their heretical theology.

While Socinus and Episcopius err in making the Bible authoritative because it is true, their viewpoint is not entirely false. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ maintained the authority and inspiration of the Old Testament when he said, “Do not presume that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.” (Matt. 5:17 NASB). Likewise, it is written, “All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness;” (2 Tim 3:16 NASB). In this verse, the Apostle Paul is primarily

⁵⁹Daugirdas, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 98.

⁶⁰ Frederick Calder, *Memoirs of Episcopius to which is added a Brief Account of the Synod of Dort* (London, England: Simpkin and Marshall, 1835), 457–458.

⁶¹ Daugirdas, *The Biblical Hermeneutics of the Socinians and Remonstrant*, 99.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

speaking of the Old Testament since the New Testament Cannon had not been completed yet. Despite this, in Paul's First Letter to Timothy, the Apostle to the Gentile, claiming to cite Scripture, quotes Deut. 25:4 and Luke 10:7 (1 Tim 5:18) thereby demonstrating that he believed that the New Testament, by extension, is Scripture and likewise "inspired by God."

The point is, if the New Testament is the Word of God, it necessarily follows that the Old Testament is also the Word of God since the New Testament itself declares the Old Testament to be inspired and presumes it to be authoritative. Therefore, Socinus and Episcopius are correct in thinking that the credibility of the New Testament automatically establishes the credibility of the Old Testament; however, they fall into error by making the authority of the Old Testament *entirely dependent upon* (i.e., "established" by) the New Testament and by making the credibility of the New Testament *entirely dependent upon* its historical credibility. The Old Testament was the Word of God prior to the arrival of the New Testament and it, like the New Testament, derives its authority from the same source: the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit (the infallible veracity of God).

But it should be noted that other than this one minor mistake (Socinian infection) in the first sentence of the seventh paragraph in the first chapter of the Confession, the rest of the *apologetics* found in the *Confession* is thoroughly orthodox. If the Global Methodist Church is to adopt the *Confession* as their own, this single error can easily be purged or rewritten.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Thus, where it is written "That the doctrine contained in the books of the New Testament (by which also the truth and dignity of the Old Testament is abundantly established and confirmed) is completely true and divine..." (*Confession* 1.7) is to be rewritten so that it reads: "That the doctrine contained in the books of the Old and New Testaments is completely true and divine..."

The first chapter of the *Confession* lies in the middle between the apologetics of James Arminius and that of John Wesley. Mr. Wesley in his, *A Clear and Concise Demonstration of the Divine Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures*, states:

There are four grand and powerful arguments which strongly induce us to believe that the Bible must be from God; viz., miracles, prophecies, the goodness of the doctrine, and the moral character of the penmen. All the miracles flow from divine power; all the prophecies, from divine understanding; the goodness of the doctrine, from divine goodness; and the moral character of the penmen, from divine holiness.⁶⁵

Unlike Wesley, who took more of an empirical approach and placed the emphasis on external evidences (such as miracles, fulfilled prophecy, the morality of the authors etc....), Arminius, by contrast, takes more of a presuppositionalist approach and places a stronger emphasis on internal evidences:

The authority of any word or writing whatsoever depends upon its author, as the word “authority” indicates; and it is just as the veracity and the power... of the author. But God is of infallible *veracity*, and is neither capable of deceiving nor of being deceived; and of irrefragable *power*, that is, supreme over the creatures: If therefore He is the Author of Scripture, its authority is totally dependent on Him alone... But whoever they be that receive (Scripture) as if delivered by God, that approve of it, publish, preach, interpret and expound it, that also distinguish and discriminate it from words or writings which are supposititious and adulterated; these persons add not a tittle of authority, to the sayings or writings, because their entire authority, whether contemplated separately or conjointly, is only that of mortal men; and things Divine neither need confirmation, nor indeed can receive it, from those which are human.⁶⁶

However, this is not to deny that Arminius appealed to miracles and prophecies⁶⁷ or Wesley, who grounded the inspiration of the Bible in “the power, understanding, goodness and holiness of God.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), XI:484.

⁶⁶ James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991) II:80–81.

⁶⁷ Arminius, *Works* II:325.

⁶⁸ Wesley, *Works* XI:484.

Episcopius' *Confession* contains both forms of reasoning:

That God is, and that he has spoken to the fathers through the prophets many times and in many ways, and that he has finally in the last times most fully declared and manifested his final will through his only begotten Son, has been attested by so many and so great proofs, prodigious signs, mighty works, distributions of the Holy Spirit, and other wonderful effects, and the certain predictions of events, and the testimonies of men worthy of belief, that no more certain, solid or perfect reason for faith can be given or justly desired. (1.2)⁶⁹

Therefore, the doctrine contained in these canonical books is itself altogether authentic and indeed of divine authority, and unquestionable, and by reason of the infallible veracity of God, entirely deserves our undoubted faith, and by virtue of its.... absolute and supreme power, most humble obedience from us... (1.9)⁷⁰

Thus, if the Global Methodist Church is to adopt the *Arminian Confession of 1621*, both forms of apologetics would be allowable. The *Confession* stands in the middle of Arminius and Wesley and does not reflect the views of Socinus nor the views of Episcopius in his later life when he became more influenced by Socinianism. If the GMC is to adopt the *Confession*, then the new Methodist denomination, in agreement with the early Remonstrants and early Methodists, would view the Bible as *true because it is authoritative*.

ii. *Can a person, by the use of mere reason, understand the Bible apart from the operations of the Spirit illuminating them?*

In the *Arminian Confession of 1621*, after stating that everything pertaining to salvation is sufficiently found in Sacred Scriptures (*Confession* 1.13),⁷¹ Episcopius states:

Furthermore, the clarity and understandability of these books, although they are obscure enough in some places (especially to the unlearned and less exercised) is so great, especially in meanings necessary to be understood for salvation, that all readers, not only the learned, but also the ignorant (who are gifted with common sense and judgement), as much as is sufficient, may be able to follow their meaning, if they do not permit themselves to be blinded by prejudice, vain confidence, or other corrupt affections, but piously and carefully search the Scripture (which we believe is not only permitted for all, though untaught, ignorant or lay people, but also commanded and enjoined by God), and study to

⁶⁹ Ellis, *Confession* 35.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

become familiar with the very phrases of Scripture, and which were most clear and meaningful in the time and language in which these books were written. We say that such [people] as these, truly honest, teachable, and fearing God from the heart, are able to perceive everything which pertains to true faith and godliness, not only those things which are necessary, but also the very reason of their necessity, namely, they really do easily perceive that they are necessary and for what purpose. (*Confession 1.14*)⁷²

The Remonstrants, including Episcopius, stressed the clarity of the Biblical message of salvation so much that, every person -believer or unbeliever- could, by their own innate and intrinsic human reason understand and comprehend the Gospel message. Granted, Episcopius maintained that an unregenerate person, even one who fully comprehends the Biblical message of salvation could not, by their own intrinsic power, assent to that saving Gospel message and believe in it in order to be saved. Thus humanity, in their fallen state, cannot *believe* in the Gospel message of salvation, but they can nevertheless *understand and comprehend* what that message is. Thus, the fall rendered humanity unable to assent and trust in Jesus Christ (Total Inability), yet the fall did not so render humanity so fallen, corrupted and darkened where they could not understand the saving message of Jesus Christ by the use of their own innate reason.

Yet, Episcopius still acknowledged that people can be clouded in their understanding due to a lack of sufficient attention or judgement when reading the texts; or due to carelessness, “not frequently and piously ask(ing) for divine aid, as is proper, or else being drenched with prejudice, confidence, hatred, envy, ambition, or other depraved feelings,” stumbling over figurative language or obscure historical matters (*Confession 1.15*).⁷³ Thus, sin does not prevent the human mind from comprehending the Biblical message to begin with, but rather, sin, when it is indulged, can prevent a person from comprehending.

⁷² Ellis, *Confession* 41–42.

⁷³ Ellis, *Confession* 42.

As Keith Stanglin adequately summarizes:

In fact, (Episcopus) would elsewhere admit that there are many passages of scripture that are difficult or absolutely vexing. But the matters that are necessary to know, believe, hope, and do (*scitu, creditu, speratu, factu*) for salvation “can be easily understood.” Episcopus also specifies that scripture must be engaged without the interference of the affections, which interpose negligence and prejudice. In such a case where the power (*vis*) of understanding seems to be clouded or suppressed, it is not really the capability (*potentia*) of understanding that has been impeded, but the will or the act of understanding.⁷⁴

The Fall, in Episcopus view, had a stronger effect on the will and the affections than it did with the intellect. In Episcopus later defense of the *Arminian Confession of 1621* entitled, *Apology for the Confession or Declaration of the opinion of those who in the treaty of the Netherlands are called Remonstrants, on the principal articles of the Christian religion against the censorship of the four professors of Leiden inscribed on the nobility, wise and powerful DD Deputies & Counselor of the Orders of Holland & West-Frisia*,⁷⁵ the Dutch Arminian doubles down on his error and continued to promulgate the notion that “that special internal illumination is not necessary for understanding the literal sense of scripture; rather, natural grace that is common and universal is all that is necessary and sufficient.”⁷⁶

It should be noted however, that Episcopus is only speaking on the perspicuity of the Bible on things pertaining to salvation only and not on any and every matter. Thus, the way of salvation is clearly laid out in the Bible to all those who use their God given “right reason” which Episcopus defines as:

For right reason here does not mean the power (*vim*) by which man reasoning (*ratiocinando*) from himself can devise or find what is right and agrees with the divine will, but only [means] the power by which he can apprehend the sense

⁷⁴ Keith Stanglin, *The Rise and Fall of Biblical Perspicuity: Remonstrants and the Transition toward Modern Exegesis* 42–43.

⁷⁵ Simon Episcopus, “Bodecherus Ineptiens,” *Operum theologorum pars altera* (Rotterdam: Netherlands: Arnold Leers 1665) II:48–58.

⁷⁶ Stanglin, *Rise and Fall of Biblical Perspicuity* 44.

clearly and perspicuously revealed by God or elicited from the circumstances of words, from what precedes and follows them, etc., rightly or agreeably (*convenienter*) to the intention of him who uttered the words.⁷⁷

So, while Episcopius maintained that faith required supernatural grace, he nevertheless maintained that the mental capacity to comprehend the literal, grammatical sense of Scriptures on matters pertaining to salvation is not so darkened by sin that the human mind is rendered incapable of comprehension. It is here in the *Confession 1.14* that another Socinian infection can be found.⁷⁸ Episcopius deviates from his teacher, James Arminius. For, Arminius states:

But those senses or meanings, the knowledge and belief of which are simply necessary to salvation, are revealed in the Scriptures with such plainness, that they can be perceived even by the most simple of mankind, provided they be able duly to exercise their reason. . . . But they are perspicuous to those alone who, being illuminated by the light of the Holy Spirit, have eyes to see, and a mind to understand and discern. For any color whatever, though sufficiently illuminated by the light, is not seen except by the eye, which is endued with the power of seeing, as with an inward light.⁷⁹

John Wesley clearly agreed with Arminius on this issue; humanity needs the grace of God and the illumination of the Holy Spirit in order to understand the written Word of God. For “there is none that understandeth (sic)- The things of God.”⁸⁰ Again,

We had, by nature, no knowledge of God, no acquaintance with him. It is true, as soon as we came to the use of reason, we learned “the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, from the things that are made.” From the things that are seen we inferred the existence of an eternal, powerful Being, that is not seen. But still, although we acknowledged his being, we had no acquaintance with him. As we know there is an Emperor of China, whom yet we do not know; so, we knew there was a King of all the earth, yet we knew him not. Indeed, we could not by any of our natural faculties. By no one of these could we attain the knowledge of God. We could no more perceive him by our natural understanding, than we could see him by our natural understanding, than we could see him with

⁷⁷ Cited from Episcopius’ *Apologia* in Stanglin, *The Rise and Fall of Biblical Perspicuity* 45.

⁷⁸ “Johannes Polyander (1568–1646) wrote an anonymous pamphlet criticizing Episcopius for teaching an optimistic anthropology in his early public disputation on scripture. Polyander observed that the disciple of Fausto Sozzini, Krzysztof Ostorodt (ca. 1560–1611), claimed in his *Institutes* that scripture can be understood “without the inner illumination of the Holy Spirit,” an opinion contrary to that received among Reformed theologians. Polyander then noted that the same thing was said by Episcopius.” Stanglin, *The Rise and Fall of Biblical Perspicuity* 43.

⁷⁹ Arminius, *Works* II:328.

⁸⁰ Wesley, *Notes* II: Romans 2:11.

our eyes. For “no one knoweth (sic) the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son willeth (sic) to reveal him. And no one knoweth (sic) the Son but the Father, and he to whom the Father revealeth (sic) him.”⁸¹

The human mind is so tainted and ruined by sin that we can no longer understand the “things of God.” If the Global Methodist Church is to adopt the *Arminian Confession of 1621*, the GMC would have to add minor alterations in order to bring the *Confession* into harmony with the trio of Methodist Doctrinal Standards and with the theology of James Arminius; namely, in *Confession 1.14* replace the word “readers” with “believers” and add “if they are illuminated by the Spirit and” so that the *Confession 1.14* would read thus: “...in meanings necessary to be understood for salvation, that all **believers**, not only the learned, but also the ignorant (who are gifted with common sense and judgement), as much as is sufficient, may be able to follow their meaning, **if they are illuminated by the Spirit and** if they do not permit themselves to be blinded by prejudice, etc....” Once this simple and minor change is made, then the *Confession* will be in full harmony with the Doctrinal Standards of Methodism and in harmony with the actual teachings of James Arminius himself.⁸²

iii. *What is the relationship between the Old and New Testament?*

Here, it is the shorter *Articles* and not the longer *Confession* that addresses this issue. It is important to note that Episcopius held to views that differed from the *25 Articles of Religion*. As Dr. Mark A. Ellis explains in his examination of the theses found in the *Public Disputations of Arminius and Episcopius*:

⁸¹ Wesley, *Works* VI:58.

⁸² It should be noted that the *Confession*, as originally written by Episcopius, is not in contradiction with the *25 Articles*, for the aforementioned *Articles* do not address this theological issue. Rather the proposed alteration that I am making is in order to bring the *Confession* into harmony with Wesley’s *Standard Sermons* and *Notes on the New Testament*. It is also true that such an alteration would change the original, intended meaning by Episcopius. However, such an alteration would bring the *Confession* into better harmony with the founder of the Remonstrants, James Arminius.

Arminius dedicated an entire thesis to the Law. He followed Calvin's "three uses" of the Law, an analysis of the three divisions of the Law (moral, ceremonial, and judicial), and the degree to which they were abrogated by the New Covenant. Episcopius gave no separate treatment of the Law. We cannot overemphasize his perception of the Law as only a type and shadow of grace... (Episcopius) insisted that the whole law was abrogated with respect to the believer. The Mosaic covenant was only made with the Jews, not the rest of humanity, and the Old was abrogated by the New. The whole law, including the moral law, contained only a minimal part of true religion, while the Gospel is entirely spiritual, a truly, "pure and spotless religion" from which nothing can be added or removed.⁸³

It is important to note that Dr. Ellis is drawing from Episcopius' early disputations while he was a Professor at the University of Leiden, prior to the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). In other words, Episcopius developed this problematic viewpoint *prior* to the penning of the *Arminian Confession of 1621*. Yet, Episcopius' problematic viewpoint on the relationship between the Law and Gospel, between the Old and New Testaments, is *not found* in the *Confession*. Therefore, there is no discord between *Article VI – Of the Old Testament* which reflect Calvin and Arminius' three divisions of the Law and that of the *Arminian Confession*.

It is extremely crucial to note that -and this point cannot be overemphasized- an adoption of the *Arminian Confession of 1621* by the GMC is NOT an acceptance or affirmation of everything that was ever written or taught by Simon Episcopius. To the contrary, the very point of having a "Confession of Faith" that encapsulates Methodism's Wesleyan-Arminian theology is so that Methodism can move away from the notion that the corpus of one man's writings should constitute the doctrinal standards of a church denomination. So, while there are significant differences between Episcopius and Wesley on this issue, my thesis is unaffected since those differences do not appear in the Methodist *Doctrinal Standards* nor in the *Confession*.

Part 2: Theology Proper

⁸³ Mark A. Ellis, *Simon Episcopius' Doctrine of Original Sin* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006), 110.

I. The Remonstrants

According to Episcopius, “our entire religion contained in these sacred books can be summarized” in a soteriological manner (*Confession* 2.1).⁸⁴ By God’s very nature He deserves to be worshiped, by His works and his will God makes known to us how we are to worship him. However speculative things not revealed in the Bible are not necessary to be believed in order to be saved, nor can there be any true saving knowledge of God without holiness (*Confession* 2.2).⁸⁵ Scripture presents to us a God whose essential attributes are shared in common by three distinct persons; the Bible further presents to us the relationship between those distinct persons within the Trinity (*Confession* 2.3).⁸⁶ “The following are those attributes, so far as they necessarily pertain to [his nature]” (*Confession* 2.4):⁸⁷

- I. “God is one.” Monotheism is affirmed; because God is of “absolute authority or irresistible power” God can do what he wills with his own creation (*Confession* 2.5).⁸⁸
- II. God is eternal. God is the only one with life and immortality in of himself and from himself. Immutability is likewise affirmed. (*Confession* 2.6)⁸⁹
- III. God is infinite. God is not limited nor confined to any particular spaces and even though there are times and places where God seems hidden or remote, he nevertheless inhabits all places however unevenly and by various degrees. (*Confession* 2.7)⁹⁰
- IV. God is omniscient. God knows all things, past, present, future, things that are, and things that are hypothetical. Because God knows all things he can never be deceived or tricked and perpetually knows how to govern wisely all things. (*Confession* 2.8)⁹¹
- V. God’s will is completely free. God “cannot be forced to will, reject or permit [anything] either by inward necessity of his nature, nor by external power.... outside himself...” God wills everything that is good, but he does not will anything that is evil, nor does he will the means to accomplish those evil ends. Yet God permits evil, not because he wills or ordains evil to be done, but so that

⁸⁴ Ellis, *Confession* 44.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 44–45.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 45–46.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 46–47.

he can preserve the freedom that he himself gave to his created creatures. (*Confession 2.9*)⁹²

- VI. God is good. However, while he is good even to sinners, God nevertheless showers more abundantly his goodness to believers. (*Confession 2.10*)⁹³
- VII. God is just. God “loves that in us, which is right and equal, and hates all iniquity. It is for this he is called “holy” in Scripture.” God’s laws, rewards and punishments are just, and because God is just, he is faithful in his promises and is never deceiving in his words. (*Confession 2.11*)⁹⁴
- VIII. God is omnipotent. God “can do whatever he wills, even though all creatures be unwilling.” Yet God does not do that which “involve contradiction” nor anything repugnant to truth or his own divine nature. (*Confession 2.12*)⁹⁵
- IX. God is most blessed or happy. God does not fear any evil nor does he require any goodness from outside of himself. God is the “inexhaustible fountain of good.” (*Confession 2.13*)⁹⁶

In conclusion, Episcopius states that these attributes are necessary “insomuch that without their knowledge we cannot correctly worship God, but by it we may.” Episcopius further stresses the necessity of depending upon God in our salvation. (*Confession 2.14*).⁹⁷ From *Confession 2.15* to *2.23*, Episcopius restates the same above-mentioned attributes and lists the corresponding worship, praise, faith, and obedience we are to give to God based on those attributes and the benefits we receive from God because of those attributes.⁹⁸

Episcopius then devotes the entire third chapter of his *Confession* to the doctrine of the “Holy and Sacred Trinity.”

