

## HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

### ARMINIUS AND THE REFORMED TRADITION

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#### I. *Arminius and the Reformed Tradition: A Historiographical Problem*

One of the questions fairly consistently raised by modern studies of Arminius's thought is the question of his relationship to the Reformed tradition and, specifically, to Dutch Reformed theology.<sup>1</sup> To pose the question succinctly, was Arminius Reformed? The answer is quite complex. Arminius certainly understood himself as Reformed—and his appointment both to the pastorate in Amsterdam and to the faculty at Leiden indicates a similar assumption on the part of fellow clergy, professors, and university curators. In both of his callings, first as pastor and preacher, second as professor, Arminius's teaching became a focus of controversy between him and various of his colleagues. At the center of the controversies lay the question of his adherence to the confessional standards of the Dutch church.

As the records of the seventeenth century indicate, the debate over Arminius's theology was intense, acrimonious, and proceeded on an *ad hominem* as well as on a confessional and dogmatic path. The level of anger and recrimination in the original debate can easily be seen in a comparison of the alternative histories of the controversy, notably the Reformed history presented as a preface to the Canons of Dort and the Remonstrant narrative written later by Limborch in response to the Reformed history. On the theological side, the debate consistently

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<sup>1</sup> Citations of Arminius's works in this article are drawn from Jacobus Arminius, *Opera theologica* (Leiden: Godfrid Basson, 1629); and from the translation, *The Works of James Arminius* (trans. James Nichols and William Nichols; 3 vols.; London: printed for Longman et al., 1825, 1828, 1875; repr. with an introduction by Carl Bangs; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986). This reprint of the "London Edition" is to be preferred over *The Writings of James Arminius* (trans. James Nichols and William Bagnall; 3 vols.; Buffalo, N.Y.: Derby, Miller & Orton, 1853; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956, 1977) for several reasons: the London Edition offers a wealth of Arminiana and collateral historical material in vol. 1 and in vol. 3 contains the *Examination of the Theses of Dr. F. Gomarus*, a work not found in the *Writings* (or in the *Opera*). It should also be noted that the 1986 reprint of the London Edition paginated vol. 1 continuously, with the result that the second part of the volume (321–770) differs from the 1825 printing.

raised the issue of the relationship between Arminius's theology and the doctrines of the Dutch churches, while on the *ad hominem* side the disputants consistently raised the question of Arminius's character.<sup>2</sup>

Several Arminian writers of the last century pressed these questions in yet another direction. Given Arminius's profession of agreement with the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, his antecedents within the Dutch church, and his argument both that his views could be supported by the confessions (in his own view, far better than the views of his supralapsarian colleagues) and that the synods and classes of the Dutch church had proposed a national synod to edit and amend the Belgic Confession, these writers argue that Arminius ought to be considered as a "Reformed theologian" despite the debates over his theology during his tenure at Leiden and despite the decision of the Synod of Dort. According to this argument, the denial of the name "Reformed" to Arminius's theology is a retroactive, dogmatic decision, not a historical judgment.<sup>3</sup>

In particular, Carl Bangs has argued "the diffuse and complex nature of the early Dutch Reformed Church, the broad and irenic positions of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism," and Arminius's status as a pastor and professor in the Dutch Reformed Church in evidence of this view.<sup>4</sup> In Bangs's view, Arminius became the representative of an "older, indigenous" Reformed theology in controversy with the "extreme Calvinists," namely supralapsarians, who had "gained control of the church."<sup>5</sup> Bangs has also, and quite accurately, noted that all too many discussions of Arminianism have equated the thought of Arminius to the theology of later Arminianism—with the unhelpful result that the contours of Arminius's own thought and its relation to the historical context of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century have been obscured. As a result, some writers have seen Arminius as "a transitional thinker whose theology was an incomplete movement from true Calvinism to true Arminianism," while

