

During my 'non-Calvinist' days, having long been a staunch opponent of Rome and her heresies, when I stumbled upon a book titled *Arminianism, the Back Door to Popery* (Jonathan Warne) I was quite a bit insulted. Similarly, Augustus Toplady had written, *Arminianism, the Road to Rome*, and, *Arminianism: A Jesuit Drug*.

I did not consider myself to be Arminian or Wesleyan, but having read some of the things John Wesley had to say about Romanism and his interpretation of antichrist as being fulfilled in the papacy, I could not fathom how one could see a connection between Arminianism and popery. Consider, for example, the following brief excerpts from Wesley's notes on Revelation 13:

"And they worshipped the dragon - Even in worshipping the beast, although they knew it not. And worshipped the wild beast - Paying him such honour as was not paid to any merely secular potentate. That very title, "Our most holy Lord," was never given to any other monarch on earth....

"And there was given him - By the dragon, through the permission of God. A mouth speaking great things and blasphemy - The same is said of the little horn on the fourth beast in Daniel. Nothing greater, nothing more blasphemous, can be conceived, than what the Popes have said of themselves, especially before the Reformation.

"To blaspheme his name - Which many of the Popes have done explicitly, and in the most dreadful manner.

"...By this the Pope manifests that he is antichrist, directly contrary to Christ....

"...The name of the beast is that which he bears through his whole duration; namely, that of Papa or Pope: the number of his name is the whole time during which he bears this name. Whosoever, therefore, receives the mark of the beast does as much as if he said expressly, 'I acknowledge the present Papacy, as proceeding from God'...."[1]

Similar statements concerning the identity of antichrist are found in Clarke's Commentary and Barnes' Notes. Dr. Ron Cooke points out that in his commentary on Revelation, Wesley "mentions the Papacy over and over again in connection with Antichrist.... The fact remains that Wesley identified the Papacy with the Antichrist [and this is] clearly demonstrated...no matter what else Wesley may have written on other subjects." [2]

I also thought of how Dave Hunt had written extensively on the subject of Romanism, denouncing it as blasphemous heresy, and also debated many Roman Catholic apologists. All that despite his anti-Calvinistic soteriology.[3]

It seemed to me, therefore, an overzealous and emotional outburst to claim that Arminianism was somehow a bridge to Rome seeing how some prominent Arminians of the past as well as many contemporary non-Calvinists had stood and continue to stand firmly against the aberrant works-righteousness of Romanism and the battery of other heresies the scarlet-colored Beast spews from its mouth.

It was not until I understood that underlying all of the mariology, saint worship, necromancy, sacerdotalism, etc., was in fact a common bond with the non-Calvinistic, non-confessional evangelicalism so prevalent today. It is an oft overlooked bond that was present within Wesley's (and presumably Adam Clarke's and Albert Barnes') theology, despite any allegiance to the historic Protestant interpretation regarding the identity of the man of sin. That common bond is *synergism*.

Wesleyan Arminianism may not be pelagian, and therefore should not be regarded as a damnable heresy. But then again, neither is Rome's soteriology pelagian (it is semi-pelagian). However, synergism is what they have in common. So, despite the offense that most evangelicals would take to the allegation that Arminianism is a backdoor to popery, when it is realized that any conceivable theory of salvation and associated *ordo salutis* must ultimately fall into one of two categories—monergism or synergism—it cannot be denied that Arminianism must necessarily sit beside its Papal predecessor under the synergistic heading. In this regard at least, Arminians are at odds with their reformed, monergistic counterparts, and of necessity, *at peace with Rome*.

That is not to say that Arminians are in bed with the Scarlet Harlot, that they embrace Rome's false gospel, or that they are diabolical Jesuits in disguise. Numerous examples can be given of men who are familiar with Rome's counterfeit gospel and stand in direct opposition to it despite their reluctance to embrace reformed soteriology. I was one of them.

Primarily, sound exegesis, systematic theology and Baptist covenant theology worked together to bring me out of synergism. But at least part of the impetus for my parting ways with my non-Calvinist position is my abhorrence for peace with Rome. There truly cannot be peace between Christ and antichrist. Synergism is that common thread that runs from pelagianism through Arminianism right through to Romanism. But the thread is cut at

Calvinism. The cancerous root of synergism is severed by the sword of a truly consistent, Protestant reformed soteriology, and synergism is ultimately smashed by the hammer that is the Word of God (Jeremiah 23:29).

Synergism undermines and eats away at an otherwise grace-centered gospel. The purity of grace is preserved by the bulwark of monergism.

-Nick Sabato

[1] Wesley, J., *Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, The book of Revelation, ch. 13.

[2] Cooke, R., *Antichrist Exposed: The Reformed and Puritan View of Antichrist*, Truth International Ministries, Max Meadows, VA, 2006, p. 431 [Available here].

[3] Of course, despite Hunt's forceful attacks on the papacy and Romanism, he could not fully embrace the historic Protestant position that had identified the papacy as the antichrist because of his prior commitment to Dispensational futurism. I hope to address this subject in a future post.

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