John Wesley is said to have expressly given Arminianism a bigger voice, making it ‘popular’. This is why we should look at what he perceived to be ‘Arminianism’. Firstly, I give the full text of Wesley’s general article on the subject. I will then comment in bold font on what he said, following the text, prefaced with ‘Response’.

(Taken from the Thomas Jackson edition of The Works of John Wesley, 1872. The full text is given below)

The Question, "What Is an Arminian?" Answered by a Lover of Free Grace, by John Wesley

To say, "This man is an Arminian," has the same effect on many hearers, as to say, "This is a mad dog." It puts them into a fright at once: They run away from him with all speed and diligence; and will hardly stop, unless it be to throw a stone at the dreadful and mischievous animal.

RESPONSE: Arminianism itself IS a ‘mad dog’, a godless, sly enemy devised by Romanists or their supporters. However, today an Arminian is not necessarily a deliberate Arminian. There are several types with this title: (1) The man who sets out to be an Arminian, theologically and fully, (2) The man who reads and imbibes Arminian ideas without understanding either their meaning or true intent, (3) The man who happens to attend an Arminian church, without realising it is Arminian, and (4) The man who does not care about titles and just says he believes in God. The response to each person must be different and tempered by understanding. But, the response to Arminianism must always be strict and total, for it is gross sin.

The more unintelligible the word is, the better it answers the purpose. Those on whom it is fixed know not what to do: Not understanding what it means, they cannot tell what defence to make, or how to clear themselves from the charge. And it is not easy to remove the prejudice which others have imbibed, who know no more of it, than that it is "something very bad," if not "all that is bad!"
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RESPONSE: Yes, it is “all that is bad” because, to put it simply, it is godless. It is godless because it preaches a false gospel that combines God’s grace with man’s choice or free-will... ‘free-will’ being an anti-scriptural myth. This is not ‘prejudice’, or my ‘opinion’, but actual biblical fact.

To clear the meaning, therefore, of this ambiguous term, may be of use to many: To those who so freely pin this name upon others, that they may not say what they do not understand; to those that hear them, that they may be no longer abused by men saying they know not what; and to those upon whom the name is fixed, that they may know how to answer for themselves.

RESPONSE: Yes, many Christians might ‘freely pin’ the name on others, because they are untaught in what Arminianism really is. This does not detract from the fact that Arminianism is heresy, to be despised.

It may be necessary to observe, First, that many confound Arminians with Arians. But this is entirely a different thing; the one has no resemblance to the other. An Arian is one who denies the Godhead of Christ; we scarce need say, the supreme, eternal Godhead; because there can be no God but the supreme, eternal God, unless we will make two Gods, a great God and a little one. Now, none have ever more firmly believed, or more strongly asserted, the Godhead of Christ, than many of the (so called) Arminians have done; yea, and do at this day. Arminianism therefore (whatever it be) is totally different from Arianism.

RESPONSE: I do not confuse Arminianism with Arianism. Nor do many others. And yet, when we examine Arminianism we see in it the traces of Arianism... for if we oppose God’s scriptural explanation of the Gospel and truth, we thereby oppose God. And, in its false gospel is the denial of Christ’s sacrifice as it really was and is.

The rise of the word was this: JAMES HARMENS, in Latin, Jacobes Arminius, was first one of the Ministers of Amsterdam, and afterwards Professor of Divinity at Leyden. He was educated at Geneva; but in the year 1591 began to doubt of the principles which he had till then received. And being more and more convinced that they were wrong, when he was vested with the Professorship, he publicly taught what he believed the truth, till, in the year 1609, he died in peace. But a few years after his death, some zealous men with the Prince of Orange at their head, furiously assaulted all that held what were called his opinions; and having procured them
to be solemnly condemned, in the famous Synod of Dort, (not so numerous or learned, but full as impartial, as the Council or Synod of Trent,) some were put to death, some banished, some imprisoned for life, all turned out of their employments, and made incapable of holding any office, either in Church or State.

RESPONSE: This summary is far too terse! In reality Arminius obtained and kept his professorship by lying about his beliefs! The various results of the Dort synod are not the subject of this very brief article. We may look at them and perhaps denounce them (probably for wrong reasons), but they do not mean Arminianism is not a foul calumny. This is how the reformers viewed the Arminian stance. They had such a strong reaction because Arminian theology was, and is, invalid and godless, a false gospel.

6. The errors charged upon these (usually termed Arminians) by their opponents, are five: (1.) That they deny original sin; (2.) That they deny justification by faith; (3.) That they deny absolute predestination; (4.) That they deny the grace of God to be irresistible; and, (5.) That they affirm, a believer may fall from grace.