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *The Preface to the Reformed Churches of Christ; in which the Rise and Progress of those Controversies in Belgium, for the Removal of which this Synod was Especially Held, are Briefly and Faithfully Related, in the Articles of the Synod of Dort* (trans. Thomas Scott; introduction by Samuel Miller; Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1856), 67-167; with Philip van Limborch, *Historical Relation concerning the Origin and Progress of the Controversies in the Belgic League, upon Predestination and its connected Heads* (trans. L. W. P.), *Methodist Review* 26 (1844): 425-60, 556-87; and Petrus Bertius, *De vita et obitu reverendi & clarissimi viri D. Iacobi Arminii oratio in Arminius, Opera*, trans. as *The Life of James Arminius in Works*, 1:13-47. Also see the survey of materials in J. Reitsma, *Geschiedenis van de Hervorming en de Hervormde Kerk der Nederlanden* (4th ed.; Utrecht: Kemink & Zoon, n.d.), 237-78.

<sup>3</sup> G. J. Hoenderdaal, "De Kerkordelijke Kant van de Dordtse Synode," *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 25 (1969): 349-63.

<sup>4</sup> See the following works by Carl Bangs, "Arminius as a Reformed Theologian," in *The Heritage of John Calvin* (ed. John H. Bratt; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 221; and *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 21-22, 314-15, 337, 340, 349, 354; a judgment reiterated at some length in his review of my *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy*, *CH* 66 (1997): 118-20. Cf. F. Stuart Clarke, "Theology of Arminius," *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 185 (1960): 251.

<sup>5</sup> Bangs, *Arminius*, 312.

others have seen Arminius “as a clever dissembler who secretly taught doctrines different from his published writings.”<sup>6</sup>

Several other authors—Clarke, Cameron, and Hicks—have minimized the differences between Arminius’s thought and Calvin’s, on the ground of Arminius’s own praise for Calvin as a commentator and theologian,<sup>7</sup> while Bangs comments (with some justice) that any comparison between Calvin’s and Arminius’s theology would result in a “mixture of agreement and disagreement, with possibly no less agreement or more dissent than would be found among later Calvinists.”<sup>8</sup> Lake, echoing Bangs, argues the conformity of Arminius’s teaching with that of the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism, given the “ambiguity” of the documents.<sup>9</sup> What neither Bangs nor Lake deals with adequately is the precise nature of these differences and whether those evidenced in Arminius’s thought, as distinct from those evidenced among later Calvinists, were of a qualitatively different sort—namely, differences that pressed against and beyond the acknowledged confessional boundaries. Olson’s approach to Arminius as a “Reformed” theologian is somewhat different: he argues that Arminianism and Calvinism are “incommensurable theological systems” separated by a “continental divide” with no “middle ground” between them, but also that, in what approaches a self-contradiction, it is only an excessively narrow definition of “Reformed” as defined by the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and Canons of Dort that will exclude Arminius. Arminius’s intention was to modify, adjust, and correct Reformed theology, not to depart from his fundamental, broadly defined Reformed identity.<sup>10</sup>

Certainly, it is of the utmost importance in analyzing and assessing Arminius’s thought that we recognize the common ground on which he stood with his Reformed contemporaries, both in training and in doctrine. His thought as a

<sup>6</sup> Bangs, “Arminius and the Reformation,” 156, citing on the first point A. M. Fairbairn, “Arminius, James,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (9th ed.; New York: Werner, 1903), 2:551-56; and Fairbairn, “Arminius, James,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910-1911), 2:576-77; and on the second point, A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (London: Nelson & Sons, 1879), 105; and Ben A. Warburton, *Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 49ff.

<sup>7</sup> F. Stuart Clarke, “Arminius’s Understanding of Calvin,” *EvQ* 54 (1982): 25-35; cf. Charles M. Cameron, “Arminius: Hero or Heretic?,” *EvQ* 64 (1992): 213-14; and John Mark Hicks, “The Righteousness of Saving Faith: Arminian versus Remonstrant Grace,” *EvQ* 9 (1991): 27-39.

<sup>8</sup> Bangs, “Arminius as a Reformed Theologian,” 216.

<sup>9</sup> Donald M. Lake, “He Died for All: The Universal Dimensions of the Atonement; Jacob Arminius’s Contribution to a Theology of Grace,” in *Grace Unlimited* (ed. C. H. Pinnock; Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), 237.

