

# Doctrinal Doublespeak

*Samuel Watterson*

Doublespeak is a term inspired by a synthesis of doublethink and the fictitious language of Newspeak used by the totalitarian party in George Orwell's famous novel *1984*. Doublethink is given an approximate definition in the novel: "Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously and accepting both of them." The Newspeak language was intended to limit breadth and precision of expression, better to control people's thoughts (both clearly indispensable in today's contradictory and ignorant church world). Doublespeak, though not a term in the book, is well-represented by the slogan of the ruling party: "War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength." Doublespeak refers to the use of equivocal language, euphemisms or oppositely redefined words and phrases to deliberately evade, obscure or distort the truth.

The past year has been the occasion of many references and comparisons to *1984*, whether fairly or unfairly, and we can all readily think of many popular examples of doublespeak used in the political and cultural arenas. For example, "marriage equality" refers to the profanation of marriage, "transgender woman" refers to a man who pretends to be a woman, "social justice" refers to giving preferential (and therefore unjust) treatment to certain social groups, "mostly peaceful protest" may refer to violent destructive riots, "social-distancing" refers to anti-social staying six feet apart and "We're all in this together" means that we are all staying apart in isolation from one another.

Scripture tells us that this doublespeak is in fact, an ancient tradition. Isaiah warned, "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20). Fundamentally, doublespeak is an expression of the language of lies, the natural tongue of the devil (John 8:44). Therefore, there are many examples of doublespeak throughout church history too, since it is the mode of speech favoured by heretics. Consider Cardinal Jacopo Sadoletto's crafty words in a letter to the Genevans in 1539: "Moreover, we obtain this blessing

of complete and perpetual salvation by faith alone in God and in Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> The wily cleric uses language here that any of the Protestant Reformers could approve, as he seems to be making a very clear and unambiguous statement about salvation by faith alone. Yet the contrived meaning that he inserts utterly overthrows this:

When I say by faith alone, I do not mean, as those inventors of novelties do, a mere credulity and confidence in God, by which, to the seclusion of charity and the other duties of a Christian mind, I am persuaded that in the cross and blood of Christ all my faults are unknown; this is indeed necessary, and forms the first access which we have to God, but it is not enough.<sup>2</sup>

Sadoletto then proceeds to insist that good works are necessary for justification. In the words of the apostle Paul, “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:2-3). Sadoletto concludes, “When we say, then, that we can be saved by faith alone in God and Jesus Christ, we hold that in this very faith love is essentially comprehended as the chief and primary cause of our salvation.” On the contrary, the apostle John concludes, “We love him, because he first loved us” (I John 4:19).

In the same letter, the cardinal also abuses the phrase “in Christ alone,” rendering it devoid of all meaning: “We, being aided in Christ alone, with all divine and human counsels, helps, and virtues, might present our souls to God in safety.”<sup>3</sup> Notice, Christ here is not the only Saviour but merely an *aid*, along with just about everything else imaginable, by which we must save ourselves! Rome has continued this tradition of doublespeak, for example in her more recent joint ecumenical statements with deluded and conniving Evangelicals and Lutherans (or at least Evangelical or Lutheran by name).

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacopo Sadoletto, “Sadoletto’s Letter to the Genevans,” in John Olin (ed.), *A Reformation Debate* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> Sadoletto, “Sadoletto’s Letter to the Genevans,” p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Sadoletto, “Sadoletto’s Letter to the Genevans,” p. 34.

The Arminians were also masters at inverting the plain meaning of words in order to confuse and deceive, and also to obfuscate how boldly and directly they were denying the plain truth of Scripture. Their veneer of orthodox-sounding language made it difficult to identify and refute their lies precisely, and to convict and discipline them for their false doctrine. The five points of Calvinism are a helpful framework from which to see this. Even today, many Arminians will claim to be “four-point Calvinists,” when in fact they fundamentally deny all five points. Nevertheless, they assert this because they provide their own meaning of the points—with the exception of “limited atonement,” since they do not find that adjective attractive or persuasive (which, honestly, genuine Calvinists do not either but for very different reasons, as we shall see).

Working backwards through the “TULIP” acronym (since we are dealing with people who turn the meaning of plain words backwards), Arminians may say that they believe in the “perseverance of the saints” or more usually “eternal security,” by which is meant that people who have made a “decision for Christ” may simply live as they please and still go to heaven—they are “eternally secure,” rather than actually persevering in holiness. The Arminians seemed to speak highly of the perseverance of the saints. In the “Opinions of the Remonstrants” we read,

A true believer can and ought indeed to be certain for the future that he is able, by diligent watchfulness, through prayers, and through other holy exercises, to persevere in true faith, and he ought also to be certain that divine grace for persevering is never lacking ... (Opinions, D8).<sup>4</sup>

Yet this was a facade since the Arminians also taught in the same breath: “True believers are able to fall through their own fault into shameful and atrocious deeds, to persevere and to die in them; and therefore finally to fall and to perish” (Opinions, D4). They did not believe that divine grace is a *power* that preserves true believers so that we persevere in holiness, always being brought to repentance again even after lamentable falls.

