

Synergistic systems

A simple, concise explanation

Introduction

'Synergism' means 'co-operation'. It stems from the Greek word meaning 'to work together with'. It is the opposite of 'monergism': 'a single work'. 'Synergism' is applied to theological systems which teach that man co-operates with God in salvation, of which there are many.

Arminianism

- Christ died for everyone.
- Salvation comes by man exercising faith by using free will. [Most say that this faith is human; others that it is aided by grace; but all affirm that the deciding factor is the human will; i.e. self-determinism. Total depravity denied.]
- Man is sovereign in initiating salvation; God is helpless after providing atonement. [Thus there is no eternal plan of salvation. God's decree depends upon human choice.]
- This is synergism, where man co-operates with God. The salvation is from God but the initiation is from man.

WESLEYANISM OR EVANGELICAL ARMINIANISM VARIANT

- An unbiblical, universal, prevenient grace comes first to aid the human will due to the problems of total depravity. It is available for all but only used by some. [This is similar to historic Semi-Augustinianism.]
- Chief source: 'Works of John Wesley'.

HISTORIC CONTINENTAL ARMINIANISM

- The will comes first, then grace (they deny man's inability through total depravity). [This is comparable to historic Semi-Pelagianism.]
- Most followers of Arminius actually went further than Arminius himself did, beginning with the Remonstrants.
- Chief sources: multitudes of books by historic and modern Arminians.

Lutheranism

- Christ died for everyone, justification is for everyone; salvation comes by exercising faith, by free will, and being baptised (baptismal regeneration).
- Man is sovereign in initiating salvation (synergism).
- Man's nature is not totally depraved but part is good by creation. Thus man can resist unbelief and choose to believe the Gospel.
- Chief doctrinal source: 'The Book of Concord'. [Modern Lutheranism denies much of Martin Luther's theology and even the Book of Concord.]

Roman Catholicism

- Christ died for everyone.
- Salvation is based upon human choosing to believe the Gospel coupled with accepting the ordinances of the church, which dispense grace. The church is the means of grace alone.
- Sacramentalism through priestly mediators (using sacramental objects like magic; e.g. 'holy water').

- Sacerdotalism: ascribing sacrificial functions and spiritual or supernatural powers to ordained priests.
- Baptismal regeneration.
- Meritorious works.
- This is synergistic and Semi-Pelagian.
- Chief doctrinal sources: ‘The Decrees of the Council of Trent’,¹ the ‘Documents of the Second Vatican Council’.²

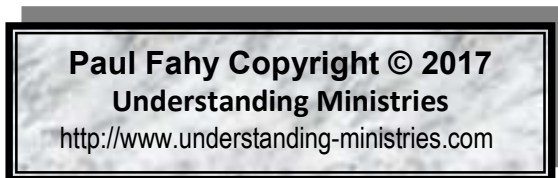
Universalism

- PURE UNIVERSALISM is: ‘everybody is saved; there is no hell’; e.g. Unitarians, Quakers.
- PELAGIANISM: man can save himself through good works; e.g. Pelagius, CG Finney (*‘man regenerates himself’*).
- SOCINIANISM (and others): man saves himself through good works looking to the moral example of Jesus on the cross.
- ARMINIANISM, CATHOLICISM AND LUTHERANISM are variations of universalism; atonement is universal but actual salvation is decided by man. They are essentially Semi-Pelagian. [If you hold that Christ’s atonement is for everyone then, according to the Biblical definition of atonement, all men are saved. Semi-Pelagian systems have to attempt to avoid obvious implied universalism.]
- QUAKERISM: Inner Light³ mysticism (which is a human work and a denial of Scripture); brotherhood of all people (denial of election); universal salvation (denial of limited atonement).

Contrast with Calvinism

- Particularism: The Bible teaches that atonement is particular – only for the elect.
- Grace: Faith is a gift from God to the elect after regeneration. It is not a human work.
- Sovereignty: God is sovereign in salvation; it is based on election (divine choosing).
- This is monergism: God controls salvation alone; man is unable to contribute anything but sin.
- Chief source: the Bible.

Expanded from a footnote in my paper, ‘Lutheranism’.



¹ Council of Trent (1545–63): an ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic Church, which met in three sessions in the city of Trento (anglicised to Trent) in northern Italy. This cemented the Counter Reformation doctrine beginning with a denial of justification by faith.

² I.e. ‘Vatican II’. There were two general councils of the modern Roman Catholic Church, held in 1869–70 and 1962–5. The first (Vatican I) proclaimed the infallibility of the Pope when speaking *ex cathedra*; the second (Vatican II) made numerous reforms, abandoning the universal Latin liturgy and acknowledging ecumenism.

³ Supposed divine illumination of the human mind directly from heaven thus obviating the need for Scripture. In fact it is nothing but occult mysticism.