<sup>10</sup> Roger Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 44-54, 61, 69, 74, 76. Olson’s work, it needs be noted, is not a scholarly essay but a form of popular theology that often misreads the documents it cites, fails to grasp the significance of confessionality in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and dismisses the centrality of soteriological monergism to the confessional churches of the Reformation. What little there is of history in his claim that Arminius ought to be viewed as Reformed is derived from Bangs.

whole must be seen in the context not only of Reformed orthodoxy and scholasticism but also of what might be called the “Leiden theology” of his day.<sup>11</sup> Still, even if one accepts Bangs’s judgment at face value—that a comparison of Arminius with Calvin would yield, potentially, as much agreement and disagreement as a comparison of various later Calvinists with one another—the actual issue is more qualitative than quantitative. Later Reformed theology was no carbon copy of Calvin’s thought, but it did stand in continuity with Calvin on particular points of doctrine and, therefore, whatever the differences, within a set of shared confessional boundaries. What is more, Calvin’s theology was not the point at issue in the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century debate; rather, the point at issue was the status of Arminius’s adherence to the confessional standards of his church, a point on which Arminius expressed himself clearly and positively, acknowledging adherence but also calling for revision of the documents.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the place and use of the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism in the Dutch churches prior to the synod of Dort and the range of meaning attributable to the documents become determining factors in the question of whether or not Arminius’s doctrine ought to be identified as “Reformed” on historical grounds.

A somewhat different approach is evident in an essay by F. Stuart Clarke. Echoing the words of Bangs that Arminius has sometimes been maligned and dismissed as a “clever dissembler,” Clarke begins his discussion of Arminius’s relationship to Calvin with the comment that “this subject can be discussed only on the assumption that Arminius was a normally honest man and a Christian theologian who had a proper sense of his responsibility to tell the truth as he saw it.”<sup>13</sup> Clarke goes on to note that “Calvinist” writers down through the centuries have disputed Arminius’s forthrightness, but such accusations, Clarke indicates, are unfortunate and, indeed, groundless.<sup>14</sup> Clarke offers no evidence for his assertion other than his purportedly methodological assumption that Arminius was “a normally honest man.”

Yet, the divergence between Arminius’s statements about the content of his own teaching and the various complaints made against him, whether by pastors like Petrus Plancius or, later, by students in the university, goes to the heart of the historical problem: can one “only” discuss the evidence “on the assumption that Arminius was a normally honest man,” or must one look at the evidence carefully and allow the historical record itself to determine whether Arminius was entirely

<sup>11</sup> See Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 23-25, 43-47, 49-50; and Keith D. Stanglin, *Arminius and the Assurance of Salvation: The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603-1609* (Brill’s Series in Church History 27; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007), 36-70, 236-44.

<sup>12</sup> Bangs, “Arminius as a Reformed Theologian,” 216; cf. Clarke, “Arminius’s Understanding of Calvin,” 28-29; and Lake, “He Died for All,” 236-37.

<sup>13</sup> Clarke, “Arminius’s Understanding of Calvin,” 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. Bangs, “Arminius as a Reformed Theologian,” 215-16; Bangs, *Arminius*, 252-53; Hicks, “The Righteousness of Saving Faith,” 29, 37.

forthcoming? And certainly there is a significant difference between clever, presumably premeditated deceit and the various forms of misrepresentation or partial statement that occur in the heat of a politically as well as theologically charged debate. The question concerning the relationship between Arminius's defensive statements concerning his teaching and the actual substance of his theology remain as much a part of the historical record as does the question of his relationship to the Reformed tradition.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, these two questions are aspects of the same problem.