But God is considered distinctly and relatively under a three-fold hypostasis, or under three persons, under which indeed he himself has made known his own deity in his Word, to be considered by us economically and with respect to itself. And this trinity is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One hypostasis of the deity is... unproduced and unbegotten. Another is produced of the Father by generation, or the only begotten of the Father. Finally, another in a peculiar manner proceeds

⁹² Ellis, *Confession 47*.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 47–48.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49–51.

from the Father and the Son or emanates from the Father by the Son. (*Confession* 3.1).⁹⁹

The Father is neither begotten from anyone, nor does he proceed from another. The Son derives his deity not from creation, adoption or by being our mediator but by Eternal Generation. In a similar manner the Holy Spirit is God by proceeding from the Father and the Son. “And so, the Father is most justly considered the fountain and origin of the whole deity.” (*Confession* 3.2).¹⁰⁰

By their divine names, properties, and operations it can be said that the Son and the Spirit “are truly partakers with the Father of the same deity or divine essence and nature” yet they are “truly distinct from the Father.” (*Confession* 3.3).¹⁰¹ Episcopi concludes the chapter on the Trinity by stating that we should be content with “the proper and express phrases of the Holy Spirit” found in the Bible since the Spirit knows best on how to reveal and make known to us his own nature. Anything else regarding this great mystery of the Holy Trinity will have to wait until glorification before we can further comprehend this great mystery (*Confession* 3.4).¹⁰²

After dealing with the Trinity, Episcopi turns to examine the creation of God in two chapters. Episcopi continues to stress that the created world of God, to a certain degree, reveals to us God and establishes God’s right to be worshiped and God’s right to impose on his creation the ways in which He should be worshiped (*Confession* 4.1).¹⁰³ The works of God fall under a twofold manner: 1. The decrees of God prior to the creation and 2. The execution of those decrees (i.e., how the methods and manners of the decrees are manifested in time). There is never any inconsistency between the execution of the decree with the actual decree itself.

⁹⁹ Ellis, *Confession* 51–52.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

(*Confession 4.2*).¹⁰⁴ Of the execution of God’s decrees, “there are two principal works... namely the work of creation...and of re-creation or redemption...;” God’s providence oversees these two principal works (*Confession 4.3*).¹⁰⁵

Episcopius affirms that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, and that God created “in the space of six days” (*Confession 5.1*).¹⁰⁶ Episcopius then states that God created angels and defines them as “invisible,” “ministering spirits,” “officers or servants and messengers” of God. They are “ordinarily dwelling in heaven” and they continually worship God and that they can announce or execute God’s orders throughout the earth (*Confession 5.2*).¹⁰⁷ However, it is not necessary for us to speculate on the number, orders and ranks of the angels, we should be content with what the Bible reveals about them. There are angels who, “by their own fault,” did not obey God and were cast out of heaven and chained in “Tartaros” with their “prince (who is called that old Serpent, the great dragon, also the god and prince of the world, the tempter, devil, and Satan).” In the future, the devil, and his demons, along with ungodly men and women, will be cast into eternal fire (*Confession 5.3*).¹⁰⁸

God created two people, a man, and a woman, but God made the body of the man from the earth whereas the woman was created out of the rib of the man. God created them in his likeness and image and gave them a rational and immortal spirit, placed them in paradise and gave them dominion over the earth (*Confession 5.4*).¹⁰⁹ In paradise, Adam and Eve had “unclouded understanding, an upright mind, a free will and other sound affections.” Because of

¹⁰⁴ Ellis, *Confession 53–54*.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

this state of existence, the first couple could execute their dominion over the rest of creation responsibly and, much more importantly, understand God’s will and obey him (*Confession 5.5*).¹¹⁰ The work of creation demonstrates to us that we owe everything to God, all goodness is from God and all glory goes to God (*Confession 5.6*).¹¹¹ Episcopius then devotes a lengthy paragraph denouncing unconditional predestination as an immoral decree that is contrary to the entire purpose of God creating a universe and of his creating of humanity (*Confession 5.7*).¹¹² It is important to note that in this lengthy paragraph, Episcopius ties together the principles laid out in *Confession* Chapter 4 concerning the decrees of God and the execution of God’s decrees manifested in time and how the two should always be in harmony, with that of the creation laid out in *Confession* Chapter 5.1-6. The Calvinistic system overthrows the very purpose of God’s creation and creates a contradiction between God’s decree of creation and his decree of re-creation or redemption.

The *Arminian Confession of 1621* then moves on to the next chapter, Chapter 6, in which Episcopius lays out an Arminian view of providence. God’s providence is over all of his creation and includes the work of redemption; God governs over all events and actions; God sustains all things, but God cares for humanity (even more so the godly) more than his created things (*Confession 6.1*).¹¹³

There is a “general” providence and a “special” providence of God. God’s general providence is over all things, albeit by different ways and degrees; using this general providence God preserves his creation and uses his creation according to his will for both the good of man,

¹¹⁰ Ellis, *Confession* 56.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 56–57.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 58.

and for the punishment of man. Episcopius then explains God's special providence over men and angels. He quickly recaps what was already said about angels in Ch. 5 and then moves on to the special providence of God over humanity. First, God limits our freedom so that we cannot do whatever we want without incurring sin so that we may be directed to follow and obey God and reflect God. Second, God offers promises and punishments and sufficiently enables men and women so that they may obey God and preserve in obedience. Thirdly, God delights, remembers, and rewards those who do obey him (*Confession 6.2*).¹¹⁴

Episcopius then turns to God's providence over sin. "Concerning disobedience or sin, in the first place, although he has greatest hatred for it, yet he knowingly and willingly permits it, but not with such permission, that being granted, disobedience cannot but follow." To think otherwise would render God the author of sin. While God permits sin, he simultaneously permits the volition of human beings to be free "with the power of contrary choice." Secondly, God directs the flow of sin and wickedness so that he can accomplish his own ends. God can direct evil desires and actions in such a way that he can bring about his desired ends even without the knowledge or will of the wicked men who perform the actions; likewise, not every wicked desire of men or demons comes to pass. Thirdly, God either forgives or punishes sin. Episcopius then concludes stating that God never decrees, approves, loves, orders, commands, causes, seeks, incites, compels, or administers sin. Instead, God always hates, refuses, prohibits, and forbids sin "and in the end severely punishes sinners..." (*Confession 6.3*).¹¹⁵

God's providence varies "first in quantity, then in quality." Concerning quantity God's providence is over all of creation but in an unequal manner. God prefers humanity over animals

¹¹⁴ Ellis, *Confession* 58–59.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

and the godly over the wicked. God delights in internal actions that are morally good. For this reason, God is not pleased with someone's actions because he is pleased with that someone, rather, it is because someone performs actions pleasing to God that God is pleased with that person. God is more patient with those who have less knowledge than those who willfully resist an illuminated conscience. The godlier one is, the more God cares for that person. When such a person falls into sin through infirmity God is more patient with that person than he is with others. Concerning those who persist in rebellion and sin, God "employs greater hatred" toward them and severely punishes them. (*Confession 6.4*).¹¹⁶

God's providence varies in quality. First God can either use his "irresistible omnipotence" to control, effect or stop objects, or he can accommodate himself to things and work in a way that is tempered to the nature of the thing. Sometimes God works immediately or mediately through "angels, men or other creatures." God can accomplish things through a physical or moral action. "And both are done according to the natures and faculties implanted in things through creation, rarely above, but never against." Finally, God administers things consistent with his own nature and the nature of things. (*Confession 6.5*).¹¹⁷

God's providence is over all things but in such a way that he does not revoke the contingency of things or the "innate liberty of the human will, once given long ago in creation, but ordinarily leaves the nature of things safe." God allows the will of man to act according to its own nature and does not impose on it the absolute necessity of doing good, much less evil. (*Confession 6.6*).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ellis, *Confession* 60–61.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Episcopus states that nothing happens “by chance, that is, God either not knowing, or ignoring, or idly observing it, much less looking on, still less altogether reluctantly even unwillingly and not even willing to permit it.” There is nothing good nor bad that can be done by men and women that is fatally, non-contingently done by an absolute necessity (*Confession* 6.7).¹¹⁹ Episcopus concludes the chapter “On the Providence of God” by stating that nothing occurs by the “blind fortune and brute rashness of the Epicureans, nor for the unyielding, fatal necessity of the Stoics, Manicheans or Predestinarians.” Episcopus stresses that both extremes are to be avoided and rejected. (*Confession* 6.8).¹²⁰

II. The Methodist

Article I

Of Faith in the Holy Trinity

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body parts, or passions; of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the Maker and Preserver of all things, both visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity -the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

The following form of the first *Article* is as it appeared in its original form that John Wesley sent to the Methodist Churches in America in his *The Sunday Service of the Methodist* (1784).¹²¹ In 1786, the words “or passions” was dropped; in 1820 the word “both” was dropped.¹²²

The *Article* lists nine attributes of God: 1. One, 2. Living, 3. True, 4. Everlasting, 5. Infinite Power, 6. Wisdom, 7. Goodness, 8. Maker, and 9. Preserver. The *Article* likewise affirms the Holy Trinity, there are three distinct persons who share in the one substance that is God. Yet there are not three powers nor are there three eternities but one, and only one, power and eternity.

¹¹⁹ Ellis, *Confession* 62–63.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Neely, *Doctrinal Standards of Methodism* 188.

¹²² *Ibid.*

III. Comparative Analysis

Questions and issues concerning Eternal Generation and Subordination will not be treated here. Those doctrinal disputes will be treated under Chapter 3 Christology. For this comparative analysis, a focus on the attributes of God will be given, along with an examination of the following question, “Is belief in the Holy Trinity necessary for salvation?” Lastly, a conclusion on the providence of God will be given.

The Attributes of God

To begin with the attributes of God, both the Remonstrants and the Methodists list nine attributes, but in a different order and with a different set (both of which are an inconsequential difference). For facilitating purposes, the attributes will be listed in the same order in the chart below:

Attributes of God in the <i>Arminian Confession of 1621</i>	Attributes of God in the <i>25 Articles of Religion of the Methodist Church</i>	Comparative Analysis
1. God is one	God is one	The meaning is the same, both affirm monotheism.
2. God is eternal	Everlasting	The meaning is the same, God is without beginning or end. As Mr. Wesley states, “The great Creator alone (not any of his creatures) is “from everlasting to everlasting:” His duration alone, as it had no beginning, so it cannot have any end.” ¹²³
3. God is infinite		While the <i>Articles</i> do not list the omnipresence of God, Wesley nevertheless affirmed it. ¹²⁴
4. God is omniscient		While God’s infinite knowledge is not listed in the <i>25 Articles</i> , John Wesley nevertheless affirmed, in

¹²³ Wesley, *Works* VI:189.

¹²⁴ Wesley, *Works* VI:315.

		harmony with the <i>Confession</i> , the omniscience of God.” ¹²⁵
5. God’s volition is completely free		Episcopius cites Matt. 22:15 in his <i>Confession</i> 2.9 and Wesley in his <i>Notes</i> on that verse acknowledges that God can do whatever he wills yet it does not follow from that verse that God unconditionally damns people. Episcopius, likewise stresses that God is not the author of evil in the very same section (2.9). The two are in agreement.
6. God is good	Goodness	The meaning is the same, both affirm the goodness of God.
7. God is just		That God is Just was clearly affirmed by John Wesley. (See his long list of biblical citations against the Rev. Mr. Law) ¹²⁶
8. God is omnipotent	Infinite Power	The meaning is the same, both affirm the omnipotence of God.
9. God is most blessed or happy		Episcopius cites Acts 14:15-17 (<i>Confession</i> 2.13) demonstrating that God is the fountain of all blessings. Wesley in his <i>Notes</i> on the same cited Biblical passage concurs and notes that God sends rain and food even to the heathens.
10.	living	That God is living is affirmed by Episcopius under “(God) is eternal” (<i>Confession</i> 2.6) in which Episcopius writes that God “is necessarily living by nature, or having life and immortality from himself...”
11.	True	That God is True, is placed under the justice of God by Episcopius (<i>Confession</i> 2.11).
12.	Wisdom	That God is wise is placed under the omniscience of God by Episcopius (<i>Confession</i> 2.8).
13.	Maker	While the <i>Arminian Confession</i> does not list “maker” or an equivalent term, Episcopius devotes an entire chapter, Ch. 5, “On the <i>creation</i> of the world, angels and men.” (emphasis added) Thereby affirming God as Maker of heaven and earth in harmony with the <i>Articles</i> .
14.	Preserver	While the <i>Arminian Confession</i> does not list “preserver” or an equivalent word, Episcopius

¹²⁵ Wesley, *Notes* John 6:64.

¹²⁶ Wesley, *Works* IX:486–487.

		devotes an entire chapter, Ch. 6, “On the providence of God, or his <i>preservation</i> and government of things.” (emphasis added) Thereby agreeing with the Articles that God is the Preserver of the universe.
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Neither list of attributes in the *Articles* or the *Confession* is a complete list. Both the Remonstrants and the Methodists affirm attributes of God that their own lists, that they themselves produced, do not list out! The list of attributes affirmed by the Methodist creed but not found in the *Confession* are nevertheless affirmed by the *Confession* in other locations. In the same manner, attributes of God listed in the *Confession* but are not found in the *Articles* are nevertheless affirmed in other locations by John Wesley in his *Standard Sermons, Notes on the New Testament*, and other writings. The two lists, when read together, complement one another. The two are in harmony. While much more can be said about the attributes of God, I must move on so that I may address a more problematic issue: “Is belief in the Holy Trinity necessary for salvation?”

On the Holy Trinity

Must one affirm the Trinity to be saved? John Wesley and Simon Episcopius made the same error on this same issue; thus, the problem is not trying to harmonize their viewpoints, but rather, the problem is that they held to a problematic viewpoint to begin with! Unlike the Anglican, Lutheran and Presbyterian churches which include the Athanasian Creed along with the Apostles Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Definition of Chalcedon, Wesley omitted the Athanasian Creed due to his distaste for the “damatory clauses” found therein.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Wheeler, *History and Exposition of the Twenty-Five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 20–22.

When Mr. Wesley abridged the *39 Articles of the Church of England*, he deleted altogether *Article VIII Of the Three Creeds* which affirmed the Apostles, Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.¹²⁸ John Wesley's *The Sunday Service of the Methodist* only contains the Apostles' Creed and not the Nicene Creed nor the Athanasian Creed.¹²⁹ In his sermon "On the Trinity," John Wesley unfortunately states:

I dare not insist upon anyone's using the word Trinity, or Person. I use them myself without scruple, because I know of none better: But if any man has any scruple concerning them, who shall constrain him to use them? I cannot: Much less would I burn a man alive, and that with moist, green wood, for saying, "Though I believe the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; yet I scruple using the words *Trinity* and *Persons*, because I do not find those terms in the Bible." These are the words which merciful John Calvin cites as wrote by Servetus in a letter to himself.¹³⁰

John Wesley's account is historically inaccurate. Michael Servetus did not reject the Trinity merely because he could not find the word "Trinity" in the Bible, rather, Servetus went further and rejected *the substance of the doctrine*.¹³¹ So yes it is true that Servetus affirmed, as Wesley says, that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, but it is also equally true that Servetus refused to make any distinction between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. Therefore, Servetus was not merely a Trinitarian who scrupled at using the Greco-Philosophical words employed by the Early Church Fathers but not found in the Bible. Instead, Michael Servetus was altogether a Non-Trinitarian apostate.

¹²⁸ Wheeler, *History and Exposition of the Twenty-Five Articles* 20.

¹²⁹ For the location of the Apostles' Creed see: Wesley, *The Sunday Service of the Methodist* 18. Yet it should be noted that the Nicene Creed does appear in contemporary Methodist books of worship even though it is scarcely used, see: *The United Methodist Hymnal Book of United Methodist Worship*, (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2001), 880.

¹³⁰ Wesley, *Works* VI:200–201.

¹³¹ Henry Sheldon, *History of the Christian Church*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), III:158; Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996) VIII:716–720.

Ironically, it would have been better for Wesley to state that this was the viewpoint of the Remonstrants who were wrongly condemned by the Calvinist; for what Wesley is describing can be more accurately ascribed to the Remonstrants and not Servetus! For Episcopius, like Wesley, was hesitant to employ any extra, non-biblical words, terminology and phrases concerning the Trinity, even though Episcopius (just like Wesley!) would nevertheless employ such non-biblical words.¹³² After laying out the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity in three paragraphs, Episcopius concludes saying:

And these are sufficient for this mystery, which indeed is completely necessary to treat soberly, prudently, and religiously, *and as far as possible, to enunciate the same in the proper and express phrases of the Holy Spirit, which we judge to be most safe, since the Spirit of God himself best knows and is most correctly able to express his own nature. Indeed, as far as is necessary and sufficient, he willed to express [it] to us in his word, whom it is fitting reverently and most religiously to follow for the present, until we see God himself in person, and know him perfectly.* Then indeed, in that glorious world, he will grant that he may be most clearly known by us. And thus far indeed [is sufficient] regarding God himself. (*Confession 3.4*) (emphasis added)

To further complicate the matter, in Episcopius later work, the *Theological Institutes* (1650) – a book that is in no way to be fully accepted by the GMC if the new Methodism is to adopt the *Arminian Confession of 1621*- Episcopius takes Wesley’s error to a further extreme as the late 16th century Bishop in the Church of England, George Bull, has already fully demonstrated and refuted.¹³³

¹³² “Episcopius is pleased to omit from his (*Theological Institutes*) the medieval scholastic distinctions and language about the Trinity. But he does retain, with reference to the Father, Son, and Spirit, the language of *hypostasis*, person, and subsistence endowed with understanding, will, and power.” McCall and Stanglin, *After Arminius* 53. McCall and Stanglin further note that the Remonstrant theologians, Etienne de Courcelles and Jean Le Clerc, likewise disdained any extra, non-biblical language in regard to the Trinity. Ibid.

¹³³ See: George Bull, “The Judgement of the Catholic Church of the First Three Centuries on the Necessity of Believing that Our Lord Jesus Christ is Very God: Maintained in Opposition to M. Simon Episcopius, and others” in *Bishop Bull’s Works on the Trinity* (Oxford, England: John Henry Parker, 1855).

Episcopius viewpoint on the Eternal Sonship can be summarized¹³⁴ as follows:

1. There are four senses, *by virtue of his human nature*, which Jesus Christ is called the Son of God:
 - a. “His conception of the Holy Ghost”
 - b. “His Mediatorial office”
 - c. “His resurrection from the dead”
 - d. “His exaltation to the right hand of the Father”
2. However, there is another sense, a fifth sense, in Scriptures by which Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This other sense, this fifth sense, in which Jesus Christ is called the Son of God is *by virtue of his divine nature*. For
 - a. Jesus Christ was the Son of God prior to the Incarnation
 - b. Jesus Christ was the Son of God prior to the creation of the universe
 - c. And it is by this account that Jesus Christ is God...
 - i. *Jesus Christ is both God and the Son of God by Eternal Generation.*

Unfortunately, Episcopius’ account of the first three centuries of the church is inaccurate.

That Episcopius was wrong in thinking that this fifth sense of Divine Sonship i.e., Jesus Christ is God and the Son of God *via*. Eternal Generation was not necessary to be believed in order to be saved and that those who knew it but explicitly rejected it are not to be damned as apostates¹³⁵ has been sufficiently refuted by Bishop Bull and Daniel Waterland. Therefore, I simply defer the reader to their writings on this topic matter.

However, there is an important nuance that Wesley rightly distinguished but inconsistently held to, and that Episcopius completely did not see. Consider the thief on the cross (Lk 23:39-43). What was the faith of the thief on the cross who said “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!” and Jesus responded saying, “Truly I say to you, today you will

¹³⁴ The summary is based upon the prolonged translated quotations from Episcopius’ *Theological Institutes* as provided by Bishop Bull; the quotations from Episcopius provided in the summary above are also derived from Bull’s translations (Ibid.).

¹³⁵ Daniel Waterland has given the best summary of Episcopius belief (and error) on the Trinity: “The sum of what (Episcopius) sentiments on this head amount to is, that the doctrine of the Trinity, as to the main substance of it, is *certain* and *clear*, but yet not *necessary* to be believed in order to salvation, nor important enough to justify an *anathema* against the impugners of it, or for the rejecting their communion.” Daniel Waterland, *The Works of Daniel Waterland* (Oxford, England: At the University Press, 1856), III:440.

be with Me in Paradise.”? When the thief on the cross hung there dying, did he believe in the Holy Trinity? Did he know then and there that Jesus Christ was:

...the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the Substance [Essence] of the Father; begotten before the worlds; and Man, of the Substance [Essence] of his Mother, born in the world. Perfect God; and perfect Man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting. Equal to the Father, as touching his Godhead; and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood. Who although he is God and Man; yet he is not two, but one Christ. One; not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh; but by assumption of the Manhood into God. One altogether; not by confusion of Substance [Essence]; but by unity of Person. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man; so God and Man is one Christ; Who suffered for our salvation; descended into hell; rose again the third day from the dead. He ascended into heaven, he sitteth (sic) on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from whence he will come to judge the living and the dead. At whose coming all men will rise again with their bodies; And shall give account for their own works. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire...¹³⁶

Given the Jewish context of Christ’s crucifixion in 1st century Israel, along with the information provided to us in the gospels, I conclude that the thief on the cross did not believe in the Holy Trinity. Yet Jesus said that the thief would be with him in Paradise! Does this mean that the Trinity is not essential? That the Trinity is not a requirement to be believed in, in order to be saved? In order to answer these questions a careful distinction must be made. Why does one not believe in the Trinity? Is it because they are *ignorant* of the doctrine and therefore do not believe in it simply because they do not know of it; or is it because they, upon learning what the Trinity is, *knowingly and willfully* reject the doctrine? The former is saved, the latter are apostates. Episcopus was only half right. Instead of answering that both can be saved he should have distinguished between *ignorance* of the Trinity and *willful rejection* of the Trinity.