---

<sup>4</sup> The citations from “The Opinions of the Remonstrants 1618” and “The Remonstrance of 1610” throughout this article are from appendices in Martyn McGeown, *Grace and Assurance: The Message of the Canons of Dordt* (Jenison, MI: RFP, 2018), pp. 339-349.

That brings us to the fourth point which we call “irresistible grace.” The Arminians spoke highly of grace and even of “efficacious grace.” Again we cite the Remonstrants’ “Opinions:”

We hold, however, that the grace of God is not only the beginning but also the progression and the completion of every good, so much so that even the regenerate himself is unable to think, will, or do the good, or to resist any temptations to evil, apart from that preceding or prevenient, awakening, following and cooperating grace (Opinions, C2).

Some Arminians today will even go so far as to say that this prevenient or cooperating grace cannot be resisted, but rather that it irresistibly and efficaciously makes it possible for everyone to be saved, yet concerning grace which actually saves (rather than simply makes salvation *possible*), the Arminians stated,

The efficacious grace by which anyone is converted is not irresistible; and though God so influences the will by the Word and the internal operation of His Spirit that he both confers the strength to believe or supernatural powers, and actually causes man to believe—yet man is able of himself to despise that grace and not to believe, and therefore to perish through his own fault (Opinions, C5).

This is a very advanced level of doublespeak! The Arminians even had the audacity to describe such ineffectual grace as “efficacious”! As for grace itself, it is reduced from being the almighty power of God to save (Eph. 2:4-8), to being a mere help that depends upon man.

Regarding “limited atonement” the Arminians prefer the term “unlimited” which we would also prefer if we are referring to its power and worth (cf. *Canons* II:3-4), but these heretics refer to the extent of its intent (although usually not, strictly speaking, to its application):

The price of redemption which Christ offered to God the Father is not only in itself and by itself sufficient for the redemption of the whole human race but has also been paid for all men and for every man (Opinions, B1).

Surely, then, every single person is saved?! Here, the massive elephant in the room is the key word “redemption.” The Arminians completely vacate this word of meaning, since immediately afterwards they state that this “redemption” is only that “the Father, on account of that merit, without giving up His righteousness and truth, has been able and has willed to make and confirm a new covenant of grace with sinners” (Opinions, B2). Of course, this is not really a “covenant of grace” at all but a *conditional* covenant that depends upon man fulfilling the condition of faith:

Though Christ has merited ... for every man, yet no one, according to the pact of the new and gracious covenant, becomes a true partaker of the benefits obtained by the death of Christ in any other way than by faith (Opinions, B3).

So, in fact, according to the Arminian fantasy, Christ’s death actually merited nothing for anyone definitely and the redemption is not sufficient actually to redeem anyone from damnation. In other words, the Arminians’ “atonement” is no atonement at all. It is simply a means whereby some new condition could be established by which men supposedly could save themselves, with the *help* of this “efficacious” grace, of course, which can be resisted entirely so that it has no effect. Even when they boast of the word “unlimited,” they raise a smokescreen for who limits the atonement but the one who denies that it actually atones for anyone?

The Arminians presented a half-truth concerning faith since, strictly speaking, not all the benefits obtained by the death of Christ are given to us through faith. Faith itself is given in regeneration, which faith and regeneration are themselves also obtained for us by the death of Christ. By excluding faith as a benefit obtained by the death of Christ, although using the orthodox language of the necessary “way” of faith, the Arminians made faith a condition which depends on man.

The Arminians also claimed to believe in an “unconditional election” but they taught many different kinds of election: “the one general and indefinite, the other particular and definite; and that the latter in turn is either incomplete, revocable, non-decisive, and conditional, or complete, irrevocable, decisive, and absolute” (*Canons* I:R:2). The Arminians also distinguished between different elections, one unto faith and another unto salvation. The “general

and indefinite” election could be described as God *unconditionally* electing the whole of humanity to be saved but, since it is general, it elects no man in particular and, since it is indefinite, it does not actually determine whether or not a person is actually saved. Utterly meaningless, in other words. This is according to the Arminian view that God loves everyone and Christ died for everyone, with a meaningless, powerless love and a meaningless, powerless death. So, in reality, when it comes to election of particular persons to salvation, the Arminians taught,

The election of particular persons is decisive, out of consideration of faith in Jesus Christ and of perseverance; not, however, apart from a consideration of faith and perseverance in the true faith, as a condition prerequisite for electing (Opinions, A7).