There was, surely, considerable rancor on both sides of the debate over Arminius's teaching. The entire course of the debate was characterized by charges and counter statements: angry attacks claiming Arminius's heterodoxy, specifically his failure to preach and teach within the bounds of the Reformed confessions, followed by Arminius's protestations to the contrary;<sup>16</sup> claims from students that Arminius had explicitly undermined the teaching of major Reformed thinkers like Calvin, Beza, and Zanchi, while at the same time praising the views of Castellio, Socinus, Aquinas, Molina, and Suárez, followed by Arminius's denials;<sup>17</sup> claims from embittered colleagues in the University that he had strayed from the norms of Reformed theology on matters of predestination, providence, grace, justification, and the doctrine of Christ, followed again by protestation on Arminius's part and, then, finally, by his broad and detailed *Declaration of Sentiments* on the debated issues.<sup>18</sup> If Arminius was totally honest in these matters, then his accusers were not. If there was any justice in their accusations, then Arminius was not totally forthcoming.

I propose here to examine the evidence related to the identification of Arminius as Reformed on four specific issues: the nature and character of Reformed confessional standards in the Netherlands before the Arminian controversy; the relationship between Arminius's thought and the Reformed theology of his era, with reference both to predecessors and to the developing theology of the Leiden faculty in his time; the understanding of what it meant to be "Reformed" in various sources from the era; and the specific relationship of Arminius's theology to the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, as elicited from his own arguments and the confessional documents contextually interpreted. The issue of Arminius's and his adversaries' forthrightness must appear in the discussion, given the accusations and counter accusations in the documents themselves, but such claims clearly do not belong to the criteria upon which the confessionality of Arminius's theology is to be assessed: rather

<sup>15</sup> Compare the accounts in *Preface to the Reformed Churches*, 69-70, 72-74, 85-86, 90-91, 93-97; and *Historical Relation*, 432-33, 435-37, 441-44.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Caspar Brandt, *The Life of James Arminius, D.D.* (trans. John Guthrie; introduction by Thomas Summers; Nashville: Stevenson & Owen, 1857), 60-111; with Bangs, *Arminius*, 252-83.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Christian Sepp, *Het Godgeleerd onderwijs in Nederland gedurende de 16e en 17e eeuw* (2 vols.; Leiden: de Breuk & Smits, 1873-1874), 1:118-19; Brandt, *Life*, 298-300.

<sup>18</sup> Jacob Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae auctoris horum operum de praedestinatione, providentia Dei, libero arbitrio, gratia Dei, divinitate Filii Dei, & de iustificatione hominis coram Deo*, in *Opera*, 91-133 = *Declaration of the Sentiments of Arminius, delivered before the States of Holland*, in *Works*, 1:580-732; *Writings*, 1:193-275.

they serve as a gauge to the highly charged political and ecclesial context of the debates and to the difficulty of identifying tendencies in the thought of a professor whose works were largely unpublished and whose accusers had to rest on reportage and complaint.

## II. *Reformed Confessions and Synods in the Netherlands Prior to Arminius*

The acceptance of the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism as normative documents by various synods of the Dutch Protestant churches in the latter quarter of the sixteenth century is usually identified as the point at which the Reformation in the Netherlands took on a clearly Reformed or "Calvinist" accent.<sup>19</sup> Quite typical of the recent scholarship on Arminius is a dual approach to the confessional problem: on the one hand, the authority and significance of the confessions prior to the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) are minimized, while on the other, Arminius's acceptance of the confessions is consistently noted and his interest in revision not understood as raising questions concerning his subscription.<sup>20</sup> That each of these approaches would seem to render the other unnecessary to the confessional vindication of Arminius, I pass over without further comment. On the Reformed side of the argument, of course, the fullness and precision of Arminius's subscription were questioned, and the confessions themselves were assumed to have been normative since the time of their introduction in the synods "under the cross."

By nearly all accounts, including that of the seventeenth-century Remonstrant Gerard Brandt, the Belgic Confession was the primary confessional document of the Dutch Reformed churches as they developed into the national church of the Netherlands in the second half of the sixteenth century.<sup>21</sup> Written in 1561 by Guy de Brès and published in the same year at Rouen, the "Confession of faith, made . . . by the faithful . . . in the low countries"<sup>22</sup> was adopted as the standard of faith by the synods of Antwerp (1566), Wesel (1568), Emden (1571), Dordrecht (1574, 1578), Middelburg (1581), and Den Haag (1586). At