¹³⁶ Philip Schaff, “The Athanasian Creed,” in *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), II:68–70.

John Wesley, unlike Simon Episcopius, makes this correct distinction in his sermon “On The Trinity”:

I am far from saying, he who does not assent to this “shall without doubt perish everlastingly.” For the sake of that and another clause, I, for some time scrupled subscribing to that [Athanasian] creed; till I considered, (1.) That these sentences only relate to *willful*, not involuntary, unbelievers; to those who, having all the means of knowing the truth, nevertheless obstinately reject it; (2.) That they relate only to the *substance* of the doctrine there delivered; not the philosophical *illustrations* of it.¹³⁷

However, in this very same sermon “On The Trinity” where Mr. Wesley makes the correct and proper distinctions concerning a lack of belief in the Trinity, incoherently defends the beliefs of Michael Servetus, who knowingly and willfully rejected the Trinity! To further the error, even though Wesley made the proper distinction on this issue, he nevertheless deleted *Article VIII Of the Three Creeds* when he abridged the *Thirty-Nine Articles* and even removed the Athanasian Creed (and the Nicene Creed) when he abridged the 1662 edition of the *Common Book of Prayer* creating *The Sunday Service of the Methodist*, all of which occurred after his sermon “On The Trinity”!¹³⁸

Though my thesis is not lost or negated by any of this. Simon Episcopius’ problematic viewpoints on whether or not one must affirm the Trinity does not appear in the *Confession of 1621* but instead appears in his posthumously published *Theological Institutes* in 1650. Likewise, John Wesley’s problematic sermon “On The Trinity” is not one of the *52 Standard Sermons* that comprise the Doctrinal Standards of Methodism but instead appears in his four-volume set of 151 sermons. Therefore, the Global Methodist Church is not bound to adhere to Episcopius and Wesley’s problematic viewpoint on this matter. The point of having a Confession of Faith is so

¹³⁷ Wesley, *Works* VI:200.

¹³⁸ However, in defense of Wesley, by removing the Athanasius’ Creed, from our Doctrinal Standards, he freed us from having to believe and maintain Christ descent into Hell.

that Methodism can finally move away from this notion of having an entire corpus of writing by one particular man as the doctrinal standard of the denomination.

On the Providence of God

The Arminian viewpoint of God's providence is neither Socinian nor Calvinistic. Unlike the Socinians who deny that God has foreknowledge of future contingencies or the Calvinist who believe that all things which come to pass, whether they be good or bad, are decreed by God, Arminians uphold simultaneously, the sovereignty and infallible foreknowledge of God on the one hand, and the contingency of events dependent upon the free volitional acts of humanity on the other hand. The *Confession* of the Remonstrants and the *Articles* of the Methodist are in harmony with one another.

Chapter 3 Christology and Pneumatology

Part I Christology

I. The Remonstrants

Before I proceed to address Episcopius' Christology as it is laid out in the eighth chapter of the *Confession*, I must first circle back to the third chapter on the Trinity and address the issue of Eternal Generation and Subordination.

James Arminius taught that Jesus Christ was *not autotheos*. Arminius gives a twofold definition of *autotheos* "according to the etymon of the word; and may mean, either *one who is truly and in himself God*, or *one who is God from himself*."¹³⁹ According to Arminius, the former applies to Christ but not the latter. Thus, Jesus is truly God *in himself*, but he is not God *from himself*. As Arminius explains:

FIRST, it is the property of the person of the Father, *to have his being from himself*, or which is a better phrase, *to have his being from no one*. But the Son is now said to have his being from himself, or rather, from no one: Therefore, the Son is the Father; which is Sabellianism. - SECONDLY. If the Son have an essence in common with the Father, but not communicated by the Father, he is collateral with the Father, and therefore they are two gods: Whereas all antiquity defended *the unity of the Divine essence in three distinct persons*, and placed a salvo on it by this single explanation- "that the Son has the same essence in number which is communicated to him by the Father; but that the Holy Spirit has the very same essence from the Father and the Son."¹⁴⁰

For Arminius, "God- *is from eternity*- having the Divine Essence. The Father- *is from no one*, which others say is "from himself." The Son *-is from the Father*- having the Divine Essence from the Father."¹⁴¹ Again, Arminius explains his opinion as, "He is the Son, who has the Divine

¹³⁹ Arminius, *Works* II:30.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

essence communicated to him by the Father;” which amounts to this, “He is the Son, who is begotten of the Father:” For, *to beget is to communicate his essence.*”¹⁴²

Thus, the Dutch theologian denies that Christ has, *from himself or from no one*, the divine essence of deity. For such a position would either mean there are two divine essences, one of the Father and one of the Son, which would mean that there are two gods or if the Father and the Son, each being two distinct persons with a divine essence from no one, yet somehow there is only one divine essence, then one would be forced, in order to avoid polytheism, to uphold the Sabellian heresy to resolve the contradiction by reducing the Father and the Son as two separate modes of the same person emanating from the same one divine essence which is from no one. Therefore, in the mind of James Arminius, he is upholding the orthodox view of the Holy Trinity and affirms that “in this opinion I have the Scriptures agreeing with me, as well as the whole of antiquity, both the Greek and the Latin churches.”¹⁴³

Episcopius follows his teacher, Arminius, on this issue. Thus, he states in the *Confession* 3.2:

For the Father alone is void of all origin, or entirely unbegotten and proceeding from no other, but who nevertheless has from eternity communicated his own deity, whether to his only begotten Son, indeed not by creation (respecting which the angels are called the sons of God) nor by gracious adoption (by which we believers are also the sons of God) nor only by the gracious communication of divine power (or authority) and supreme glory, by which he is the mediator, but also by a true yet secret and ineffable generation; and also to the Holy Spirit, proceeding from both a mysterious emanation and spiration. And so the Father is most justly considered the fountain and origin of the whole deity.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Arminius, *Works* II:31.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Ellis, *Confession* 52.

In his later work, the *Theological Institutes*, Episcopius goes further and endorses an ontological subordination of the Son to the Father.¹⁴⁵ Because Jesus is God by Eternal Generation, (i.e., he is not God from himself [not autotheos], but from being the Son begotten by the Father) Jesus is *by his divine nature*, ontologically subordinate to the Father.

Episcopius errs by collapsing personhood and essence. What is being begotten when the Father begets the Son? Is the Father begetting the divine essence? Or is the personhood of Jesus established by eternal generation (i.e., Jesus is the *Son of God* by Eternal Generation)? Again, what is established in Jesus Christ by Eternal Generation, his deity, or his personhood (eternal sonship)? Since Episcopius dismisses the scholastic distinctions, he wrongly collapses the essence and personhood of Christ. For a much more thorough examination of this issue, I defer the reader to the fifth chapter of Stephen Hampton's *Anti-Arminians: The Anglican Reformed Tradition From Charles II to George I*.¹⁴⁶

However, there are a few objections I must make with Hampton's work. First, while Hampton does acknowledge that "the problem begins with John Calvin,"¹⁴⁷ he nevertheless minimizes Calvin's culpability. Hampton continues, "it is not that Calvin was himself a subordinationist, but rather that his efforts to avoid subordinationism caused a reaction which led to subordinationism in others, and which ultimately bore an Arian fruit in eighteenth-century

¹⁴⁵ The "deity and divine perfections (of Jesus) are attributed 'not collaterally or coordinately, but subordinately'." From Episcopius' *Theological Institutes* IV.ii.32; see, Stanglin & McCall, *After Arminius* 54.

¹⁴⁶ Stephen Hampton, *Anti-Arminians: The Anglican Reformed Tradition From Charles II to George I*. OUP Oxford, 2008. EBSCOhost, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.regent.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=242246&site=ehost-live>.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

England.”¹⁴⁸ Having acknowledge this, Hampton nevertheless lays the Arian controversy that ravaged the Church of England during the 17th century primarily at the feet of the Remonstrants.

In fact, there was a significant trend within late seventeenth-century Anglican theology, ignored by most modern commentators, which better accounts for (Samuel) Clarke’s heterodox views about the Trinity than any presumption of Socinian or Unitarian influence. It will be argued here that Clarke’s Arianism is best seen, not as a result of the pollution of English orthodoxy by an essentially alien anti-Trinitarianism, but as the culmination of a long tradition of thoroughly Anglican subordinationism whose roots can be found in the first decades of the seventeenth century. That subordinationism was derived, not so much from the Socinian tradition, but far the far more respectable theology of the Remonstrants, in particular, Simon Episcopius and Etienne de Courcelles.¹⁴⁹

As I have already mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis paper, I am constrained in the scope of this thesis paper and am forced to curtail major portions of this paper I originally planned on examining, including Anglican defenses and interactions with Remonstrant literature. Suffice it to say, that I willingly concede to Hampton that Remonstrant literature greatly influenced many early Anglican divines and that the Arian tendencies that certain Anglicans fell into originated in the subordinationist tendencies that were directly derived from the Remonstrants.

However, what Hampton acknowledges but downplays is the fact that the Remonstrant subordinationism was an overreaction to the poorly constructed theology of John Calvin on this issue.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, while it is true that the Anglicans derived their errors from the Remonstrants, the Remonstrants in turn derived their errors from the errors of John Calvin and their Reformed background. Thus, John Calvin is ultimately to blame for the wrong ward trajectory.

¹⁴⁸ Hampton, *Anti-Arminians* 166.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 165.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 165–171.

Yet, I must confess that the anti-scholasticism of Episcopius (which is not found in Arminius who was a scholastic theologian¹⁵¹) exacerbated the problem. So, while Calvin's poorly constructed viewpoint on this issue is the origin of the problem, and is of ultimate blame, Episcopius should not have rejected scholasticism in its entirety. Rather, Episcopius should have merely rejected the *excesses and abuses* of scholasticism. By rejecting scholasticism in its entirety, Episcopius no longer had the theological and philosophical tools to utilize in order to make the proper and careful distinctions on such a perplexing issue, as Hampton most accurately observes.¹⁵²

But the following objection and question can be raised: will the Global Methodist Church plunge itself into the ontological subordination heresy that deteriorated into non-trinitarianism among the later Remonstrants and various Anglican Arminians if the GMC is to adopt the *Arminian Confession of 1621* as its own creed and confession? The answer is no!

1. By adopting the *Arminian Confession of 1621*, the GMC is not adopting everything ever written by Episcopius' in his 1650 *Theological Institutes*.
2. This issue is not intrinsic to Arminian theology, rather the issue arises out of Episcopius and Calvin's inability to properly utilize scholastic distinctions which are necessarily needed when one ventures into such speculative and complicated questions in theology. Thus, to further protect the GMC from this error, if the GMC is to adopt the *Confession* as their own, the original "Preface" to the *Confession* by Episcopius should be deleted in its entirety. By doing this, Episcopius' rejection of scholasticism which is found in the preface¹⁵³ will not be adopted, thereby opening the doors for Methodist theologians to adopt and utilize the scholastic distinctions, categories, and vocabulary.
3. An adoption of the *Confession* would not negate or replace our *Articles* and other "established doctrines;" the *Confession* would merely take its place beside our

¹⁵¹ Yet I do acknowledge that Arminius stressed the necessity of relying more on what the Bible directly says and less on philosophical and speculative reasoning. Thus, by rejecting scholasticism, Episcopius carried Arminius' views to their logical conclusion.

¹⁵² Hampton, *Anti-Arminians* 171–175.

¹⁵³ Ellis, *Confession* 25. Note: The deletion of the Preface because of its anti-scholasticism is only a *secondary* reason why the Preface should be deleted. It is in the Preface that the bulk of the anti-creedalism of the Remonstrants is found. It is precisely because the Remonstrants were anti-creedal and anti-confessional that their own Confession was forgotten and violated over time by their own theologians. This is the *primary* reason why the Preface should *not* be adopted by the Global Methodist Church.

- already established doctrines. Therefore, the *25 Articles*, along with the early ecumenical creeds would further protect the GMC against any trajectory towards ontological subordinationism. The *Confession* along with the *Articles* and early ecumenical creeds form a sound and coherent perimeter of permissible doctrine. Ontological subordinationism is outside that perimeter.
4. Methodists have *already* dealt thoroughly with this issue in the *Eternal Sonship Controversy* between Adam Clarke and Richard Watson. With Watson being the victor of that controversy and an astute theologian who was able to parse the careful distinctions that are necessarily entailed in this issue, something both John Calvin and Simon Episcopius failed to do. Methodist theology has had the benefit of observing and learning from the mistakes of the Remonstrants.
 5. The works of prominent Methodist theologians Thomas C. Oden and William J. Abraham have reignited interest in the Early Church Fathers among Methodist theologians. With a solid grounding in the literature of the Early Church Fathers, future Methodists will not repeat the mistakes of the Remonstrants.
 6. Belief in a hierarchy within the Trinity does not necessarily entail a fall into non-Trinitarianism as the existence of the Eastern Orthodox Church is a living testimony towards. Because Calvin and various Dutch Reformed theologians asserted that Christ was *autotheos* without properly defining and distinguishing their terms, Arminius' rejection of Christ being *autotheos* created the *appearance* that the divinity of Christ was being lowered and diminished. This created a forward/directional momentum and trajectory. Thus, Episcopius carried out that momentum and trajectory a little bit further than Arminius, and Episcopius' successor, Etienne de Courcelles, took the trajectory even further etc.... Because the Eastern Orthodox Church has always held to a hierarchy within the Trinity, there was no trajectory or directional momentum established. Thus, belief in the Monarchy of the Father never led Eastern Orthodoxy into a deteriorated form of ontological subordination that then led to non-trinitarianism. It was the *particular historical context* the Remonstrants found themselves in that led to a collapse in Trinitarian Orthodoxy. There is nothing inherent in Arminianism that will necessitate non-trinitarianism. Since the GMC finds itself in a vastly different historic context, an adoption of the *Confession* will not rebirth that downward Christological trajectory that the Remonstrants fell into after the Synod of Dort.

Before I leave this most difficult and puzzling issue, it must be mentioned that Episcopius has been exonerated on his views concerning the Trinity on multiple occasions. While he was a professor at the University of Leiden, Episcopius was accused of heresy for multiple reasons, including matters concerning the Trinity, by Festus Hommius, a Calvinist theologian and future participant in the Synod of Dort.¹⁵⁴ After accusing Episcopius of heterodoxy on the Trinity and debating and questioning him, Hommius declared, "Gentlemen, I assent... for when satisfaction

¹⁵⁴ Fredrick Calder, *Memoirs of Simon Episcopius* (London, UK: Simpkin and Marshal, 1835), 158–186.

is given to me, I am most willing and ready to acknowledge it.”¹⁵⁵ The curators of the University of Leiden, along with the burgomasters of the city, whom Episcopius and Hommius stood before, likewise exonerated Episcopius.¹⁵⁶

At the Synod of Dort, the Arminians -including Episcopius who was the leader of the Arminian party at the Synod- were only condemned for their views on the five disputed points and not on their views of the Trinity; even when Conrad Vorstius, a Remonstrant minister with very peculiar and divergent views unrepresentative of the Remonstrants in general, was singled out and condemned.¹⁵⁷

Thus, it is important to note that the Synod of Dort was willing to condemn Vorstius on the Attributes of God, the Trinity, the Creation, the Providence of God, the Two Natures of Christ, the nature of the Atonement, and Justification by Faith yet they were not willing to condemn all the other Remonstrants, apart from Vorstius, on these issues.¹⁵⁸ The rest of the Remonstrants were only condemned for their viewpoints on the Five Articles.

After Episcopius’ death in 1643, Anglican theologians from the late 17th and early 18th centuries such as George Bull, Bishop of St. David’s, and Daniel Waterland of Cambridge University both exonerated the Trinitarian views of Episcopius. Thus, Bishop Bull only sets out to refute Episcopius assertions that one can be saved not believing, or even rejecting, the Eternal Sonship and deity of Christ.¹⁵⁹ Daniel Waterland is of the same opinion.¹⁶⁰ The mid to late 18th

¹⁵⁵ Calder, *Memoirs* 178.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 180–181.

¹⁵⁷ Brandt, *History of the Reformation* III:295.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ See, George Bull, “The Judgement of the Catholic Church of the First Three Centuries on the Necessity of Believing that Our Lord Jesus Christ is Very God: Maintained in Opposition to M. Simon Episcopius, and others” in *Bishop Bull’s Works on the Trinity*, (Oxford, England: John Henry Parker, 1855).

¹⁶⁰ Waterland, *Works* III:440–441.

century Methodist theologians, John McClintock and James Strong, likewise exonerated Simon Episcopus.¹⁶¹

In January 2022, over fifty scholars in the Wesleyan tradition gathered together to produce a statement of faith, entitled *The Faith Once Delivered: A Wesleyan Witness*.¹⁶² While this document is clearly *inferior*¹⁶³ to the *Arminian Confession of 1621* it nevertheless contains some sound summations of Wesleyan-Arminian theology. In particular, the authors of that document, unknowingly and unintendedly affirmed the hierarchical view of the Trinity found in the Remonstrant *Confession* and Episcopus' writings more generally:

At the same time that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, they are united in a single Godhead. *The Son and Spirit, because they are from the Father who is the source of divinity, share in the Father's divine nature (I.30) ... Because the Son and Spirit are eternally united to the Father's being, they are themselves eternal and not creatures. Because the Son and Spirit share in the Father's eternal divinity, they are worshiped and glorified together with him. The unity of operations by the Father, Son, and Spirit reveals the single rule (monarchia) of the Father whose transcendent and providential will is actualized in creation (I.32).*¹⁶⁴ (emphasis added)

¹⁶¹ John McClintock and James Strong. "Episcopus, Simon," *McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia Online*, <https://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/E/episcopus-simon.html>.

¹⁶² "Summit Document." *John Wesley Institute*, 3 June 2022, <https://nextmethodism.org/summit-document/>.

¹⁶³ Compare the *Confession* with the statement of faith on Biblical authority, the nature of the atonement and the five disputed points. The authors of the 2022 statement of faith were too timid to take a clear stance on inerrancy and, in contrast to Arminius and Episcopus, who ground biblical authority in *the infallible veracity of God* by which no human argument or emotion can add upon nor diminish, since God is of *supreme authority* and is not dependent upon, much less diminished by, any external authority; the 2022 statement of faith states, "The authority of Scripture grows from a developing relationship of love: a love of God for us as revealed in Jesus and our love in return for God." *I respond*, the authority of the Bible does not grow nor diminish based on any love or hatred humanity has for God, since the authority of the Bible is dependent upon the authority of its author which is God who is of supreme and unchanging authority. The 2022 statement is likewise *silent* upon the nature of the atonement, whereas Episcopus declares without hesitation, and in sharp contradistinction to the Socinian heretics, that Jesus "submitted to the cursed death of the cross for us and offered himself to God the Father as a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the entire human race, and though innocent, suffered himself to be sacrificed upon the alter of the cross." (Ellis, *Confession* 71). Finally, the 2022 statement, unlike the *Confession*, is *silent* upon four of the five disputed points. It baffles my mind that a document that calls itself a "Wesleyan Witness" would be silent on the soteriological system the John Wesley self-identified with, thoroughly embraced, and promulgated throughout the world!

¹⁶⁴ Ken Collins and Kevin Danker, *The Faith Once Delivered: A Wesleyan Witness* 11–12.

Having now briefly examined Episcopius views on Eternal Sonship and Subordination that were passed over in discussing the Trinity in chapter two of this thesis paper and having dealt with that issue in light of Methodist theology, I will now proceed to examine Episcopius' Christology as it is laid out in the eighth chapter of the *Confession*, followed by an examination of Methodist Christology and a comparative analysis.