When the Arminians speak of God’s election, they actually mean the opposite. They mean man’s election of God. Man chooses himself to be saved, by means of using his free will not to resist the grace which helps him to believe, thereby satisfying the new condition that God established by Christ’s death.

The Arminians were at their most duplicitous when they claimed to believe in “total depravity,” for they asserted,

That man has not saving grace of himself, nor of the energy of his free will, inasmuch as he, in the state of apostasy and sin, can of and by himself neither think, will, nor do anything that is truly good (such as having Faith eminently is); but that it is needful that he be born again of God in Christ, through His Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, inclination, or will, and all his powers, in order that he may rightly understand, think, will, and effect what is truly good, according to the word of Christ, John xv. 5: “Without me ye can do nothing” (The Remonstrance, Article 3).

And further:

Man does not have saving faith of himself, nor out of the powers of his free will, since in the state of sin he is able of himself and by himself neither to think, will or do any good ...

The will in the fallen state, before calling, does not have the power and the freedom to will any saving good. And therefore we deny that the freedom to will saving good as well as evil is present to the will in every state (Opinions, C1, 4).

Yet for all that, the Arminian doctrine was that there are many who remain unbelieving and unconverted, but who are also not totally depraved, since they are able or would be able, with the freely available help of this resistible grace, to do good:

Although according to the most free will of God the disparity of grace is very great, nevertheless, the Holy Spirit confers, or is ready to confer, as much grace to all men and to each man to whom the Word of God is preached as is sufficient for promoting the conversion of men in its steps. Therefore sufficient grace for faith and conversion falls to the lot not only of those whom God is said to will to save according to the decree of absolute election, but also of those who are not actually converted (Opinions, C6).

Notice that the word “sufficient” here does not mean sufficient, since there are many who receive this “sufficient” grace who are not converted. Besides that, the Arminian doctrine of total depravity is reduced to a merely hypothetical scenario: All men *would be* totally depraved, if God did not confer (or was not ready to confer) this grace by which they can do good. Even this hypothetical total depravity is not really total depravity at all, for the Arminians claim that the reason some are converted, and others not, is because some despise this grace which is supposedly sufficient for conversion. Why then do others not despise this grace except that they are not, in fact, totally depraved? This they put in negative terms, but positively: “not to despise” means to have some regard, respect or reverence for this grace, which is undoubtedly good. Put simply, if some are converted and others not, yet they all receive “sufficient” grace, they are not all alike unable to think, will or do any good. Some distinguish themselves from others by not despising or resisting grace. This is a “total depravity” which is either not “total” or not “depravity.”

Enough with the convoluted nonsense of the Arminians! Suffice it to say that such doublespeak is alive and well still today, and can be heard from many

pulpits and read in many books. Beware of doublespeak which may sound good but means the opposite! But the question arises, since people so readily and deviously use orthodox words or phrases with completely opposite or confused meanings, should we then be suspicious and distrust everything that we read or hear? Should we be looking for secret, hidden meanings or doubting the faithfulness of our ministers? Do we need the Spanish Inquisition to get to the bottom of things? Quite simply, no. God sees the heart (I Sam. 16:7), and He knows all the lies and deceptions of the evil one, and He will judge every thought, word and deed (Matt. 12:36).

The wickedness and craftiness of the world does not absolve us of the responsibility of Christian charity which “suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil” (I Cor. 13:4-5). Although we may be “as sheep in the midst of wolves,” we must be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16). Being “wise as serpents” does not mean that we viciously attack and poison those around us with uncharitable suspicions or accusations. Rather it means that, like the lidless (vigilant) serpent, we are watchful but without casting off charity (I Cor. 16:13-14). The great Synod of Dordt dismissed the Arminians after months of having endured their lies, graciously and charitably forborne with them and given them time to speak, write and explain their positions. Johannes Bogerman’s fiery dismissal speech against them was only after they had abused the Synod’s charity, attempted to disrupt and obstruct its proceeding, and repeatedly refused its request of them to explain their views.

Finally, we remember also that despite the devil’s efforts, “Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (II Tim. 2:19). We rest in the comfort that our Lord has told us that the elect cannot be so deceived that we would perish (Matt. 24:24), because we have received not only the truth but also the love of the truth (II Thess. 2:8-12).