With regard to the two first of these charges, they plead, Not Guilty. They are entirely false. No man that ever lived, not John Calvin himself, ever asserted either original sin, or justification by faith, in more strong, more clear and express terms, than Arminius has done. These two points, therefore, are to be set out of the question: In these both parties agree. In this respect, there is not a hair's breadth difference between Mr. Wesley and Mr. Whitefield.

RESPONSE: See our article on the argument between Wesley and Whitefield! And see my book (‘Tom Got it Wrong’) on the very subtle way Rome taught these same ideas while claiming to be ‘biblical’ (through the work of Aquinas). The first two points are not “entirely false”! Arminianism, in its teachings, actually deny God’s doctrine. Simple as that.

But there is an undeniable difference between the Calvinists and Arminians, with regard to the three other questions. Here they divide; the former believe absolute, the latter only conditional, predestination. The Calvinists hold, (1.) God has absolutely decreed, from all eternity, to save such and such persons, and no others; and that Christ died for these, and none else. The Arminians hold, God has decreed, from all eternity, touching all that have the written word, “He that believeth shall be saved: He that believeth not, shall be condemned:" And in order to this, “Christ died for all, all that were dead in trespasses and sins;” that is, for every child of Adam,
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since "in Adam all died."

RESPONSE: In this matter Calvin is correct and Arminius wrong. Arminianism must twist scripture to make it say thus. They misinterpret texts so that their own ‘free-will’ ideas are met. "He that believeth shall be saved: He that believeth not, shall be condemned:" The problem here is not the text but the interpretation of it. Only those who are elect can believe. This is what God tells us. He also tells us that He chose those who are to be saved from before the world was made... but on this Arminians are silent!

The Calvinists hold, Secondly, that the saving grace of God is absolutely irresistible; that no man is any more able to resist it, than to resist the stroke of lightning. The Arminians hold, that although there may be some moments wherein the grace of God acts irresistibly, yet, in general, any man may resist, and that to his eternal ruin, the grace whereby it was the will of God he should have been eternally saved.

RESPONSE: No! In the matter of salvation NO MAN CAN RESIST! This is what scripture tells us. A man may resist the will of God in almost all other situations, but not in the matter of salvation. Arminians avoid these texts. To suggest that it is the will of God that a man will be saved, and yet the man can resist and end up in hell, is not just spurious – it is blasphemous, for God’s will cannot be altered by anything or anyone. If only one man could resist His election, then God is not God.

The Calvinists hold, Thirdly, that a true believer in Christ cannot possibly fall from grace. The Arminians hold, that a true believer may "make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience;" that he may fall, not only foully, but finally, so as to perish for ever.

RESPONSE: A play on words! A man cannot fall from the mercy and grace shown in salvation/election. But, he CAN prevent God applying His grace to his life when he deliberately holds and teaches heresy, or sins in other ways. Christ openly said that those given to Him (the saved) can never be lost! Thus, Arminius was very wrong and his conclusions are again blasphemous, for they subtly ask the serpent's query, “Did God say that?”
Indeed, the two latter points, irresistible grace and infallible perseverance, are the natural consequence of the former, of the unconditional decree. For if God has eternally and absolutely decreed to save such and such persons, it follows, both that they cannot resist his saving grace, (else they might miss of salvation,) and that they cannot finally fall from that grace which they cannot resist. So that, in effect, the three questions come into one, "Is predestination absolute or conditional?" The Arminians believe, it is conditional; the Calvinists, that it is absolute.

RESPONSE: His logic is sound, for one thing leads to another. He correctly identifies a grave error in Arminianism – that it believes and teaches that salvation is conditional, even though scripture itself tells us it is unconditional! Let me give this summary: Salvation is unconditional, because it is a free gift no man can buy or achieve. But, after salvation, God’s grace towards the man is conditional – upon his obedience and life. In truth, that Arminians do not believe the unconditionality of salvation is irrelevant, because scripture is our measure, not man’s flawed theological systems.

Away, then, with all ambiguity! Away with all expressions which only puzzle the cause! Let honest men speak out, and not play with hard words which they do not understand. And how can any man know what Arminius held, who has never read one page of his writings? Let no man bawl against Arminians, till he knows what the term means; and then he will know that Arminians and Calvinists are just upon a level. And Arminians have as much right to be angry at Calvinists, as Calvinists have to be angry at Arminians. John Calvin was a pious, learned, sensible man; and so was James Harmens. Many Calvinists are pious, learned, sensible men; and so are many Arminians. Only the former hold absolute predestination; the latter, conditional.