In the eighth chapter of the *Confession*, the Remonstrants layout their beliefs concerning the person and office of Jesus Christ. After emphasizing that salvific nature of Jesus Christ coming into the world, a salvation that includes the removal of the guilt of sin by God's "mercy and grace alone" and the endowing of sufficient power and grace to "(shake) off the dominion of sin and (obey) the will of God with a whole heart" (*Confession* 8.1),¹⁶⁵ Episcopius then quasi-repeats and reiterates this again in *Confession* 8.2.¹⁶⁶

Next, Episcopius lays out a very Orthodox understanding of the person of Christ that is in line with traditional Nicene Orthodoxy. He declares Jesus to be "true and eternal God, and at the same time true and perfectly just man, in one and the same person." He reiterates his belief in Eternal Generation and Eternal Sonship then declares that "through the operation of the Holy Spirit, he was made a man true and complete and born of the Virgin Mary, without any stain of sin" (*Confession* 8.3).¹⁶⁷

In *Confession* 8.4, Episcopius affirms the true and full humanity of Christ in respect to the substance of his manhood and emphasizes the fact that Christ suffered from the same infirmities, pains, griefs, passions, emotions, and even death etc.... just like any other human

¹⁶⁵ Ellis, *Confession* 69.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 69–70.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

being. Yet Christ was without sin. Episcopius concludes by positively quoting from the line from the Apostle's Creed stating, "I believe in Jesus Christ etc...."¹⁶⁸

The remainder of the chapter (*Confession* 8.5-10), Episcopius dedicates to the threefold office of Jesus Christ: the prophetic, the priestly and the kingly. Jesus partly fulfilled these offices during his earthly ministry, and he partly fulfills these offices to this very day. Episcopius sees in the Apostles Creed, affirmations of the offices of Christ (*Confession* 8.5).¹⁶⁹

Christ entirely fulfilled his prophetic ministry in revealing the Gospel to us, revealing eternal life, confirming this by signs and miracles, the example of his proper obedience, his life and death and after his death and resurrection his teachings for forty days (*Confession* 8.6).¹⁷⁰ Christ partly fulfilled his priestly ministry by being a "propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of the entire human race" on the cross. Christ continues his priestly ministry by continually interceding for us to this very day (*Confession* 8.7).¹⁷¹ Finally, by Jesus' kingly office, Christ rules over all the earth and heavens. He administers all things, protects the faithful from the wicked and the demonic and then at the final judgment will destroy the wicked and take the godly to heaven. Upon these three offices true knowledge and worship of Jesus Christ is established (*Confession* 8.8).¹⁷²

According to Episcopius, Jesus Christ is "not our savior for just one reason" on account of his office, nor is Jesus our savior by the example of his suffering, nor because Jesus has

¹⁶⁸ Ellis, *Confession* 70.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 70–71. Note: When quoting the Apostle's Creed, Episcopius includes "*he descended into hell*" as was common during his time period. However, if the GMC is to adopt the *Arminian Confession* as their own, these four words in *Confession* 8.5 are to be deleted thereby bringing the *Confession* into harmony with the Methodist Doctrinal Standards. It should be further noted that this alteration to the *Confession* in no way undermines what Episcopius is saying concerning the prophetic office of Christ.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 71.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 71.

¹⁷² Ibid., 72.

declared the way of salvation to us and confirmed it by miracles, nor is Jesus our savior by the example of his life and death; rather Jesus Christ is our savior by “his virtue of merit and efficacy before God.” Episcopius leaves the door open on whether or not this merit of Christ is established by Penal Satisfaction or Penal Substitution. Yet, Episcopius nevertheless emphasizes the fact that because Jesus was a ransom and sacrifice, as prefigured in the Old Testament, the doors of salvation are opened to humanity. Likewise, Jesus is our savior by his efficacy, for our Lord and Savior applies the fruit of his merit to all those who have faith (*Confession* 8.9).¹⁷³ Episcopius concludes noting that the Calvinistic system of unconditional, double predestination overthrows the merit and efficacy of Christ by grounding salvation in an arbitrary decree that renders Christ sacrifice meaningless (*Confession* 8.10).¹⁷⁴

II. The Methodists

Article II

Of the Word, or Son of God, who was made very Man

The Son, who was the Word of the Father, begotten from everlasting of the Father,¹⁷⁵ the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man’s nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one Person, never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men.

Article III

Of the Resurrection of Christ

Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man’s nature, wherewith he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth (sic) until the return to judge all men at the last day.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Ellis, *Confession* 73.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 73–74.

¹⁷⁵ This phrase, *begotten from everlasting of the Father*, was omitted from the *Articles* in 1786 and has never reappeared since; see Neely, *Doctrinal Standards* 188.

¹⁷⁶ Neely, *Doctrinal Standards* 188.

In these two articles, Methodism is firmly established in Nicene and Chalcedon Orthodoxy. While Wesley removed the Athanasius' Creed, the *doctrinal substance* of that creed is nevertheless maintained by John Wesley and the Methodist. In the second article, the full deity is maintained, along with the full humanity of Christ; two natures in one person, never mixing or confusing this important truth. Concerning the Resurrection of Christ, Methodism affirms a literal bodily resurrection, just as it affirms a literal Virgin Birth in the second article.

However, there are two things that need to be mentioned from the second article:

1. "begotten from everlasting of the Father"
 2. "and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men"
- The second phrase, concerning the remission of original guilt will be deferred to Chapter

4 Anthropology. For this chapter, I will briefly address the removal of the affirmation of Eternal Generation. For a more thorough examination of this issue, I defer the reader to *'Begotten from Everlasting of the Father': Inadvertent Omission or Sabellian Trajectory in Early Methodism?* By Jason E. Vickers.¹⁷⁷

John Wesley believed in Eternal Generation as evidenced in Mr. Wesley's preserving of the phrase "begotten from everlasting of the Father" in his abridgment of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* and in his affirmation of Eternal Generation in his *Notes on the New Testament*:

This day have I begotten thee- I have begotten thee from eternity, which, by its unalterable permanency of duration, is one continued, unsuccessive (sic) day. *I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son-* I will own myself to be his Father, and him to be my Son, by eminent tokens of my peculiar love. The former clause relates to his natural Sonship, by an eternal, inconceivable generation; the

¹⁷⁷ Vickers, Jason E. "'Begotten from Everlasting of the Father': Inadvertent Omission or Sabellian Trajectory in Early Methodism?" *Methodist History*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2006, 251–61.

other, to his Father's acknowledgement and treatment of him as his incarnate Son.
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After examining this issue, as it played out in 19th century American Methodist history, Dr. Vickers concludes stating that it is impossible to tell how (or who) the omission affirming Eternal Generation in *Article II* was caused by.¹⁷⁹ I concur with Dr. Vickers that we may never know why or how the phrase affirming Eternal Generation disappeared from our *25 Articles*.

Regardless of what came *after* Wesley, the Father of Methodism was himself not confused on this topic matter and maintained traditional orthodoxy. While the current edition of the *25 Articles* -contrary to the original intent of Mr. Wesley- does not affirm Eternal Generation in the second article, Wesley's *Notes on the New Testament* does affirm Eternal Generation.

III. Comparative Analysis.

Despite all the confusion, poorly defined terms and distinctions and the complete mess that ensued in later Remonstrant and Anglican Christology and in the early Christological debates among Methodists, these problems are not found in the *Arminian Confession of 1621*. Likewise, these problems are not found in the *25 Articles* as Wesley himself originally created them when he abridged the *39 Articles*. If only the Remonstrants, and Episcopius himself, abided by their own *Confession* and not venture off beyond what was laid out in the *Confession*, then the heresies of later Remonstrant theology would not have come to pass. In the exact same manner, if only Methodists abided by their *25 Articles*, as it was originally made, then the heresies of later Methodist theology would not have come to pass.

Thus, the problems incurred by Episcopius' later writings and of later Remonstrants, along with that Methodists after Wesley, does not impugn against my thesis; to the contrary, it is

¹⁷⁸ Wesley, *Notes II*: Hebrews 1:5.

¹⁷⁹ Vickers, *Begotten from Everlasting of the Father* 261.

further evidence that a denomination and theological movement needs to have a confession or creed that clearly lays out their theological beliefs so that adherents to that said confession or creed can easily identify deviations from orthodoxy and hold those deviations accountable. Furthermore, as already mentioned, the GMC is adopting to its doctrinal standards the *Apostle's Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, and the *Definition of Chalcedon*. Thus, with these early ecumenical creeds, along with the *Arminian Confession* and the *25 Articles* (with a restoration of the eternal generation clause in the second article), the GMC will be planted in firm ground of Trinitarian Orthodoxy.

Part 2 Pneumatology

I. The Remonstrants

To the dismay of anyone with Pentecostal or Charismatic leanings or sympathies, the *Arminian Confession of 1621* does not devote a single chapter, and only one full paragraph, to the Holy Spirit; instead, statements about the Spirit are diffused throughout the *Confession*.

In *Confession* 1.2, Episcopius lists the “distributions of the Holy Spirit”, along with other arguments, as evidence that God has revealed himself to humanity.¹⁸⁰ Episcopius affirms a high view of Biblical inspiration, seeing the writers of the Bible as “instructed and directed by the Spirit of God” (*Confession* 1.3).¹⁸¹ The pupil of Arminius believes that “the demonstration of the Spirit” was a factor in the spreading of the Gospel during the age of the Apostles, an age of great hostility towards the Gospel truth (*Confession* 1.7).¹⁸² God commands everyone to search the scriptures, examine the laws and to test the spirits; “and retain that which is good, since he has

¹⁸⁰ Ellis, *Confession* 35.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 37.

promised his grace and Holy Spirit to those who search his laws, and seek to understand them” (*Confession* 1.10).¹⁸³

Episcopius affirmed the Trinity and saw the Holy Spirit as full deity, the third person of the Trinity, and was open to affirmations of the Spirit proceeding from the Father *and* the Son, or the Spirit proceeding from the Father *by* the Son (*Confession* 3.1-2).¹⁸⁴ Episcopius affirmed that the Spirit is distinct from the Father and the Son yet shared in the same essence with the Father and Son. Thus, the divine titles, names, properties, and operations can be attributed to the Spirit just as to the Son and Father (*Confession* 3.3).¹⁸⁵ Episcopius equates the Bible as “the express phrases of the Holy Spirit,” therefore we should be content with what is expressly revealed in Sacred Scriptures “since the Spirit of God himself best knows and is most correctly able to express his own nature” (*Confession* 3.4).¹⁸⁶

To the joy of modern-day Pentecostals and Charismatics, Simon Episcopius affirms in his *Confession* that those who are godly God showers even greater affections upon, including the “gifts of the Holy Spirit” (*Confession* 6.4).¹⁸⁷ While Episcopius does not define the meaning of the expression, it is clear from the context that the “gifts of the Holy Spirit” are for the godly (i.e., believers) and that this is a part of the normal providence of God (i.e., Episcopius is not speaking about the godly from the Apostolic age only).

In dealing with sin, the famed Remonstrant minister acknowledges the existence of, but does not define, the sin against the Holy Ghost (*Confession* 7.6).¹⁸⁸ The Early Dutch Arminian in

¹⁸³ Ellis, *Confession* 40.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 52. Note: Episcopius concludes this paragraph affirming the triune affirmation found in the Apostles’ Creed, including “I believe in the Holy Spirit etc.....”.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

the *Confession* sees repentance and faith as being brought about by the “efficacious operation of (the) Holy Spirit” (*Confession* 8.2).¹⁸⁹ Episcopius likewise affirms the miraculous virgin birth as brought about by the operation of the Holy Spirit (*Confession* 8.3-4).¹⁹⁰ Christ by his Spirit protects the faithful (*Confession* 8.8).¹⁹¹

According to Episcopius, immature or new Christians, (i.e., beginners), due to habitual sin, resist the Holy Spirit, or their “mind illuminated by the Spirit of God through the gospel;” however, as Christians progress in their sanctification this problem diminishes. Christians are born again by “the grace and Spirit of God” (*Confession* 11.6).¹⁹²

In denying ourselves, we crucify our fleshly desires; Episcopius sees Galatians 5 as a work of the Spirit (*Confession* 13.2).¹⁹³ In the Lord’s Prayer, in order for us to resist temptation and be delivered from evil, we must be sustained and strengthened by the Holy Spirit (*Confession* 14.11).¹⁹⁴ God does not merely want obedience from us, he desires *willful* obedience from us; this willful obedience that God requires is bestowed to us by the Holy Spirit (*Confession* 17.1).¹⁹⁵ The call to salvation is “effected and executed by the preaching of the gospel, together with the power of the Spirit” (*Confession* 17.2).¹⁹⁶ We cannot do anything to save ourselves but must be renewed by God in Christ with the power of the Holy Spirit (*Confession* 17.5).¹⁹⁷ Yet humanity can resist the Spirit and be damned (*Confession* 17.7).¹⁹⁸

¹⁸⁹ Ellis, *Confession* 70.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

The Holy Spirit confers grace upon all people (*Confession* 17.8).¹⁹⁹ After justification and sanctification, there is the “sealing by the Holy Spirit” (*Confession* 18.3),²⁰⁰ Episcopius equates this sealing by the Holy Spirit as assurance of salvation (*Confession* 18.5).²⁰¹ People who persist in wickedness, God withdraws his Holy Spirit (*Confession* 20.2).²⁰²

When the original Apostles were designated by Jesus as “certain extraordinary ambassadors as his eminent and special ministers and furnished them with all the gifts and virtues of the Holy Spirit necessary to the discharge of their mission” (*Confession* 21.2).²⁰³ However, once the original apostles had sufficiently diffused sound doctrine among the people and committed it to writing, the “infallible instruction and unquestionable assistance of the Holy Spirit” ceased (*Confession* 21.6).²⁰⁴ It is important to note that, given the context, Episcopius is speaking about *doctrine*, thus no new doctrine can be claimed by divine revelation. A careful reading of this section of the *Confession* will reveal that Episcopius is *not* claiming that the Gifts of the Spirit ceased, but rather new authoritative doctrinal teachings have ceased.

Against the Roman Catholic Church, Episcopius denies that the Holy Spirit infallibly preserves a single, particular church from all error (*Confession* 22.6).²⁰⁵ Baptism is to be done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Salvation is by faith and obedience in Christ brought about by the power of the Holy Spirit (*Confession* 23.3).²⁰⁶ The final reference to the

¹⁹⁹ Ellis, *Confession* 109.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 112. Note: This is the one instance in the *Confession* that the Holy Spirit is dealt with in a full paragraph.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 118.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

Spirit appears in *Confession* 24.9 where Episcopius chides those who execute heretics as far removed from the “gentle Spirit of Christ.”²⁰⁷

II. The Methodists

Article IV

Of the Holy Ghost

The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.²⁰⁸

Article I likewise affirms that the Holy Ghost is a part of the Trinity,²⁰⁹ *Article XII* states that “not every sin willingly committed after Justification is the sin against the Holy Ghost” and that after receiving the Spirit one can fall away (but also be renewed).²¹⁰

The *25 Articles* say very little about the Holy Spirit. In order to search out Methodist pneumatology, one must turn to Wesley’s *Notes on the New Testament* and his *Standard Sermons*.

References to the Spirit are diffused throughout Wesley’s sermons, however, the bulk of his views, along with his main emphasis, is found in his two-part discourse on the “Witness of the Spirit,” both of which are a part of the *52 Standard Sermons*.²¹¹ The two-part discourse can be summarized as follows.

Based on Romans 8:14-17, Wesley argues that there is a two-fold witness by which a person can know if he or she is a child of God. This *Spirit of Adoption*, which changes our relationship with God from a slave/master relationship of fearing God to a Father/child relationship of loving God, has a two-folded witness: an indirect witness and a direct witness.

²⁰⁷ Ellis, *Confession* 133.

²⁰⁸ *BOD* 66.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

²¹¹ Wesley, *Works* V:111–134.

The indirect witness is the witness of our own spirit, a self-testimony that we are a child of God, loved by our heavenly father, whereas the direct witness is the direct testimony of the Holy Spirit to our heart that we are a child of God, loved by the Father.

The testimony, or witness, of our own heart can be established by syllogistic reasoning, and on this account, it is an *indirect* testimony.

1. If (A.) I possess the fruit of the Spirit, then (B.) I am a child of God.
2. (A.) I have the fruit of the Spirit.
3. Therefore (B.) I am a child of God.

However, this self-testimony, or indirect witness based on syllogistic reasoning is not enough, for there must be two witnesses for a valid testimony. This second witness, this greater testimony, is the witness of the Holy Spirit who speaks directly to the heart of the believer and assures the believer of their salvation and of their relationship with God as Father, being adopted into the family of God as brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.²¹²

Wesley's teachings on the Holy Spirit are largely soteriological in nature, stressing the Spirit's power to truly regenerate and sanctify, outwardly and inwardly, a believer in Christ Jesus.²¹³ Holy Love, and not the Gifts of the Spirit, truly is the greatest of all gifts and the gift to be most earnestly desired. Holy Love is the root from which the Gifts, along with true holiness and godliness, flow from.

III. Comparative Analysis.

On the nature and deity of the Holy Spirit, there is no difference between the Remonstrants and the Methodists. Episcopius' trinitarian statements in the *Confession* stand in staunch contrast

²¹² Wesley, *Works* V:111–134.

²¹³ For example, see Wesley's sermon, "The First Fruits of the Spirit," in Wesley, *Works* V:87–97.

against the Socinian denial of the deity of the Spirit. In the same manner, Wesley's trinitarian statements in his writings stand in staunch contrast against the denials of the deity of the Spirit among the Unitarians and Deists. There is full harmony between the *Articles* and the *Confession*.

The main issue in pneumatology between Episcopius and Wesley is that of assurance. Episcopius sees assurance rooted in the "sealing by the Holy Spirit" which "is a more solid and strong confirmation in a true confidence and hope of the heavenly glory and the certainty of divine grace by which believers are rendered more and more certain" of their salvation (*Confession* 18.5).²¹⁴ Thus, by this undefined work of the Spirit, a Christian can have assurance of their salvation and assurance of their preservation "if they keep themselves in it."²¹⁵

Episcopius grounds the assurance of a believer in the work of the Spirit, but he does not define or elaborate what this work actually is. I submit that the difference between Episcopius and Wesley is not a difference in *doctrine* but a difference in *development*.

Like Episcopius, Wesley sees the grounds for assurance rooted in the work of the Spirit. Unlike Episcopius, Wesley does explain how a Christian can have *assurance by the Spirit* that they are *in Christ* and are *beloved children of the Father*. With the doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit, Wesleyans can explain how the Spirit "seals" Christians in assurance of their salvation. Episcopius sees the Spirit giving the believer "a more solid and strong confirmation" a "true confidence and hope" but does not explain how this is so. Wesley answers by explaining that the Holy Spirit directly witnesses to the heart of the believer that they are a child of God, loved by their heavenly Father. With this direct witness, along with the lesser indirect witness of our own spirit, a Christian can know, with a valid testimony, that they are saved and will no longer be a

²¹⁴ Ellis, *Confession* 112.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

slave seeing God in fear, but instead cry out “Abba, Father” as a beloved child of God clinging to their heavenly Father with a spirit of adoption.

Chapter 4 Anthropology

I. The Remonstrants

The bulk of Episcopius' views on the human sin nature is found in chapter seven of the *Confession*. After briefly recapping the providence of God (*Confession 7.1*),²¹⁶ Episcopius then devotes a lengthy paragraph to the origin of sin. Episcopius is unmistakably clear, sin has its origin in the free will of man. Adam by no external or internal necessity disobeyed God; neither did God withdraw his grace from Adam which in turn left Adam unable to obey God. To think otherwise is to make God the sole author of sin and to justly excuse Adam from any culpability. The origin of sin falls squarely on the free-will of man, the only part that God and Satan play is that God permitted these events to happen, and Satan had the ability to persuade, but not force, the first couple to sin (*Confession 7.2*).²¹⁷

By this first, original, sin Adam and Eve were “made liable to eternal death,” subjugated to misery, “stripped of that primeval happiness,” ejected from the Garden of Eden and “barred from the tree of life, which was a symbol of blessed immortality.” (*Confession 7.3*)²¹⁸ Since Adam “was the stock and root of the whole human race,” all of humanity has been implicated by his sin “as if they were contained in his loins and went forth from him by natural generation.” Humanity therefore inherits the same death and misery Adam was subjugated to and suffers the following: 1. The deprivation of primeval happiness, 2. Deprivation of true righteousness and the ability of earning salvation, and 3. Subjugated to eternal death and misery. Jesus Christ is the

²¹⁶ Ellis, *Confession* 63.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 64.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 64–65.