<sup>19</sup> See Reitsma, *Geschiedenis van de Hervorming*, 160-236; cf. A. W. Harrison, *The Beginnings of Arminianism to the Synod of Dort* (London: University of London Press, 1926), 12-13.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Hoenderdaal, "De Kekordelijke Kant van de Dordtse Synode," 349-50; with Bangs, "Arminius and the Reformation," 160, 163-64; Bangs, "Arminius as a Reformed Theologian," 211-12, 217-20; Wood, "Declaration of Sentiments," 117-18; Lake, "He Died for All," 236-37.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Gerard Brandt, *The History of the Reformation and Other Ecclesiastical Transactions in and about the Low Countries: From the Beginning of the Eighth Century, down to the Famous Synod of Dort* (4 vols.; London: n.p., 1720-1723; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1979), 1:405-6.

<sup>22</sup> *Confession de foy, faite d'un commun accord par les fideles qui conversent es pays bas, lesquels desirent vivre selon la pureté de l'Evangile de nostre Seigneur Jesus Christ* (Rouen: Abel Clémence, 1561). See the historical discussion in Philip Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1:504-8; and the text in 3:382-436; note that Schaff did not know of the 1561 printing. The various texts are collated and compared in J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften: In authentieke teksten met inleiding en tekstvergelijkingen* (Amsterdam: Bolland, 1976); also see Bakhuizen van den Brink, "Quelques notes sur l'histoire de la Confession des Pays-Bas en 1561 et en 1566," in *Ecclesia II* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1966), 296-308.

Antwerp (1566), Wesel (1568), Emden (1571), and Dordrecht (1578), the Heidelberg Catechism was also accorded a symbolic or confessional status.<sup>23</sup>

In recent scholarship, however, on grounds of a strict reading of church order, Hoenderdaal has relativized the authority of these and other synods held before 1618 by noting that most did not derive their authority from the States General or provide universal representation to Dutch Protestants and that two of them (Wesel and Emden) were held outside the borders of the Netherlands, and thus are not to be considered "National Synods" even by the standards of the day. The one synod that qualified as "national" was the synod held at Den Haag in 1586, but this synod, Hoenderdaal argues, was so under the power of the Earl of Leicester that its decisions were later viewed as less than binding.<sup>24</sup> These synods, Bangs concludes, "were less than universal in character and less than compelling in authority."<sup>25</sup>

This interpretation of the status of the sixteenth-century synods represents, at the very least, a revisionist reading of the documents: the older histories and collections of *Acta* and *Kerkordeningen* consistently distinguish the synods "under the cross," namely, Tours (1563), Tournai (1563), Anvers (1563), Antwerp (1563, 1564, 1565, 1566), Wesel (1568), Emden (1571), from the "provincial" or "particular synods," namely, Edam (1572), Alkmaar (1573), Dordrecht (1574), Harderwijk (1580), Middelburg (1591), and Utrecht (1612), and from the "national" or "general synods," namely, Dordrecht (1578), Middelburg (1581), Den Haag (1586), and Dordrecht (1618–1619).<sup>26</sup>

Those held from 1563 to 1566 are all, strictly speaking, Belgic or Walloon synods, the records of which are in French. And like the congregations that called them, these synods all met covertly, referring to their churches by secret names—such as the "Rose tree" at Ryssel, the "Vineyard" at Antwerp, the "Sword" at Ghent, and the "Olive tree" at Bergen—in order to avoid capture and persecution at the hands of the Spaniards. These synods are all preparatory to the rise of the Reformed church in the Netherlands. Little remains of

<sup>23</sup> See F. L. Rutgers, *Acta van de Nederlandsche Synoden der zestiende Eeuw* (Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1889); and C. Hooijer, *Oude Kerkordeningen der Nederlandsche Hervormde Gemeenten (1563–1638) . . . verzameld en met Inleidingen voorzien* (Zalt-Bommel: Joh. Noman en Zoon, 1865). Cf. Maurice G. Hansen, *The Reformed Church in the Netherlands: Traced from A.D. 1340 to A.D. 1840, in Short Historical Sketches* (New York: Board of Publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1884), 60, 77, 84, 87–88, 102; with B. Glasius, *Geschiedenis der Nationale Synode, in 1618 en 1619 gehouden te Dordrecht, in hare Voorgeschiedenis, haandelingen en gevolgen* (2 vols.; Leiden: P. Engels, 1860), 1:36–43.