RESPONSE: Agreed! Away with ambiguity that “puzzle the cause”! Arminians MUST listen to the word of God and not to their futile minds. As for reading the words of Arminius, well, that is a reasonable demand for those who wish to dispute his teachings, just as it is reasonable that those who shout about their ‘Calvinism’ should actually read Calvin!

The idea that Arminians and Calvinists are “upon a level”, having the same status, is, however, a fallacy, for in the matter of salvation Arminians are both faulty and dangerous, for they mislead minds and hearts and preach a false gospel. Nothing can be more hellish than that. It is not about differences of opinion, it is about a demonic attack on the very means of Heavenly will.
To my mind, then, a die-hard, deliberate Arminian is not my brother, because he is unsaved. Why? He has falsely come to Christ by his own efforts and teaches others they may do the same.

One word more: Is it not the duty of every Arminian Preacher, First, never, in public or in private, to use the word Calvinist as a term of reproach; seeing it is neither better nor worse than calling names? – a practice no more consistent with good sense or good manners, than it is with Christianity. Secondly. To do all that in him lies to prevent his hearers from doing it, by showing them the sin and folly of it? And is it not equally the duty of every Calvinist Preacher, First, never in public or in private, in preaching or in conversation, to use the word Arminian as a term of reproach? Secondly. To do all that in him lies to prevent his hearers from doing it, by showing them the sin and folly thereof; and that the more earnestly and diligently, if they have been accustomed so to do? Perhaps encouraged therein by his own example!

RESPONSE: There is no such thing in God’s economy as an ‘Arminian preacher’... only a man called by Him to preach the Gospel. He is NOT called to preach with a slant, or an added flavour or an ‘ism’! Nor should there be a ‘Calvinistic preacher’ for the same reason. If a man is truly called of God and gifted to the office of preacher, then he will speak as God demands, consistent only with scripture.

Wesley says an Arminian preacher should not use derogatory terms when referring to Calvinists. This is a smokescreen, so that Calvinists do not speak ill of Arminians! A true die-hard Arminian is an enemy of God and must be marked as such... and it IS a “term of reproach”.

In our dealings with men, whether they are deliberate heretics or not, we must do two things... we must tell them the truth and that they are liars (even if they do not mean to be), and we must not treat them with hatred (though we may hate what they teach). We must see them as deluded and ourselves as no better except that the Lord has shown us the true light. Even then, if such men continue in their heresy and add hatred for God’s word or aid others to follow their heresy, we must apply discipline, from warnings to shunning and removal from our midst if necessary. Otherwise, we help them to reject God’s word and to preach a false gospel. Any sympathy is nothing but dishonour.
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So, to put it bluntly, Wesley was very wrong, as was and is his system known as Methodism. His approval of Arminianism is a proof of his heresy. Most churches today are Arminian, especially those in charismatic circles.

Additional Notes

As I show in several of my articles, most Arminians do not even realise they ARE ‘Arminian’! They tend to have been brought up in an Arminian church, which can often be ‘loving’ and outgoing, they experience kindness and friendship, and usually never hear the words of Calvin or of scripture itself given without an Arminian criticism. For these I have patience and ongoing pity and sympathy, for they are genuine but misled by a Roman-fed theology.

But, are they saved? If they have been ‘called’ by their emotions, no they are not; If they think they chose Christ after intellectual activity, no, they are not. And the majority of men can be marked as ‘unsaved’ if they make it evident by their own mouths and actions... and this is how we are commanded to mark them. We cannot judge their hearts, but we can and must judge what they say and do. And when we so judge, we must also apply reason and love, showing them that they are wrong, heretical, and in need of change.

If they will not listen, it is usually because they are afraid to know that what they have believed, perhaps for many years, is heretical. Gentleness is required! Yet, if they continue in their error, which is very grave (for nothing is more serious than preaching a false gospel), then we have no option but to cast them from our midst and shun them. And if they preach or witness the same errors to others in public, we must speak against them, also in public. If they later recant and repent they can be taken back into fellowship.

As for pastors and others who are deliberate theological adherents to Arminianism, our approach is rather different, for we cannot love what God hates. The man who goes out of his way to teach Arminianism is saying that we can choose our own salvation, plus many other serious errors of biblical truth. Such must be publicly denounced and spoken against. He must be warned to repent and to recant. If he does not, he is, to us, as an unbeliever (and may well be in reality).

In the past, I have received a number of argumentative letters and emails, saying “If you say Wesley was an Arminian, then you denounce the whole of Methodism”. Yes, that is exactly what I am doing! Wesley, by his own admission, was an Arminian by choice. Therefore, he was an heretic. This is not a personal attack; it is a biblical response to deliberate error and bad
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Theology.


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