Second Adam and remedy for the first Adam; original sin cannot establish the doctrine of unconditional reprobation (*Confession 7.4*).²¹⁹

In *Confession 7.5*, Episcopius states that besides *original* sin, there are *actual* sins which:

1. Multiply our guilt,
2. Obscure our minds on spiritual matters,
3. Slowly and gradually blind humanity and
4. Actual sins “finally deprave our will more and more by the habit of sinning.”²²⁰

Next Episcopius list various types of sins and notes that certain sins are worse than others, especially those that are specifically listed as sins that will keep one out of heaven. Episcopius distinguishes between *habitual sinning* and sins that are temporal *slip-ups* arising from a sudden explosion in passion, or ignorance or weakness in human nature (*Confession 7.6*).²²¹ There are various forms of punishment for sin: temporal, or eternal, bodily or spiritual (*Confession 7.7*).²²²

While sin subjugated the human race to eternal death and captivity to sin, and while God did not fully reveal his saving grace, nevertheless God did not abandon his creation. While some in the Old Testament, by divine grace through faith, walked blamelessly, shook off the power of sin and were absolved of their guilt, sin nevertheless reigned supreme. Even before the giving of the law and despite the prospering of sin, humanity still had the “dictates of natural reason, paternal traditions and some other God-ordained divine and angelic revelations and apparitions did thrive...” Yet only few walked by faith and were holy. Most of humanity was corrupted and

²¹⁹ Ellis, *Confession* 65.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²²² *Ibid.*, 67.

“every imagination of man was only evil from childhood.” Thus, the guilt of human sin became so great that God unleashed “a universal flood” upon the ungodly (*Confession* 7.8).²²³

After the flood, sin continued to flourish among the whole human race. Out of the nations of idolaters and sinners, God chose a particular people and gave to them a written law and commandments: moral, ceremonial, and political. God continued to reveal to them his will through his prophets and other servants. Nevertheless, sin continued to conquer the human race. Sin was not destroyed by the law nor was it removed by animal sacrifice. Sin grew more and more “that the whole world was shut up under sin and liable to condemnation.” (*Confession* 7.9)²²⁴

It was from this that the highest necessity and also advantage of divine grace, prepared for us in Christ the Savior before the ages, clearly appeared. For without it we could neither shake off the miserable yoke of sin, nor do anything truly good in all religion, nor finally ever escape eternal death or any true punishment for sin. Much less could we at any time obtain eternal salvation without it or through ourselves. (*Confession* 7.10)²²⁵

According to Mark Ellis, the *Arminian Confession of 1621* contains three important errors concerning Original Sin: 1. Episcopius definition of “eternal death”, 2. Actual sins, and not Original Sin, depraves human volition, 3. Not all sins merit eternal damnation.²²⁶

What is the meaning of “eternal death” found in the *Confession*? The passage in contention is *Confession* 7.3:

Through this transgression the man was made liable to eternal death and multiple miseries from the power of the divine threat²²⁷ and was stripped of that primeval

²²³ Ellis, *Confession* 67.

²²⁴ Ibid., 68.

²²⁵ Ibid., 68–69.

²²⁶ Mark A. Ellis, *Simon Episcopius’ Doctrine of Original Sin* 122–123.

²²⁷ Here, Episcopius cites in a footnote to the *Confession* the following Bible verses: Gen. 2:17 & 3:16 and Rom. 5:12. Ellis, *Confession* 65.

happiness which he received in creation. Thus, he was ejected²²⁸ from that most delightful garden (a type of the heavenly paradise) in which he otherwise happily conversed with God, and was perpetually barred from the tree of life, which was a symbol of blessed immortality.²²⁹

According to Dr. Ellis:

Having suggested earlier that Episcopius redefined eternal death as physical death, this provides a test of that interpretation. Given Episcopius’ understanding of the garden as a type of heaven, ejection from the garden appears to imply eternal damnation until we examine the references associated with each result of Adam’s sin. Under *reus aeternae moris*, Episcopius listed “Gen. 2:17, 3:16 & seq; Rom. 5:12 & seqq.,” all of which are usually taken (even if incorrectly) as references to physical death. Instead, Episcopius listed references to eternal punishment (“Apoc. 2:7 & 21:14.”)²³⁰ under the penalty of separation from the tree of life. It would seem Episcopius had these reversed, that expulsion from the garden should symbolize exclusion from heaven and exclusion from the tree of life would indicate the penalty of physical death, but his appeal to biblical texts supports our contention that he defined *mortem aeternam* as mere physical death.

To begin, Dr. Ellis is conveniently ignoring the fact that Episcopius defines eternal death (albeit in passing) within the *Confession*. Thus, Episcopius writes, “For that twofold power and efficacy of sin of which mention was made above, (**indeed damnation or eternal death**, and the servitude of sin, or captivity under the practice of sin), most clearly appeared long ago...” (*Confession* 7.8).²³¹ Hence it is clear that Episcopius equates “damnation” with “eternal death.” Nevertheless, I will examine Dr. Ellis’s contention more fully since it will be discovered that Episcopius is operating with a different definition in 7.3 than in 7.8. I will first summarize Dr. Ellis’s contention in the chart below:

<i>Confession</i> 7.3	Biblical citations in the <i>Confession’s</i> footnotes	Dr. Ellis’ Contention
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²²⁸ Here, Episcopius cites in a footnote to the *Confession* the following Bible verses: Rev. 2:17 & 21:14. *Ibid.*, 65.

²²⁹ Ellis, *Confession* 64–65.

²³⁰ I believe that Dr. Ellis meant to cite Revelation chapter *twenty-two* verse fourteen and *not* chapter *twenty-one* verse fourteen. Rev. 21:14 has no relevance to our current discussion whereas Rev. 22:14 explicitly refers to the tree of life. I have double checked Ellis’s translation with that of the 1676 English translation of the *Confession* (page 119) and the Latin edition, both Episcopius’ *Opera Theologica* assembled by Phillip van Limborch (1678) and a 1622 publication of the *Confessio, sive Declaratio, sententiae pastorum, qui in Foederato Belgio remonstrantes vocantur, super praecipuis articulis religionis christianae*. Both English translations and the 1622 edition cite the irrelevant verse, Rev. 21:14. I was not able to tell whether or not chapter 21 or 22 was cited in Limborch’s edition. Regardless of Limborch’s later edition, the 1622 edition contains the irrelevant citation which is faithfully reflected in both English translations. I speculate that the error arose from Episcopius himself, who accidentally wrote 21 instead of 22 when citing Rev. 22:14. For the purpose of this thesis paper, I will cite the relevant passage which I presume Episcopius truly meant.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 67. (emphasis added).

<p>“Through this transgression the man was made liable to <i>eternal death</i> and multiple miseries from the power of the divine threat and was stripped of that primeval happiness which he received in creation.” (emphasis added)</p>	<p>“but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die.” (Gen. 2:17 NASB)</p> <p>“To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you shall deliver children; Yet your desire will be for your husband, And he shall rule over you.” (Gen. 3:16 NASB)</p> <p>“Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all mankind, because all sinned” (Rom 5:12 NASB)</p>	<p>Dr. Ellis contends that these Biblical citations refer to physical death. Therefore, according to Dr. Ellis, Episcopius wrongly equates “eternal death” with physical death. Furthermore, the Genesis citations are referring to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, thus Dr. Ellis reasons that Episcopius wrongly equated the expulsion from the Garden with physical death.</p>
<p>“Thus, he was ejected from that most delightful garden (a type of the heavenly paradise) in which he otherwise happily conversed with God, and was perpetually barred from the tree of life, which was a symbol of blessed immortality.”</p>	<p>“The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes, I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.” (Rev. 2:7 NASB)</p> <p>“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city by the gates.” (Rev. 22:14 NASB)</p>	<p>According to Dr. Ellis, these Biblical citations refer to eternal damnation. Dr Ellis contends that Episcopius viewed humanity being barred from the tree of life as equivalent to eternal damnation.</p>

I find Dr. Ellis reading of the *Confession* to be *slightly* incorrect. To begin, Episcopius takes expulsion from the Garden of Eden and being perpetually barred from the tree of life together, not separate, as Dr. Ellis contends. I have doubled checked Dr. Ellis’ Biblical citations within Episcopius’ *Confession* with volume two of the *Opera Theologica*, the citations are correct. Episcopius gives the two citations from Revelation (referring to eternal damnation) in between the words “ejected” and “from.” Thus, the *Confession* reads, “Thus, (Adam) was ejected

(Biblical citations) from that most delightful garden (a type of the heavenly paradise) in which he otherwise happily conversed with God, and was perpetually barred from the tree of life, which was a symbol of blessed immortality.”²³²

Again, Dr. Ellis states, “It would seem Episcopius had these reversed, that expulsion from the garden should symbolize exclusion from heaven and exclusion from the tree of life would indicate the penalty of physical death.” But Episcopius does not separate them! Instead, Episcopius collapses the two. The Garden of Eden was “a type of the heavenly paradise” in which Adam and Eve “happily conversed with God” (i.e., were in full communion and fellowship with God) symbolized by the tree of life, “blessed immortality.” However, both were lost when the original pair were ejected from the Garden. I contend that Episcopius is interpreting the tree of life -a symbol of blessed immortality- as representational of Adam and Eve’s full communion and fellowship with God in which they enjoyed eternal life. Thus, when they were ejected from the Garden and barred from the tree of life, this signaled a disruption between the fellowship and communion of humanity with God, resulting in eternal damnation. Hence the citations from Revelation which treats and equates the tree of life *with* heaven: “I will grant to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7b NASB) and “they will have the right to the tree of life and may enter the city” (Rev. 22:14b NASB). Just as these passages take the *tree of life* and *paradise* together, Episcopius likewise takes the two together. Thus, Episcopius takes *both*, ejection from the Garden *and* perpetual separation from the tree of life as eternal damnation.

²³² Ellis, *Confession* 65.

It is not that Episcopius is equating expulsion from the Garden of Eden as physical death and prohibition from the tree of life as eternal death, as Dr. Ellis contends simply because Episcopius cites the two Genesis verses in the first sentence of *Confession 7.3*; rather expulsion from the Garden and prohibition from the tree of life are taken together in the second sentence as the break in fellowship and communion with God and all the travesty that entails (such as the loss of the innate ability to attain everlasting life).

However, this still leaves the first sentence unaccounted for, since it is eternal death that is being separated. Episcopius still appears to equate eternal death with physical death. I concur with Dr. Ellis that Episcopius is in fact equating eternal death with physical death in *Confession 7.3*. This is demonstrated clearly in *Confession 7.4*, after the fall humanity is “now born subject to that eternal death of which we spoke, and manifold miseries. And this is customarily and vulgarly called original sin...”²³³.

The explanation for this is simple, Episcopius, like Arminius before him,²³⁴ rejected the doctrine of *inherited guilt*. Since nobody inherits the guilt (and therefore the damnation) of Adam, humanity only inherits physical death from Adam. Again, Episcopius equates eternal death with Original Sin, and since Original Sin is *not* Original Guilt, eternal death cannot mean the transmission of eternal damnation from one generation to the next. Thus, Episcopius declares:

The Remonstrants do not regard original sin as sin properly so called, which renders the posterity of Adam deserving of the hatred of God; nor as an evil which by the method of punishment properly so-called passes from Adam to his posterity; but as an evil, infirmity, injury, or by whatever other name it may be called, which is propagated to his posterity by Adam devoid of original righteousness. Whence it results, that all the posterity of Adam destitute of the

²³³ Ellis, *Confession* 65.

²³⁴ Arminius, *Works* II:59.

same righteousness, are wholly unfit for, and incapable of attaining eternal life, - either to return of themselves into favor with God, or to discover a way whereby they may return, - except God by his new grace go before them and restore as well as supply new strength by which they can attain it. And this the Remonstrants believe to have been signified by the expulsion of Adam from paradise, the type of heaven. For this calamity happened not only to Adam but was common with him to all the posterity of Adam. But that original sin is not evil in the sense of implying guilt and desert of punishment, -is plain. It is not evil in the sense of implying guilt; because to be born is confessedly an involuntary thing, and therefore it is an involuntary thing to be born with this or that stain, infirmity, injury, or evil. But if it is not an evil in the sense of implying guilt, then it cannot be an evil in the sense of desert of punishment; because guilt and punishment are correlated... So far, therefore, as original sin is an evil, it must be in the sense in which the Remonstrants define the term; and is called original sin by a misuse of the word 'sin'...²³⁵

For Episcopius, original sin is not truly sin, rather it is the condition of humanity devoid of original righteousness, incapable of working out our own salvation. Original sin is not itself sin, but the fallen human condition from which sin arises out of. Likewise, expulsion from the Garden of Eden signified humanities break in fellowship with God, rendering all of humanity incapable of meriting our own salvation (Total Inability).

This leads to Mark Ellis second contention: actual sins, and not Original Sin, depraves human volition. Dr. Ellis states:

“(Episcopius’) assault on the Augustinian doctrine of original sin continued in the next paragraph (*Confession* 7.5) ... His declaration that one’s own personal sins “obscured the mind, blinded men, and perverted the will” completely broke with the Augustinian tradition, which considered them the results of original sin. However, he was not denying the existence of a sin nature of the necessity of divine grace. Adam deprived his posterity of happiness and true righteousness...”²³⁶

²³⁵ William T. G. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner & CO, 1871), II:181–182. William T. G. Shedd is citing and translating directly from Episcopius “*Apology for the Remonstrant Confession* Ch. VIII” in *Opera Theologica II*.

²³⁶ Ellis, *Episcopius’ Doctrine of Original Sin* 123.

The problematic passage, *Confession 7.5*, appears to renounce the doctrine of total depravity! Observe the passage alongside *Confession 17.5*:

<i>Confession 7.5</i>	<i>Confession 17.5</i>
<p>“Besides this sin are the proper or actual sins of each and every man, which also really multiply our guilt before God and obscure our mind concerning spiritual matters. Indeed, little by little they blind us, and finally deprave our will more and more by the habit of sinning (7.5).”²³⁷</p>	<p>Man therefore does not have saving faith from himself, nor is he regenerated or converted by the powers of his own free will, seeing that in the state of sin he cannot of himself or by himself either think or will or do anything that is good enough to be saved (of which first of all is conversion and saving faith), but it is necessary that he be regenerated and totally renewed by God, in Christ, through the word of the gospel joined with the power of the Holy Spirit, namely, in his understanding, affections, will and all his strengths, that he may be able to understand, mediate on , will and finish correctly these things that are savingly good. (17.5)”²³⁸</p>

The issue with this problematic passage can be boiled down to a single dilemma: *are we sinners because we sin, or do we sin because we are sinners?* The problematic passage from the *Confession* cited above, in contradistinction to the other cited Remonstrant statements, wrongly answers this question in the former: *we are sinners because we sin*. In *Confession 7.5* the same Socinian heresy from *Confession 1.14* resurfaces.

As already mentioned in Chapter 2 of this thesis paper, Episcopius followed the Socinian notion (namely from Krzysztof Ostorodt, the Socinian missionary to the Netherlands) that fallen human reason was able to understand the Gospel message without any special divine grace or illumination from the Holy Spirit. In other words, original sin did not render human reason

²³⁷ Ellis, *Confession* 65.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

impotent on spiritual matters. Thus, Episcopius wrongly asserts that “actual sins” (not original sin) “obscure our mind concerning spiritual matters. Indeed, little by little they blind us...”

In *Confession 7.5*, it is the habit of sinning that depraves our mind and will (i.e., we are sinners because we sin). In earlier Arminian theologies, it is because we are born with a depraved mind and will that we commit sin (i.e., we sin because we are sinners). Dr. Ellis speculates that the other Remonstrant theologians demanded from Episcopius a more faithful representation of Arminius in the *Arminian Confession*, which is why *Confession 17.5*, contrary to *Confession 7.5*, is in harmony with previous Remonstrant sentiments and is included in the confessional statement.²³⁹

The final contention Dr. Ellis maintains against the seventh chapter of Episcopius’ *Confession* is this: *Confession 7.7* maintains that not all sins merit eternal damnation. The actual words of Episcopius are as follows: “various punishments are ordained by God for the diverse quantity and quality of sins, namely, first condemnation, then of sense, whether temporal or eternal; finally, whether bodily or spiritual, etc.”²⁴⁰

To understand Episcopius thought, it is important that two things be kept in mind: 1. Unlike popular American Evangelical theology that sees all sins being equal, Episcopius maintains that there is a hierarchy of greater and lesser sins, 2. The central place of free-will. *Confession 7.7* cannot be understood apart from the preceding paragraph:

For truly there are others which deserve to be *called lighter slip ups rather than crimes*, for which, in consequence of the gracious covenant of God and his fatherly kindness, *a man is not excluded from the hope of eternal life*, although he does not knowingly and foreseeingly (sic) cast this difficulty of freeing himself from them upon himself, or by any other means whatever of continuing in them, *but that he falls into them only through thoughtlessness, frailty, lack of attention,*

²³⁹ Ellis, *Original Sin* 127.

²⁴⁰ Ellis, *Confession* 67.

or some sudden passion, whether it arises from some natural temperament, or evil practice, or some unexpected chance, etc. Therefore, acts here are almost always accurately *to be distinguished from habits and*, in that respect, manifest imperfections and frailties from *those acts committed against the express and ready dictate of natural reason or supernatural revelation, and accompanied with an open transgression* of some commandment and injury of our neighbor (especially according to the sense of the New Testament).²⁴¹ (emphasis added)

Episcopius is distinguishing between slips ups due to infirmities, sudden heats of passion, ignorance, chance etc.... on the one hand and on the other hand crimes of habitual sin or open transgression against reason and revelation. In other words, Episcopius distinguishes between involuntary sins (the former) and voluntary sins (the latter). Episcopius is clear in his reasoning in his *Apology for the Confession* when speaking of original sin:

But that original sin is not evil in the sense of implying guilt and desert of punishment, -is plain. It is not evil in the sense of implying guilt; because to be born is confessedly an involuntary thing, and therefore it is an involuntary thing to be born with this or that stain, infirmity, injury, or evil. But if it is not an evil in the sense of implying guilt, then it cannot be an evil in the sense of desert of punishment; because guilt and punishment are correlated...²⁴²

One cannot be guilty of involuntary sin, and if there is no guilt then there is no punishment since it is unjust to punish the innocent (not guilty). Therefore, involuntary sin does not merit eternal damnation. Indeed, involuntary sins are not truly sin.

II. The Methodists

Article VII Of Original or Birth-sin

Original Sin standeth (sic) not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.

VIII Of Free-Will

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to

²⁴¹ Ellis, *Confession* 66.

²⁴² Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine* II:182.

God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing²⁴³ us, that we may have a goodwill, and working with us, when we have that goodwill.²⁴⁴

In the seventh article of the Methodist *Articles*, an unmistakably clear and strong affirmation of original sin is made. Original sin is not the mere imitating of Adam's decision in our own personal lives, but is the thorough corruption of our human nature, both the deprivation of original righteousness and the positive corruption towards evil. In such a totally depraved state, as the eighth *Article* explains, humanity cannot do anything that is good nor turn to God for salvation without the grace of God preceding any action we take and accompanying any decision that we do.

John Wesley in his *Standard Sermons* elaborates more thoroughly in his sermon on "Original Sin."²⁴⁵ In this sermon, Mr. Wesley begins by rebuking the picture of man as dignified and inherently good – a view of "human nature which men have drawn in all ages!"²⁴⁶ The fact that such a positive outlook of human nature has prevailed among so many at all times is itself a form of self-flattery and sin!²⁴⁷ According to Wesley, this popular viewpoint is contrary to the Bible.²⁴⁸

In his sermon on original sin, Wesley examines humanity as humanity was, before the flood.²⁴⁹ He concludes that all of humanity was evil, and only evil "every day, every hour, every moment."²⁵⁰ There was no good intermingled with the wickedness of humanity, no light

²⁴³ Old English: preventing, prevenient (i.e., preceding, going before, anticipating etc...). From this older English term, the doctrine of Preventive Grace was coined (i.e., in modern 21st century English the term *Prevenient Grace* is equivalent to the term *Preceding Grace*.)

²⁴⁴ Neely, *Doctrinal Standards* 191.

²⁴⁵ Wesley, *Works* VI:54–65.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 56–57.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

intermixed with darkness.²⁵¹ According to Wesley, after the flood humanity saw no improvement and continued on in its debauchery and iniquity -even up to and including the present time.²⁵²

People are by nature atheist, Wesley rejects the idea that humans are born with an innate knowledge of God; humanity does not love God nor do they take any delight in him.²⁵³

We humans worship ourselves; we are full of pride. We do what *we will* and not God's will. The same principle governs both humanity and Satan: autonomy from God.²⁵⁴ Interestingly, Mr. Wesley sees the total deprivation of the human race as the distinguishing mark of Christianity, separating itself from all forms of heathenism since heathens are "wholly ignorant of the entire deprivation of the whole human nature."²⁵⁵ Thus, if anyone deny the doctrine of original sin is "but Heathen still."²⁵⁶

Wesley concludes the sermon by speaking of the relationship between the disease and the cure. If one does not understand the fallenness of humanity, one will not understand nor depend upon the grace of God in Christ. To undermine the corruption from birth is to undermine the blessed second birth. Christ truly heals, transforms, and saves to the very uttermost.²⁵⁷

While Wesley is unmistakably clear that original sin is not only the mere loss of original righteousness but is the positive corruption of every aspect of human nature, Mr. Wesley is not entirely clear on the question of *original guilt*. *Article II* states that Christ "truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, *not only for*

²⁵¹ Wesley, *Works* VI:57.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 58–59.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 60–61.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ Wesley, *Works* VII:64–65.

original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men.” (emphasis added) Do Wesleyans believe that we inherit the guilt of Adam too?

Regrettably, John Wesley never wrote a commentary or explanation of his abridgement of the *Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England*. However, later Methodists did, and they are clearly divided on this issue. According to Henry Wheeler:

Methodist theologians generally deny the doctrine of original guilt. The ninth English Article, of which the Article now under consideration is an abridgement, reads: “The flesh lusteth (sic) always contrary to the spirit; and therefore, in every person born into the world, it deserveth (sic) God’s wrath and damnation.” This was rejected by Wesley, and the fact is sufficient proof that imputed or original guilt had no place in his theology at the time he made his abridgement, whatever may have been his belief in earlier life.²⁵⁸

Bishop Thomas B. Neely concurs, Mr. Wesley abridged the Anglican Article on original sin the way that he did, “not for the sake of brevity, but that he struck all that out because he did not want to say those things, and because he did not want to obligate his people to believe them.”²⁵⁹

In his *Systematic Theology*, John Miley rejects the doctrine of original guilt on the grounds of its involuntary nature.²⁶⁰ In regard to *Article II*, where it is written that Christ died for both original guilt and actual sins, Miley explains it away as a contradiction of Article VII; “the simplest explanation of its remaining is through mere oversight in the revision of the articles.”²⁶¹ Thus, Wesley left-in that phrase in his abridgment of the *Articles* by accident.

Thus, the interpretation of *Article VII* by Methodists who reject the doctrine of original guilt can be summarized as follows:

²⁵⁸ Wheeler, *History of the Twenty-Five Articles* 184.

²⁵⁹ Neely, *Doctrinal Standards* 168.

²⁶⁰ John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), I:552.

²⁶¹ Miley, *Systematic Theology* I:525.

1. Wesley's deletion of the following lines from the 39 Articles in his abridgment constituted a positive rejection of those sentiments, which are as follows:
 - a. "so that the flesh lusteth (sic) always contrary to the spirit; *and therefore, in every person born into this world, it deserveth (sic) God's wrath and damnation.* And this infection of nature doth remain, yea in them that are regenerated; whereby the lust of the flesh, called in the Greek, *phronema sarkos*, which some do expound the wisdom, some sensuality, some the affection, some the desire of the flesh, is not subject to the Law of God. And although there is no condemnation for them that believe and are baptized, yet the Apostle doth confess, that concupiscence and lust hath of itself the nature of Sin."²⁶² (emphasis added)
2. No one can be held guilty for the crimes of another. In order for there to be culpability there must first be a free-will that *voluntarily*, without necessity, transgresses the law and sins. If there is no free volition, then there is no guilt and if there is no guilt then there is no punishment.
3. The retention of the phrase "original guilt" in Article II was a *human mistake*; John Wesley accidentally overlooked the phrase when he abridged the *39 Articles of the Church of England*.
However, not all Methodists are satisfied with this interpretation of the *25 Articles*.

According to Allen A. Jameson, Christ remitted original guilt for all people unconditionally and remits all actual sins conditionally based on faith.²⁶³ John William Fletcher agrees, "Adam brought a general condemnation, and a universal seed of death upon all infants, so Christ brings upon them a general justification, and a universal seed of life."²⁶⁴ For Fletcher, Adam brought damnation for all, but Christ brought forgiveness and reconciliation for all.²⁶⁵

Thomas O. Summers follows the same logic: "If a decree of condemnation has been issued against original sin, irresponsibly derived for the first Adam, likewise a decree of justification has issued from the same court, whose benefits are unconditionally bestowed through the Second Adam."²⁶⁶ But is it unjust to make one guilty for the sins of another? No.

²⁶² Wheeler, *History of the Twenty-Five Articles* 22.

²⁶³ Jameson, *Notes* 98.

²⁶⁴ John William Fletcher, *The Works of the Reverend John William Fletcher Late Vicar of Madeley in Four Volumes* (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishers, 1974), I:284.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ Thomas O. Summers, *Systematic Theology A Complete Body of Wesleyan Arminian Divinity* (Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, 1888), II:39.

“Thus, while Adam’s sin makes guilty all his sons, none of them have any occasion to complain of the injustice of this imputation, because “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”²⁶⁷

That original guilt is remitted by Christ death on the Cross is likewise supported by William Burt Pope.²⁶⁸ Pope states that, “we must believe that original sin as condemnation in the fullest sense, and as an absolute doom, never passed beyond Adam and the unindividualized nature of man. It was arrested in Christ as it regards every individual and changed into a conditional sentence.”²⁶⁹

Thus, the interpretation of *Article VII* by Methodists who accept the doctrine of original guilt can be summarized as follows:

1. Wesley’s deletion of the second half of the seventh article constitutes a rejection of original guilt is a non-sequitur; for it could equally be true that Wesley deleted that section for the sake of brevity. This being demonstrated by the fact that he left the phrase “original guilt” in the second article. Since the concept was already mentioned in the second article there was no need to include it in the seventh article.
 - a. Consider Wesley’s full deletion of *Article XIII Of Works before Justification*. It does not follow from Wesley’s complete deletion of this article that he rejected this notion that all good works prior to regeneration are sins. To the contrary, Mr. Wesley embraces this view in his sermon on “Justification by Faith,” which is a part of the *Standard Sermons* and is a doctrinal standard of Methodism.²⁷⁰
2. This viewpoint maintains a continuity in Wesley’s views on original sin. The 2nd and 7th *Articles*, as they are, demonstrate that Wesley believed, just as he did in his earlier,²⁷¹ that the guilt of Adam’s sin is remitted in all by Christ’s death on the Cross. Therefore, all who die in infancy are saved.

²⁶⁷ Summers, *Systematic Theology* II:46.

²⁶⁸ William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study Biblical Dogmatic Historical* (London, England: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1877), II:59.

²⁶⁹ Pope, *Compendium* II:59.

²⁷⁰ Thus, Wesley states, “All truly good works...follow after justification... all works done before justification are not good, in a Christian sense...;” Wesley, *Works* V:59.

²⁷¹ Wesley, *Works* IX:192–464.

3. No injustice is made on God's part for condemning the human race on account of Adam's sin since God has provided a Second Adam who is by far greater and who truly does remit the guilt of Adam's sin, so that no one is ever damned on account of Adam's sin alone.

Since John Wesley never wrote a defense, apology, commentary, or explanation of his abridgement -never explained why he kept what he kept, why he deleted what he deleted, why he changed what he changed- Methodist theologians have been left to guess and argue among themselves the meaning of the *Twenty-Five Articles*.

III. Comparative Analysis.

There are two main issues that arise from a comparison between the Remonstrants and the Methodist on original sin: 1. what constitutes original sin and 2. The question of original guilt.

1. What constitutes original sin?

In *Confession 7.4*, Episcopius defines original sin purely in the terms of loss and deprivation, i.e., *a loss of original righteousness*.²⁷² However, by limiting original sin to a loss of original righteousness only, Episcopius was merely following Arminius, for the father of Dutch Arminianism taught: "must some contrary quality, beside the absence of original righteousness, be constituted as another part of original sin? Though we think it much more probable, that this *absence of original righteousness* only is *original sin itself*, as being that which alone is sufficient to commit and produce any actual sins whatsoever."²⁷³ (emphasis original)

The watered-down views of Episcopius on Original Sin are a direct continuation of Arminius' mistaken and watered-down views of the same doctrine. Thus, the fault originates in Arminius and not Episcopius. The downward trajectory of the Remonstrant views on this issue

²⁷² Ellis, *Confession* 65.

²⁷³ Arminius, *Works* II:375.

can be traced directly back to Arminius. However, it must be strongly emphasized that Arminius does not bare the totality of the blame, he merely partakes in the blame.

As I have already mentioned, Episcopius' weakened views of the noetic effects of sin are not in continuity with Arminius. As I have already mentioned and demonstrated, the notion that the fall of Adam did not blind the minds of his posterity is a Socinian heresy, i.e., it is external from, and an outside corruption of, Arminian theology. However, must all the blame fall on the Socinians? No. For there is another source, neither Socinian nor Arminian that led Episcopius astray -indeed a source much more respectable than Socinianism: Desiderius Erasmus, who was a Pelagian.

The chief *philosophical principal* by which Pelagius objected to the prayers of Augustine, and constructed his entire theology around, was this: *how can a just God demand the impossible from us and yet still hold us guilty for not obeying that which is an impossibility? God is just, therefore if he demands something of us, then we must have the innate ability to perform the demand.*

Concerning this chief philosophical principal and foundation of Pelagianism, Arminians have no affinity with. God holds all of humanity guilty for not upholding his righteous demands and law, even though God foreknew that such a demand would be impossible for us to do. Is God unjust for holding us responsible for things he foreknew would be impossible for us to maintain? Absolutely not! For this entire issue is not a question of *justice*, but a question of *mercy*.

If God demanded from us that which we can inherently do, then humanity will have every right to boast of their own merit. Indeed, a salvation that only requires the inherently

possible is by definition, salvation by works. Such a plan of salvation will necessarily, and rightfully so, encourage every reason for the human heart to burn with pride and arrogance. But by demanding the impossible from us, God teaches us that we must rely solely on his grace and mercy. There is no injustice in God demanding what he foreknew would be impossible for us to uphold since God is demonstrating to us his mercy and grace. Only by his mercy and grace can a man or a woman have faith in Christ and uphold the law of God.

But if God is teaching us to cling to his mercy and care, then imagine the monstrosity of God, if he were to teach us about the need for his grace, just to turn around and purposefully withhold, on the basis of nothing, his grace, that he himself taught us to rely on! Thus, true injustice lies not in God demanding the impossible from us, as Pelagius maintained, but rather the true injustice lies in God demanding the impossible from us, in order to demonstrate to us the necessity of grace, just to purposefully and arbitrarily withhold that necessary grace that he himself taught us to need, as the Calvinist maintain!

Arminians maintain *the sufficiency of God's grace*. God's grace is sufficient; God's grace can bestow onto anyone saving faith, that is, a faith that believes in, and assents to the Gospel message and is likewise obedient to it. God's sufficient grace is given to all. Therefore, there is no injustice on God's part in demanding what he foreknew would be impossible for us to uphold, since God bestows onto all the sufficient grace needed for that purpose.

It is Erasmus who revived the Pelagian principal that corrupted the Remonstrants. Erasmus defines free-will as follows: "Free choice is a power of the human will by which a

person can apply himself to what leads to eternal salvation or turn away from it.”²⁷⁴ Consider further the Pelagian sentiments of Erasmus:

1. “In agreement with these passages are the Lord’s words to Moses: ‘I have placed before you the way of life and the way of death. Choose what is good and walk in it. What could be more clearly expressed? God shows us what is good and what is bad, and shows the two different consequences for each, life, and death; the freedom to choose he leaves to man. It would be ridiculous to tell someone to ‘choose’ if it were not in his power to turn this way or the other, as though someone standing at a crossroads were to be told, ‘you see the two roads – take whichever you want,’ if only one were open.”²⁷⁵
2. Our mental capacity for judgment.... whether you prefer to call it ... (mind or understanding) or ...(reason) – was darkened, but not extinguished, by sin.”²⁷⁶
3. “Even now there is insufficient agreement among theologians about whether or not a person without a special grace can solicit the effective grace of God by means of morally good deeds. My definition is open to both opinions, since I reject neither one, though I am inclined to the one which attributes more to grace.”²⁷⁷
4. “And so the sin of Adam and even more the additional sins which some call ‘personal’ rendered man’s free will faint, not extinct, wounded, not killed, crippled by an injury, not amputated, left half-alive, not dead”²⁷⁸
5. “I demonstrated that even the unregenerate retain some of the light of reason by which the philosophers, according to Paul, attained to a knowledge of God’s nature without grace. By the same token it was shown that these same persons retain some desire for what is right. These are the seeds or the remnants of inborn freedom.”²⁷⁹

Simon Episcopus, while he was a professor at the Remonstrant Seminary (1634-1643),

included the works of Erasmus as part of the curriculum and syllabus. It was while he was a

²⁷⁴ Desiderius Erasmus, and Charles Trinkaus, “Hyperaspistes I,” *Collected Works of Erasmus: Controversies, Volume 76*. University of Toronto Press, 1999. EBSCOhost, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.regent.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=468030&site=ehost-live>. LXXVI: 262.

²⁷⁵ Erasmus, “A Discussion of Free-Will,” *Ibid.*, LXXVI:34. Note: Erasmus then spends several pages examining various Old Testament passages in which people are exhorted to choose between good and evil, or to turn back to God from their sinful ways; Erasmus makes it clear that he believes such passages presuppose an innate capacity of the will to obey such exhortations and calls to repentance, otherwise such calls would be frivolous. *Ibid.*, 34–38.

²⁷⁶ Erasmus, “A Discussion of Free Will,” *Ibid.*, LXXVI:23.

²⁷⁷ Erasmus, “Hyperaspistes I,” *Ibid.*, LXXVI:270.

²⁷⁸ Desiderius Erasmus, and Charles Trinkaus, “Hyperaspistes II,” *Collected Works of Erasmus: Controversies, Volume 77*. University of Toronto Press, 2000. EBSCOhost, <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.regent.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xna&AN=468032&site=ehost-live>. LXXVII:339.

²⁷⁹ Erasmus, “Hyperaspistes II,” *Ibid.*, LXXVII:340.

professor at this newly founded seminary that Episcopius began to compose his *Theological Institutes*. Therefore, it is not surprising that this same work bore the marks and influence of Erasmus. Thus, in his *Theological Institutes* Episcopius maintains -contrary to Arminius but in agreement with Erasmus- that “inability is the most just reason for one’s defense or of an excuse, from whence it is rightly said, that no one is obligated to do the impossible.”²⁸⁰ I concur with Dr. Ellis that one finds in the mature writings of Episcopius a marked departure from his earlier writings and the writings of Arminius.²⁸¹ However, what Dr. Ellis fails to consider is the influence of Erasmus (and Socinianism).

Once Arminian theologians adopt and accept this philosophical principle, if God commands something of us, we must have the intrinsic ability to comply, then the road to Pelagianism is inevitable.

In contradistinction to this philosophical principal of Pelagianism, is the robust view of Original Sin as it is maintained by the Methodists. We sin because we are sinners. We are not sinners by choice, rather, we are sinners by nature. Humanity is not merely “very far gone from original righteousness,” as *Article VII* declares, but that our “own nature (is) inclined to evil, and that continually.” In the fall, human nature was *positively corrupted* by sin.

The Methodists have improved upon the Remonstrant doctrine of Original Sin. Whereas the Remonstrants defined original sin as a loss of original righteousness only, the Methodists have correctly noted that in the loss of original righteousness a positive corruption of human nature is necessarily entailed. With this stronger view of original sin, Methodists are in a better position to maintain that humanity needs the grace of God in order to fulfill the law of God. With

²⁸⁰ Ellis, *Original Sin* 159.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 165–166.

a stronger and more Augustinian view of Original Sin, Methodists are less inclined to accept the Pelagian philosophical principle that deteriorated Remonstrant theology.

2. On the question of original guilt.

For the Methodist theologians who reject the idea that all of humanity is guilty of Adam's sin, no difference is to be found between them and that of the Remonstrants. Not only are their conclusions in full harmony with one another, their reasoning is even the same. Like Episcopius, these Methodist theologians hold that free-will is the basis for moral responsibility. If the will is not free, then the will cannot be held culpable for the actions that it could not help but otherwise do. But if there is no culpability, if there is no guilt, then there is no punishment either. Humanity had no choice but to be the offspring of Adam, but since we had no choice on who our forefather was, we cannot be held responsible for his sin. If we are not responsible for Adam's sin, then we cannot be justly punished for it.

To better understand the Methodist theologians who do uphold and maintain the doctrine of original guilt, recall what I said earlier about the Arminian view of sufficient and universal grace in contrast to that Pelagian philosophical presupposition and the Calvinist monstrosity. The Pelagians err in thinking that God cannot demand the impossible from us, therefore they wrongly conclude that anything that God demands from us, humanity must have the intrinsic ability to fully respond. The Calvinists most rightfully realize that God can demand the impossible from us and still hold us guilty for not complying with what God himself foreknew would not be possible for us to fulfill. Is the God of Calvinism unjust for making such impossible demands? No! For in demanding the impossible God teaches us to wholly depend upon his grace alone. But what an insult it is to God to say that, after teaching humanity to wholly depend upon his grace alone,

God immediately turns around and only gives that saving grace to the elect only! God's grace is universal, and it is given to all. God's grace is sufficient for all.

In other words, Orthodox Arminians hold that God can hold humanity guilty of things that are beyond our control and free-will and yet remain just. The justice of God is maintained since God himself gives the necessary grace to remedy the impossibility, undercutting any complaint or cry from humanity about the injustice of God. Therefore, God can justly demand faith and holiness from a totally depraved humanity incapable of doing either one of those demands. Those Methodists who hold to original guilt follow this same logic.

While it is true that Adam's guilt is beyond our control, beyond our free-will, no cry of injustice can be made against God since God himself resolves the problem on our behalf. By providing his own Son as a propitiatory sacrifice, not only for the actual sins of humanity, but for the guilt we inherited from Adam too, God cannot be said to be unjust. By holding us guilty for Adam's sin, God teaches us to rely on his grace and mercy; a grace and mercy that is given to all by the oblation of Christ our Lord on Calvary's cross. Therefore, nobody is ever damned to hell on account of Adam's sin alone. So, while the Methodists who hold to Adamic guilt differ from the Remonstrants and other Methodists, they all make the same one conclusion: nobody is ever eternally damned on account of Adam's sin alone.

The strength of this view is that, unlike the Remonstrants and other Methodists, free-will does not hold as central a place in their theology. In this Methodist's viewpoint, the universality and sufficiency of God's grace takes center stage. However, this view does seem to be incompatible with the notion that sin can only be a *voluntary* transgression of the law, that free-will is the basis for moral responsibility. Indeed, this view dislodges such notions. Are these

Methodists too Calvinistic or are the other Methodists, along with the Remonstrants, too Pelagian?

Consider the further objection of James Arminius who seemingly anticipated, almost prophetically, such a position: “for as participation of Christ’s benefits consist in faith alone, it follows that, if among these benefits “deliverance from this (original) guilt” be one, believers only are delivered from it, since they are those upon whom the wrath of God does not abide.”²⁸² Thus, even if we truly do inherit the guilt of Adam, only those who have faith in Christ would be forgiven of Adam’s guilt, rendering all non-believers liable to damnation on account of Adam’s sin. To say otherwise is to divorce salvation and reconciliation in Christ, from faith in Christ, something Arminius would not allow.

How is one to reconcile these competing views among Arminians? Is there even a need or necessity that such views must be reconciled? Is my thesis undermined by such a diversity and disharmony among the Arminian theologians? Absolutely not! A confession of faith does not spell out every single detail that a church must hold on to. Rather creeds and confessions draw a fence and perimeter that the church must operate within. While the *original intent* of the *Arminian Confession of 1621* is contrary to the *Twenty-Five Articles of the Methodist Church*, the *actual words* of *Confession 7.4* do not *technically* contradict *Article VII*. By stating that original sin is the loss of original righteousness, it does not necessarily follow that the *Confession* is denying that original sin *could* be more than the mere loss of original righteousness; even though that would have been the original intent of Episcopius, yet the actual wording of the

²⁸² Arminius, *Works* II:65.

document does not force such an interpretation. The two documents can be harmonized by saying that the *Articles* supplement the *Confession*.

Concerning original guilt, the careful reading of Dr. Ellis remains intact, while at first glance it appears that eternal death means eternal damnation in *Confession 7.4*, a more careful reading will demonstrate that Episcopius is redefining eternal death as mere physical death even though Episcopius defines eternal death in a different manner later on in the *Confession*! To a certain extent Richard Watson was correct in insisting that the *Confession* is ambiguous.²⁸³

However, Dr. Ellis arrived at his conclusions by examining the Biblical citations of Episcopius in the *Confession*. By advocating that the GMC should adopt the *Arminian Confession* as their own, I am not advocating that the Biblical citations in the footnotes should be adopted by the GMC. Thus, without the specific Biblical citations in the footnotes by Episcopius, the GMC will be given much more latitude in interpreting the document. Furthermore, the *Articles* are likewise ambiguous on the question of original guilt as I have already noted.

I propose that the ambiguity should be *purposefully* left in the *Confession* and *Articles*. By doing this, the GMC allows breathing room for her theologians to explore this topic further. This ambiguity will allow Global Methodists to choose whether or not they believe original guilt was never transmitted to begin with or if original guilt has been remitted in all by Christ's sacrifice on the Cross. Either way, the conclusion is the same; regardless of differences among Arminian theologians concerning original guilt, their conclusion has always been one and the same: no man or woman is ever condemned to hell on account of Adam's sin alone.

²⁸³ Richard Watson and Dennis L. Hartman, *A Theological Dictionary* (Evansville, IN: Fundamental Wesleyan Publishers 2000) 43. Note: Watson was speaking generally and not particularly on the issue of original guilt. However, the question of original guilt and the meaning of eternal death are prime examples of ambiguity in the *Confession*, although Mr. Watson overemphasizes his point.

Concerning the problematic passage in *Confession 7.5*, this short paragraph will need to be deleted or revised prior to adoption by the GMC. Such a revision or deletion will bring the *Confession* more in harmony with itself (especially 17.5) and with the *Articles*.

Chapter Five Soteriology

I. The Remonstrants

Episcopus lays out his *ordo salutis* in chapter nine of his *Confession*:

1. **What God does.** “First, those things which God for his part decreed to do in us or about us through (and) by his Son Jesus Christ, that we may be partakers of that eternal salvation offered by him.” (*Confession 9.1*)²⁸⁴
 - a. **“Decree of Predestination to salvation or election to glory.”**²⁸⁵“(God) decreed for the honor of his beloved Son to choose for himself sons through him to salvation and life eternal, to adopt, justify, seal with his Holy Spirit and finally glorify all those and only those truly believing in his name, or obeying his gospel, and persevering in faith and obedience until death, and to the contrary, to reprobate unbelievers and the impenitent from life and salvation and to damn them perpetually.”²⁸⁶ (*Confession 9.2*) This first decree establishes the “true necessity” of faith, thus to invert the order and make the decree of predestination anterior to faith is to “take away the merit of Jesus Christ” and to undermine and subvert true religion. (*Confession 9.3*)²⁸⁷
 - b. **“Decree of calling to faith or election to grace.”**²⁸⁸ God “has decreed through his same Son, to confer to all that are called, although miserable sinners, such efficacious grace through which they may really believe in their Christ the Savior, obey his gospel and be freed from the dominion and guilt of sin, indeed also through which they may really believe, obey and be freed, unless by a new defiance and rebellion they reject the grace offered by God.”²⁸⁹ (*Confession 9.2*). This second decree establishes the necessity of divine grace “or of the means necessary for us to yield faith and obedience to Jesus Christ according to the will of God, revealed in the Gospel.”²⁹⁰ (*Confession 9.4*)
2. **What humans do.** “Second, those things which he wholly wills to be done by us through his own grace, if we really want to obtain eternal salvation.” (*Confession 9.1*)²⁹¹

In *Confession* chapter ten, Episcopus explains what humans are to do, what it is that God

requires of humanity. What God desires of us to perform “is fully contained in the

commandments of Jesus Christ” and although they are many and differ, they can essentially be

²⁸⁴ Ellis, *Confession* 74.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 75. From *Confession 9.3*.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 75. From *Confession 9.4*.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 74–75.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

boiled down to “one commandment of faith in Jesus Christ,” but such a faith is a living faith that works through charity. (*Confession 10.1*)²⁹²

Episcopius defines saving faith as a faith that produces good works. While salvation is dependent upon true faith and even though “faith itself is said to be imputed for righteousness to the one who believes,” nevertheless true saving faith must be a faith in which we ourselves work out righteousness and holiness. Faith cannot be divorced from obedience. (*Confession 10.2*)²⁹³

For Episcopius, “faith encompasses the whole conversion of man as prescribed by the gospel.” Faith is not merely contrition and sorrow for past sins, but it is true repentance and a change in one’s whole life (*Confession 10.3*).²⁹⁴ Repentance constitutes three things: 1. Repentance must be actualized, it cannot be reduced to mere emotion or the zeal for godliness, one must take this emotion and zeal and act outwardly upon it, 2. Repentance must come whole heartedly with true sincerity and an honest soul, and not arise out of a conflicted mind divided in its intent, 3. Repentance must be continual, it is not a onetime event, nor is it an event that occurs here and there; rather we must live a life of repentance up till our very death (*Confession 10.4*).²⁹⁵

In chapter eleven of the Remonstrant *Confession*, Episcopius devotes the entire section to examining faith in Jesus Christ. Episcopius defines faith as “a deliberate and firm assent of the mind placed in the Word of God” which is inseparable from, not only the acceptance of the truth

²⁹² Ellis, *Confession* 76.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 76–77.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 77–78.

of the doctrine of Christ, but also total trust in Christ as our prophet, priest, and king “given to us by God for salvation purely by grace” as our one and only redeemer (*Confession 11.1*).²⁹⁶

Knowing and understanding the will of God is not sufficient for saving faith since the demons and the ungodly can understand the will of God and yet not assent and trust in God’s will. Neither is any assent whatsoever sufficient for saving faith, since an assent that does not manifest itself in good works and holiness is not an assent that is salvific. True assent must be obedient. True faith is not a mere realization that my sins have been forgiven (although this is included in it), but a firm commitment that it is impossible for me to be saved apart from Christ. True commitment cannot be separated from actual obedience (*Confession 11.2*).²⁹⁷

However, in order for there to be true obedience on our part, this obedience must be freely given by us. If we will to live an obedient life simply because there is an irresistible power forcing us to will such an obedience, then that obedience is not true and proper obedience (*Confession 11.3*).²⁹⁸ Episcopius, with his exalted view of reason, unabashedly claims that in order for there to be true assent on the part of humanity, then what God proposes to us to be believed in cannot be so contrary to reason that belief in the proposition is “unworthy of being believed.” Despite this, and with a level of self-contradiction, Episcopius maintains that this true and same assent must be open to being taught by God. Those who are godly will understand, those who are wicked will hate the light and rebuke it (*Confession 11.4*).²⁹⁹

Episcopius again stresses that true saving faith that relies entirely on Jesus Christ as the author of our salvation will necessarily obey Christ, produce good works and live out true

²⁹⁶ Ellis, *Confession* 78.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 80.

holiness (*Confession 11.5*).³⁰⁰ Episcopius gives a three staged approach and progression of sanctification: 1. There are beginners who truly assent to the gospel but are still in continual struggle and internal fighting with sinful desires, habits, wants and actions, 2. Then there “are the proficient” who live a more strict life and require less to resist the temptations of sin since they do not so strongly desire it any longer, and 3. Finally there are “adults,” mature Christians who no longer desire sinful things and have shaken off all habitual sins. Mature Christian adults only sin by way of infirmity, surprise or error which does not happen often, only occasionally. For Episcopius, people in any one of the three stages or degrees of sanctification are true Christians. All three stages or degrees are only possible by the grace of God (*Confession 11.6*).³⁰¹

Episcopius concludes the eleventh chapter of his *Confession* by declaring that a Christian can lose his or her salvation and be damned if they do not continue in the way of righteousness and holiness. However, those who do truly fall away can nevertheless be truly restored to salvation (*Confession 11.7*).³⁰²

The bulk of the soteriology of the Remonstrant *Confession*, however, is to be found in chapters seventeen and eighteen. It is here the echoes of James Arminius are the loudest. Episcopius begins by reiterating that people must freely will to perform and obey the commands of the Gospel, yet that it is by God’s grace that such a thing is even possible (*Confession 17.1*).³⁰³ God gives to all of humanity the necessary, *and the sufficient*, grace to effect salvation even if this salvation is never effectuated. In other words, this *election to grace* (which is different from “*election to glory* or to salvation itself”), which is transmitted by the preaching of the Gospel

³⁰⁰ Ellis, *Confession* 80.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 81–82.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 82.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 105–106.

together with the power of the Holy Spirit, is a serious intent to save all who are called, regardless if one believes or not and is saved or not. (*Confession 17.2*)³⁰⁴

There is only one *calling* from God that is effective and it is a calling that is not irresistibly made yet there is another calling that is sufficient but ineffective, namely from humanity's unwillingness to acquiesce. Thus, damnation is entirely the fault of man and woman (*Confession 17.3*).³⁰⁵ For the calling that is indeed effective is called being born again and other similar phrases found in the Bible (*Confession 17.4*).³⁰⁶ Therefore, Episcopius concludes, since it is God who is performing the action through his calling or election to grace, humanity is totally incapable of initiating any action to achieve salvation and humanity must be totally renewed in every aspect of our being (our mind, will, affections etc...) by God in Christ through the power of the Spirit (*Confession 17.5*).³⁰⁷ Episcopius affirms that:

the grace of God is the beginning, progress, and completion of all good, so that not even a regenerate man himself can, without this preceding or preventing, exciting following and cooperating grace, think, will, or finish any good thing to be saved, much less resist any attractions and temptations to evil. Thus faith, conversion, and all good works, and all godly and saving actions which are able to be thought, are to be ascribed solidly to the grace of God in Christ as their principal and primary cause. (*Confession 17.6*)³⁰⁸

Episcopius then reiterates at length that the grace of God is resistible and that a necessary and irresistible force renders obedience meaningless and wickedness excusable from any just punishment (*Confession 17.7*).³⁰⁹ While Episcopius acknowledges that there is a disparity and unequal way in which God conveys his grace to the world, God nevertheless bestows enough

³⁰⁴ Ellis, *Confession* 106.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 106–107.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 107–108.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 108–109.

sufficient grace to all as to beget true and saving faith, regardless if this saving faith is actualized in the recipient. God genuinely calls all to salvation (*Confession 17.8*).³¹⁰

According to Episcopius, there are five acts that pertain to this side of life: election to glory, adoption, justification, sanctification, and the sealing of the Holy Spirit (*Confession 18.1-2*).³¹¹ Election to glory is for those who truly believe and are separated from the multitudes of humanity that are damned; adoption is entrance into the family of God which is fully consummated at the bodily resurrection (*Confession 18.2*).³¹² Justification is the pardon of sins which is only obtained by a living faith in Jesus Christ “without any merit of our own works” (*Confession 18.3*).³¹³ Sanctification is the separation of our lives from wickedness and a true increase in virtue and holiness (*Confession 18.4*).³¹⁴ Sealing by the Holy Spirit is assurance and confidence in our salvation (*Confession 18.5*).³¹⁵

Among those who truly repent and believe, Episcopius believes that there are three orders or types: 1. Novices, who quickly fall away after persecution, temptation, or affliction, 2. Those who remain in the faith and resist temptation but are in the end, for one reason or another, finally conquered by the world, the flesh or Satan and fall away, and finally, 3. There are those who truly repent and believe and endure through it all, up until their very death, or those who do truly fall away but are fully restored into the fold. According to the Remonstrant theologian, the first two typed are only elected, adopted, and justified temporarily; only the third type will truly be

³¹⁰ Ellis, *Confession* 109–110.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 110–111.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 111.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 111–112.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 112.

saved in the end (*Confession 18.6*).³¹⁶ Episcopius then concludes the eighteenth chapter of the *Confession* quoting Ezekiel 18:24 (*Confession 18.7*).³¹⁷

II. The Methodists

IX Of the Justification of Man

We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings (sic): wherefore, that we are justified by faith only, is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.

Article X Of Good Works

Although good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgement; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively Faith, insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.³¹⁸

In *Article XI*, Works of Supererogation are rejected as contrary to the Bible.³¹⁹ According to *Article XII*, not all sins committed after justification is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, therefore a place of forgiveness should not be denied to those who fall but truly repent.³²⁰

In the *Minutes*, one can find concise and authoritative statements of soteriology as held by Mr. Wesley and the Methodists. Justification is defined as “to be pardoned and received into God's favor; into such a state, that, if we continue therein, we shall be finally saved.”³²¹ Faith is the condition of justification and is preceded by repentance and works meet for repentance.³²² Faith is defined as a supernatural conviction or proof of things that are not seen, such as past, future, and spiritual things.³²³ First, sinners are convinced by the Holy Spirit that Christ loved

³¹⁶ Ellis, *Confession* 112–113.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

³¹⁸ Neely, *Doctrinal Standards* 191–192.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 192.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ Wesley, *Works* VIII 275.

³²² *Ibid.*, 275–276.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 276.

them and died for them (justifying faith) and the Spirit bears witness to them that there are redeemed (saving faith).³²⁴

All Christians have such a faith and will be self-aware of it.³²⁵ One may not go to heaven without it.³²⁶ All believers have the Witness of the Spirit in himself; willful sins are contrary to justifying faith, works are necessary for continuing in the faith, however disobedience, and not a lack of works, is the cause of a loss of faith.³²⁷ Paul and James are in harmony with one another, for Paul speaks of works prior to faith which cannot justify, whereas James speaks of works that spring from a justified faith.³²⁸

Sanctification is defined as “renewed in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness.”³²⁹ Faith is both the instrument and condition of sanctification, perfection consists in perfect love.³³⁰ Contrary to the *Minutes of some late conversations between the Rev. Mr. Wesley and others* dated Monday June 25th, 1744, the *Minutes* dated from Friday August 2nd, 1755, Mr. Wesley and his Methodist ministers declare that faith cannot be lost through disobedience; rather, faith is first lost which is then manifested in outward sin and disobedience.

Concerning Calvinism, the *Minutes* declare in 1745:

Q.23. Wherein may we come to the very edge of Calvinism?

A. (1.) In ascribing all good to the free grace of God. (2.) In denying all natural free-will, and all power antecedent to grace. And, (3.) In excluding all merit from man; even for what he has or does by the grace of God.³³¹

³²⁴ Wesley, *Works* VIII:276.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 276–277.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 277.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 279.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 285.

However, the *Minutes* also declare:

Q.77. We said in 1744, “We have leaned too much toward Calvinism.” Wherein?

A. (1.) With regard to man’s faithfulness. Our Lord himself taught us to use the expression: Therefore we ought never to be ashamed of it. We ought steadily to assert upon his authority, that if a man is not “faithful in the unrighteous mammon, God will not give him the true riches.”

(2.) With regard to “working for life,” which our Lord expressly commands us to do. “Labor,” ...literally, “*work*, for the meat that endureth (sic) to everlasting life.” And in fact, every believer, till he comes to glory works *for* as well as *from* life.

(3.) We have received it as a maxim, that “a man is to do nothing in order to justification.” Nothing can be more false. Whoever desires to find favor with God, should “cease from evil, and learn well.” So, God himself teaches by the Prophet Isaiah. Whoever repents, should “do works meet for repentance.” And if this is not in order to find favor, what does he do them for?³³²

However, it should be noted that the *Minutes* declare that works do not merit salvation but are instead a condition of salvation.³³³

III. Comparative Analysis

In John Wesley and the Methodists, one will find the greatest and most successful dissemination, promulgation, and defense of early Dutch Arminianism. While there are different nuances in the way in which they frame their soteriology, the substance of the soteriology among the Remonstrants and the Methodists is the same.

Both Wesley and Episcopus place repentance before faith. Both place faith before regeneration. Do I believe because I am a part of the elect, or am I part of the elect because I believe? Both answer in the latter. Episcopus and Wesley not only agree in their doctrines of justification by faith, both agree -contrary to Luther and Calvin- that we do not receive an alien righteousness that is not our own but rather faith itself is accredited for righteousness. Both make

³³² Wesley, *Works* VIII:337.

³³³ *Ibid.*

justification dependent upon our continual sanctification. Therefore, those who are justified and truly believe, but do not preserve in the faith, will ultimately be damned.

Sanctification, good works, and holiness hold high places in both of their theologies. Both hold that good works are necessary for salvation, not that good works *merit* salvation but rather they are a necessary *condition* that is a part of salvation. Sanctification entails actual righteousness. Thus, Wesley and Episcopius hold that a Christian can truly be righteous and work out true righteousness. Our righteousness cannot be reduced to being merely an alien righteousness. God's grace ontologically changes men and women.

Chapter 6 Ecclesiology and Eschatology

Part I Ecclesiology

I. The Remonstrants

The last five chapters of the *Arminian Confession of 1621* contain the Ecclesiology of Episcopius and the Remonstrants. It is God's will that the preaching of the Gospel be everywhere proclaimed (*Confession 21.1*).³³⁴ God first separated some for this purpose and endowed to them power and authority from the Holy Spirit (*Confession 21.2*);³³⁵ these are the original Apostles who directly received their authority from Jesus Christ and in turn from the Apostles came prophets, evangelists, teachers, and pastors (*Confession 21.3*).³³⁶

However, when the foundations of the truth were fully laid and written down in the Sacred Scriptures the infallible instruction from the Holy Spirit ceased, and what had been laid down was to be faithfully promulgated and maintained by bishops, elders, and deacons (*Confession 21.4-6*).³³⁷

Bishops, elders, and deacons do not have proper authority (i.e., authority by divine right) over one another, yet God is not the author of confusion but order; therefore, a pragmatic hierarchical order is allowed as long as it does not degenerate into tyranny and remains a spiritual ministry for the edification of discipleship (*Confession 21.7*).³³⁸ But if any bishop surpasses his authority and rules himself over others, whether ecclesiastical or secular,

³³⁴ Ellis, *Confession* 117–118.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 119–120.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

maintaining the power of the sword and other abuses then that bishop has ceased being a true bishop (*Confession 21.8*).³³⁹

The church is the assembly of people professing by mouth, faith in Jesus Christ (*Confession 22.1-2*).³⁴⁰ This assembly can be divided in a two-fold manner: those who are truly godly and truly believe and those who are not. The former is visible to God only and is, from our humanly perspective, the invisible church. Episcopius makes a distinction between saving doctrine in Jesus Christ which entails a proper faith and obedience by which one cannot be saved without and other more minor things not necessary for salvation. All churches that adhere to the necessary fundamentals, the bare minimum for salvation, can be properly and truly called churches of Jesus Christ even if they error in other matters not pertaining or jeopardizing salvation (*Confession 22.4*).³⁴¹

The visible church is all those who outwardly profess faith in Jesus Christ, even if some of the professions are not genuine (*Confession 22.5*).³⁴² The true catholic or universal church is diffused throughout the world and those apart of it can truly fall away even though the catholic and universal church remains. No one particular church or congregation is promised an infallible preservation in true faith and doctrine (*Confession 22.6*).³⁴³

The most certain visible marks that manifest outwardly the invisible church of Jesus Christ are profession of faith in the “saving doctrine delivered by Jesus Christ” and external adherence and obedience to the commandments of Christ (*Confession 22.7*).³⁴⁴ According to

³³⁹ Ellis, *Confession* 120–121.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 121–122.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 122.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 123.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Episcopius, any church that tries to validate itself as a true church of Jesus Christ by any other means (such as appealing to its antiquity, popular majority, succession of persons, wealth and material possession etc....) does so in vain (*Confession 22.8*).³⁴⁵ To Episcopius, the church is not merely individual professions of faith, but of those professing individuals coming together in communion and fellowship with one another; besides the preaching of the Word and the hearing of the Gospel, there are two other primary duties: the sacraments and the “exercise of Christian discipline.” (*Confession 22.9-10*).³⁴⁶

Episcopius defines the sacraments as “outward ceremonies...by which as by covenantal signs and visible seals God not only represents and sketches out his gracious benefits to us...but also in a certain way exhibits and seals them to us.” (*Confession 23.1*)³⁴⁷ There are two rites in the New Testament: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The former corresponds to circumcision in the Old Testament whereas the latter corresponds to the eating of the Passover lamb.

“Baptism is the first public and sacred rite of the New Testament, by which all who belonged to the covenant were engrafted into the church by the solemn washing with water without distinction of age or gender and initiated into the worship of God.” The outward washing in water symbolizes the internal washing of the heart by the blood of Christ which delivers us from the guilt of sin and grants to us eternal life. However, this initiation into the covenant is conditioned on continual preservation in the faith. (*Confession 23.3*).³⁴⁸

The Holy Supper symbolizes what Christ did for us on the Cross and in it we publicly testify to our “spiritual communion with the body of Christ crucified and his shed blood”

³⁴⁵ Ellis, *Confession* 123–124.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 124–125.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 125–126.

(*Confession 23.4*).³⁴⁹ The early Dutch Arminians rejected the five following errors in regard to the Lord's Supper: 1. The notion that the substance of the bread and wine turn into the body and blood of Christ, 2. The body of Christ is in any other way(s) physically included into the Lord's Supper, 3. That the cup should be withheld from the laity, 4. Christ is re-sacrificed in the Lord's Supper, and 5. That the cup and bread are to be worshiped and adored. (*Confession 23.5*).³⁵⁰

Episcopius acknowledges that there are other rites in the Bible even though they are not expressly commanded by Christ for all to perpetually do and partake in, such as laying on hands during ordination, marriage, confirmation, public reception of backsliders, liturgical observations etc.... Yet these rites are not without their benefits and should be performed by the church with great benefit and edification. But for these other rites to be administered in an orderly fashion for the edification of the people of God, yet without infringing upon Christian liberty or offering any scandal to the weak, and due to the diverse circumstances of places and time, there must be Church discipline and obedience to the Christian magistrate (*Confession 23.6-8*).³⁵¹

In order for there to be order, there must be discipline (*Confession 24.1*);³⁵² this discipline consists in mutual reproof and correction whenever a member falls into sin which entails repentance from sin or the disaffiliation from membership (*Confession 24.2*).³⁵³ Church discipline applies to both pastors and lay members. Pastors are not to forbid that which is allowed nor allow that which is forbidden, they are to be holy and upright. Concerning the laity, they are not to neglect or willfully disobey the commands of Christ nor are they to disturb the

³⁴⁹ Ellis, *Confession* 126.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 126–127.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 127–128.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 129.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

public order and peace on trifling matters of indifference (*Confession 24.3-4*).³⁵⁴ Discipline is to be done in charity and with prudence and respect for elders and those in authority (*Confession 24.5*).³⁵⁵ Episcopius follows Jesus three-fold model from Matthew 18:15-17 (*Confession 24.6*).³⁵⁶ However, if a Christian is be shunned in this manner, they are nevertheless still bounded to uphold any previous obligation or contract, such as marriage, duties to parents, duties of a maid or servant to a master etc....(*Confession 24.7*).³⁵⁷ This withdrawal is a voluntary withdraw of the church away from the sinner and is not a coercive force of power that punishes the sinner with expulsion or death (*Confession 24.8-9*).³⁵⁸

In the last chapter of the *Arminian Confession of 1621*, Simon Episcopius examines the manner and use of church councils and synods. Bishops and elders are to govern the churches but there are times in which controversy is so great that a council or synod must be called (*Confession 25.1*).³⁵⁹ Episcopius then lists six qualifications, namely pertaining to sound knowledge and judgement in the Word of God, to godliness, zeal for truth and peace, respect for liberty of conscience etc.... that are requisite for the participation in a synod or council (*Confession 25.2*).³⁶⁰ Surprisingly, despite the political events leading to the Synod of Dort, Episcopius still maintained, even after the fallout of Dort, that the secular magistrate should have an input and a certain control in such synods and councils (*Confession 25.3*).³⁶¹ Episcopius then concludes the Remonstrant Confession stating that no secular power can enforce the decisions of

³⁵⁴ Ellis, *Confession* 129–130.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 130–131.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 131–162.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 132–133.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 133–134.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 134–135.

a council by the use of force or against the liberty of conscience of those who descent from the decisions of a council or synod. (*Confession 25.4*).³⁶²

II. The Methodist

Article XIII gives no definition of what constitutes the invisible church of Christ. It only gives a twofold definition of the visible church: namely, the preaching of the Word of God and the proper administration of the sacraments.³⁶³

The sacraments are defined, named, and numbered in the sixteenth article:

Sacraments ordained of Christ are not only badges of tokens of Christian Men's Profession; but rather they are certain Signs of Grace, and God's good Will toward us, by the which he doth (sic) work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in him.

There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord. Those five commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony, and extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly³⁶⁴ of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures: but yet have not the like nature of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, because they have not any visible Sign or Ceremony ordained of God.

The sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about; but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same they have a wholesome effect or operation: but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves condemnation, as Saint Paul saith.³⁶⁵

Following his Anglican tradition, John Wesley had a very strong sacramental theology. The sacraments are not mere empty signs signifying something else (although they are that too) but that the holy sacraments are a means of grace ordained of God. The sacraments are not magical items that convey the grace of God every moment they are performed, but rather they are things

³⁶² Ellis, *Confession* 135.

³⁶³ Neely, *Doctrinal Standards* 192–193.

³⁶⁴ “grown partly” was reversed to say “partly grown” in 1786. *Ibid.*, 194.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 193-194. Note, the citation “1 Cor. XI.29.” was added to the end of the sixteenth article in 1816. (*Ibid.*, 194).

that, when performed, convey the grace of God in a more abundant form than other means of grace. They are “an outward sign of an inward grace and a means whereby we receive the same.”³⁶⁶

Concerning baptism, *Article XVII* states that baptism is not a mere sign differentiating Christians from non-Christians, but it is also a sign of regeneration and new birth; yet infant baptism is to be retained.³⁶⁷ The Lord’s Supper is not a mere sign of Christian love for one another but it is “a sacrament of our redemption by Christ’s death;” in the partaking in the Lord’s Supper we partake in the body of Christ: yet the substance of the bread and wine are not physically transformed into Christ, rather we partake in Christ body through the sacrament in a spiritual and heavenly manner by faith.³⁶⁸

Church services are to be held in a language known to the people (*Article XV*), the laity can partake in both the cup and the bread in the Lord’s Supper (*Article XIX*), Christ sacrifice was completed on the Cross and is not repeated in the Lord’s Supper (*Article XX*), ministers are allowed to marry (*Article XXI*), rites and ceremonies of the church can differ according to the times and costumes of the church (*Article XXII*), the sovereignty and independence of the United States government is recognized (*Article XXIII*), socialism is rejected (*Article XXIV*), Christians can swear an oath (*Article XXV*).³⁶⁹

III. Comparative Analysis

There is more in common between the Remonstrants and the Methodists than what might appear on a surface level reading of the two texts. Both are essentially in the

³⁶⁶ Wesley, *Works* V:188.

³⁶⁷ Neely, *Doctrinal Standards* 194.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 194–195.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 193–198.

Reformed tradition; the Remonstrants having been a part of the Dutch Reformed Church prior to their expulsion by the Synod of Dort, and Thomas Cranmer, who was greatly influenced by Reformed thinking on the sacraments, engraved the Reformed view into the *Thirty-Nine Articles* which Wesley preserved when he abridged the document.

Nevertheless, there are subtle differences. Episcopius essentially defines the sacraments in the same manner as Wesley (albeit with a more covenantal language) but immediately drops the word “sacrament” for “rite” after the first paragraph in the twenty third chapter of the *Confession*. However, this should not be seen as a rejection of the concept of a sacrament. There is another, entirely different reason that can sufficiently explain the change in vocabulary. As Episcopius notes within his own *Confession* (3.4) the words of the Bible are the words of the Holy Spirit, therefore it is better and safer to speak as the Bible speaks. As Keith Stanglin and Thomas McCall note, Episcopius in particular and the Remonstrants in general, held to a high view of reason that could, unaided by the Spirit, understand the Bible, which is perspicuous, which in turn led them to believe that only biblical words should be used in describing biblical concepts and doctrine.³⁷⁰ On the basis of this principle, the valuing of the *words* of the Bible over the *concepts* of the Bible, added to the lack of the word “sacrament” in the Bible, sufficiently explains why Episcopius preferred the term “rite” over “sacrament.”

A further difference is that of emphasis. The *Confession* emphasizes the symbolic nature of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, whereas the *Articles* emphasize the sacramental

³⁷⁰ Stanglin and McCall, *After Arminius* 46–50.

nature of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as means of grace. A more substantial difference between Episcopius and Wesley is on rites outside of the two sacraments.

Episcopius says very briefly and in passing -even relegating it to parentheses- that the other rites in the church are not “deserving the grace of God or eternal life.”³⁷¹ Concerning the latter, Wesley and the Methodists agree, these other rites do not convey eternal life onto the recipient, however, Wesley would firmly disagree that these other rites do not convey any grace at all. The sacraments are not the only means of grace.³⁷² In order to bring the *Confession* into harmony with Methodist Doctrinal Standards, the ten-word parenthetical section of *Confession 23.7* will have to be deleted.

Another difference between the *Confession* and *Articles*, which is of no consequence, is their definitions of the visible church. For Episcopius, the visible church is defined by faith in Christ and obedience to Christ, whereas Wesley defines the visible church as faith in Christ (the preaching of the Word) and the proper administration of the sacraments. Regardless if Episcopius would have approved the proper use of the sacraments as an outward sign defining the visible church, the adoption of the *Confession* would not change Methodist Doctrinal Standards. Like Episcopius, Wesley heavily emphasized holiness and good works, the two Arminian theologians never divorced saving faith from the good works and righteousness they necessarily entail. Thus, by adopting the *Confession*, the GMC makes explicit what was only implicit in Wesley's understanding of faith in Christ as constituting the church. Thus, when taken together, the *Articles* and the *Confession* are in harmony with one another and supplement each other:

³⁷¹ Ellis, *Confession* 128.

³⁷² Wesley, *Works* V:185–201.

the church is where people have faith in Christ, live godly lives, and the sacraments are properly administered. In similar manner, the *Confession* makes known our belief what the two sacraments symbolize, yet the *Articles* remind the Methodists that the two sacraments cannot be reduced to mere symbols only.

It is interesting to point out that *Article XXIV*³⁷³ rejects communal ownership in favor of private property and that Episcopius, in *Confession 15.2*³⁷⁴ rejects the idea that the poor are holier than the rich by virtue of their poverty. Thus, Arminians reject two key doctrines which are fundamental to the system of Marxism. Although, for historical accuracy, it should be noted that Episcopius and Wesley are rejecting *Anabaptism* in their respective documents, though my argument is not diminished since Marxism has restored both heretical notions of the Anabaptists.

Part II Eschatology

I. The Remonstrants

In accordance with the Apostle's Creed, Episcopius affirms the resurrection of the dead and a future eternal life (*Confession 19.1*).³⁷⁵ At the Second Coming of Christ, both the just and the unjust will be resurrected, first for those who are already dead and second for those who are alive at the Second Coming. All will be judged according to their works, whether it be good or evil. Incorruptible bodies will be given to those who died in the faith, those who are alive at the Second Coming will be changed instantly (*Confession 19.2*).³⁷⁶ The current world will be destroyed by flames and a new heaven, and a new

³⁷³ Neely, *Doctrinal Standards* 198.

³⁷⁴ Ellis, *Confession* 102.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

earth will be created where we will be with God happily for an eternity (*Confession 19.3*).³⁷⁷

However, for those who refused to believe and repent, God wills that they should be punished (*Confession 20.1*).³⁷⁸ God punishes the unrepentant unbelievers in this life and in the next. In this life God withdraws the grace of his Holy Spirit that they continually resisted and from this their hearts are hardened and their wickedness increases (*Confession 20.2-3*).³⁷⁹ In the end, God will then throw unbelievers, along with the devil and his angels, into everlasting fire where they will be eternally punished (*Confession 20.4*).³⁸⁰ In the new heaven and new earth justice will dwell and God will be all in all (*Confession 20.5*).³⁸¹

II. The Methodists

The *Twenty-Five Articles* are entirely silent on the end times and the afterlife. There is not a single article on the Second Coming, the Resurrection of the Dead, Heaven, or Hell. There is an article, *Article XIV*, that rejects purgatory. At the end of *Article III Of the Resurrection of Christ*, it is stated, "... he ascended into Heaven, and there sitteth (sic) until he return to judge all men at the last day."³⁸²

In his *Notes on the New Testament*, Mr. Wesley openly admits that his notes on the Book of Revelation are almost entirely taken from the writings of Johann Albrecht Bengel and that, "every part of this (i.e., the notes) I do not undertake to defend."³⁸³ One

³⁷⁷ Ellis, *Confession* 114–115.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*

³⁸² Neely, *Doctrinal Standards* 188–189.

³⁸³ Wesley, *Notes II*: no page number, see his preface to the Book of Revelation.

can only wonder how Mr. Wesley's *Notes* are doctrinal standards when he himself admits that his *Notes* are largely the work of another and that he himself is not entirely willing to defend everything found therein!

In Wesley's *Standard Sermons* no one sermon is given over to the topic of eschatology.³⁸⁴ Yet Wesley did in fact preach on this topic, even though he did not include any of them as a part of the Doctrinal Standards of Methodism. Thus, in his other sermons one can find sermons *On the Resurrection of the Dead*,³⁸⁵ *Of Hell*,³⁸⁶ and *The Great Assize*.³⁸⁷

The Canadian Methodist, William I. Shaw, in the last chapter of his *Digest of the Doctrinal Standards of the Methodist Church* gives a convenient compilation of Wesley's *Notes* on the end times that are scattered throughout his New Testament notes. For Wesley the "man of sin" has not arrived yet even though there is much resemblance of the "man of sin" with the papacy.³⁸⁸ Wesley affirms an intermediate state,³⁸⁹ nobody knows when the Second Coming will take place,³⁹⁰ postmillennialism with one resurrection and not two separate resurrections,³⁹¹ affirms a future bodily resurrection,³⁹²

³⁸⁴ But this is not to deny that there are fleeting references to eschatology found scattered throughout the *Standard Sermons*.

³⁸⁵ Wesley, *Works* VII:474–484.

³⁸⁶ Wesley, *Works* VI:381–391.

³⁸⁷ Wesley, *Works* V:171–184.

³⁸⁸ Shaw, *Digest* 117.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 121–122.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 124.

affirms a future day of judgement,³⁹³ everlasting torment in hell,³⁹⁴ and an everlasting blessedness in heaven.³⁹⁵

III. Comparative Analysis

There is not much to compare between the two traditions of Arminianism since both say little on this issue. Despite this, the few things that they affirm are important: 1. Christ will return again, 2. There will be a future bodily resurrection, 3. Hell is real, 4. Heaven is real and 5. There is coming a day of judgement. Thus far, a very liberal eschatology is excluded and so is universalism.

Wesley in his *Notes on the New Testament* affirms postmillennialism in his interpretation of the Pauline epistles even though his *Notes* in the Apocalypse is derived entirely from a Lutheran Pietist who affirms premillennialism. Episcopius is entirely silent on this issue in his *Confession*. However, both affirm a single resurrection and not two separate resurrections. Therefore, the pre-tribulation rapture is excluded, however, this does not exclude the post-tribulation rapture, nor does it exclude traditional premillennialism (chiliasm).

The entire reason I am proposing in this thesis paper for the GMC to adopt the *Arminian Confession of 1621* is to supplement the lack of Arminian distinctiveness found in the *Twenty-Five Articles*. I generally see the silence of the *Articles* on various doctrines as a deficiency, however, on the question of the end times I see the lack of definite statements, both in the *Articles* and the *Confession*, as a strength. Both documents, when

³⁹³ Shaw, *Digest* 126.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

read together, maintain the basic fundamentals that all Christians should affirm: a literal Second Coming, a literal Resurrection, a literal Heaven and Hell and a literal Day of Judgement. The exact details do not need to be spelled out. The GMC should allow its theologians and laity to ‘think and let think,’ so long as the four aforementioned doctrines are maintained. In the GMC there will be room for Amillennialist, Postmillennialist and Non-Dispensational Premillennialist.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In 1778 John Wesley founded a magazine and this magazine was not called the *Eastern Orthodox Magazine*, nor the *Pietist Magazine*, nor even the *Anglican Magazine*, but the *Arminian Magazine*. In the *Arminian Magazine* and in other works of Wesley, John Wesley self-identified with Arminianism. John Wesley and the Methodists were the greatest successors, promulgators, and defenders of James Arminius and the Remonstrants.

It is only fitting then that the Global Methodist Church, in its quest to restore true Methodist theology, will need to have a confession of faith that can govern the theology of the new denomination. However, conservatives are not revolutionary, conservatives do not make new things for the sake of newness. Rather conservatives seek to conserve the best of their tradition and improves upon that which is lacking. If the GMC is truly conservative, then they will support the idea of restoring and preserving an Arminian Confession of Faith that was written long ago, a confession that is well written and solidly orthodox.

The *Arminian Confession of 1621* written by Simon Episcopius and ratified by the Remonstrant Brotherhood is such a confession. However, a conservative is not a slave to tradition, bound by every minute detail and closed to any form of change. Instead, a conservative preserves the very best of his or her tradition and improves upon it. In Methodism one finds an improvement upon Remonstrantism.

As I have pointed out on multiple occasions in this thesis paper, there are clear and identifiable Socinian corruptions in this document.³⁹⁶ Such corruptions are to be purged by deletion or by correction. The changes I have proposed are not changes for change's sake; rather they are portions in Simon Episcopius' *Confession* that can be objectively identified as Socinian by demonstrating a clear break from Arminius' theology, but a clear agreement with, Socinian writers. Once these corrections are made the *Arminian Confession of 1621* will be in full harmony with the *Twenty-Five Articles of the Methodist Church*.

The ratification of a Confession of Faith for any denomination is no small or light task. Any minor error or overlook can sow the seeds of destruction for a denomination. No Confession of Faith should be adopted quickly and rashly. Therefore, I make the following final recommendation to the Global Methodist Church.

In order to have the best grasp of the Remonstrant *Confession*, various writings of Episcopius and the Remonstrants *that directly relate to, comment upon, and explain the Arminian Confession of 1621* should be translated into English and French so that a more in-depth examination by American and African Methodists can occur. The writings of Simon Episcopius are: *Bodecherus the Simple* (a short, early work defending the *Confession*), *Apology for the Confession* (one of Episcopius main works and *the* main work defending the *Confession*), and *Remonstrant Response* (a response defending attacks against the *Apology*).³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ Namely, *Confession* 1.7, 1.14, & 7.5 but there are other minor changes worth considering.

³⁹⁷ These three works, along with the *Confession* itself, can be found in *Simonis Episcopii, Operum theologicorum pars altera* (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Arnold Leers, 1665), II:48–58, 69–321.

According to Calder and Brandt, when Episcopius first wrote the *Confession* in 1621, other Remonstrant ministers examined it and gave their input.³⁹⁸ If these inputs were put down in writing and are not lost, then these works, if they exist, should be translated as well.

Calder likewise reports that Episcopius wrote the *Apology for the Confession* with the intent of it being representative of Remonstrant opinions in general and not merely his own personal opinions; therefore, Episcopius waited two years after completing the work before publishing it and he likewise submitted the book to seven leading Remonstrant ministers for their intake and approval.³⁹⁹ Calder informs us that Carolus Niellius wrote extensively to Episcopius on the *Apology*.⁴⁰⁰ If these works can be located, if they are still in existence, then they should be translated into English and French as well. Finally, if there are other works by Remonstrant theologians in general that give a *direct* Biblical, theological and/or philosophical defense or explanation of the *Arminian Confession of 1621* or a response to a Calvinistic attack against the *Confession* or a defense of the *Apology for the Confession* against any attacks, then those works, if they exist, should be translated.

In conclusion, James Arminius and the Remonstrants were proto-Methodists, or to restate it in a less anachronistic manner, but with equal effect and meaning, John Wesley and the Methodists were Arminians. Arminians have a Confession of Faith that is on par with the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and the *Augsburg Confession of Faith* but due to the anti-creedalism of the authors of that said *Confession*, the *Confession* was forgotten

³⁹⁸ Calder, *Memoirs* 390–406; Brandt, *History* IV:217–218, 324–326.

³⁹⁹ Calder, *Memoirs* 468–470.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 469.

and ceased to be a meaningful Confession of Faith among a church body. It is time for the Global Methodist Church to correct this 400-year error and to finally establish for itself what 19th century Methodism desired but failed to achieve: the establishment of a Confession of Faith containing the distinctives of Methodism. Apart from a few minor alterations and corrections, the *Arminian Confession of 1621* by Simon Episcopius is in full harmony with the *Twenty-Five Articles of the Methodist Church* and should be adopted by the Global Methodist Church as their own Confession of Faith.

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