<sup>24</sup> Hoenderdaal, "De Kekordelijke Kant," 349–50.

<sup>25</sup> Bangs, "Arminius as a Reformed Theologian," 212.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Rutgers, *Acta van de Nederlandsche Synoden* 120–220 (Provinciale Synode te Dordrecht); 221–338 (Nationale Synode te Dordrecht), etc.; with Hooijer, *Oude Kerkordeningen*, 1–82 (synoden onder het kruis); 83–112 (provinciale synode, gehouden te Dordrecht); 132–70 (nationale synode, gehouden te Dordrecht), etc.; cf. Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford History of Early Modern Europe; New York: Clarendon Press, 1995), 164, 367–71; Reitsma, *Geschiedenis van de Hervorming*, 165–66; and Hansen, *Reformed Church in the Netherlands*, 57, 76.

the *acta* of the earliest of these meetings.<sup>27</sup> The Synod of Antwerp (1566) marks the beginning of the official status of the Belgic Confession. It was there that de Brès' work was transcribed by Franciscus Junius, edited, and adopted as normative for the churches in the Low Countries.<sup>28</sup>

The synods of Wesel and Emden stand as Dutch synods that attempted to represent the church of the Dutch Reformation and to solidify its doctrine and polity in an era of intense warfare. They met beyond the borders because of the Spanish occupation. It is undeniable that in all of these synods the confessional Reformed faith was affirmed, typically in the form of the Belgic Confession. At both Wesel and Emden the revised Belgic Confession was affirmed as the norm for both French- and Dutch-speaking churches, while the Geneva Catechism was identified for use in the French-speaking and the Heidelberg Catechism in the Dutch-speaking churches.<sup>29</sup> To claim, on the grounds of the secrecy and exile imposed on these synods by the Spanish occupation and persecution, that they "were less than universal in character and less than compelling in authority" is hardly acceptable.<sup>30</sup>

Wesel and Emden were representative gatherings of Dutch clergy that had a national status beyond that of the synods "under the cross." The former does not quite meet the criteria of an official "national synod," but can be called a "national convocation." The latter, however, has been typically identified by modern historians as, *de facto*, the first national synod on the grounds of its orderly calling, its representative character, and its normative decisions concerning the Confession and Catechism.<sup>31</sup> At the very least, Emden can be identified, if not as the first official "national synod," certainly as "the first full synod of the Netherlands Reformed Church."<sup>32</sup>

It is apparent that the majority of clergy at these synods were of a Reformed confessional persuasion, although a minority existed that did not hold certain tenets of the Reformed faith, notably the Reformed doctrine of predestination and various related doctrines concerning grace and free choice. To complicate matters, it is also clear that the majority of the population, although warmed to the anti-Roman, just as to the anti-Spanish cause, was not committed to a strict confessionality. There was, in short, a significant difference between clergy and laity over the meaning of reform in the church, indeed, over the implications of being "Reformed." This complication gave rise to dissensions, specifically dissent among the clergy, with a smaller number continuing to advocate positions

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hooijer, *Oude Kerkordeningen*, 7, 9, 12-14, 19-20, 22-23 for the records of the synods; with Hansen, *Reformed Church in the Netherlands*, 55-56.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Hooijer, *Oude Kerkordeningen*, 23; Hansen, *Reformed Church in the Netherlands*, 55-56, 60.

<sup>29</sup> *Acta ofte handelingen der Versamelinghe der Nederlandsche Kerken die onder 't Cruys sitten . . . gehouden tot Wesel . . . 1568*, Articles 2.8 and 3.2; and *Acta ofte handelingen der Versamelinghe der Nederlandsche Kerken die onder 't Cruys sitten . . . gehouden tot Emden . . . 1571*, Articles 2 and 5, in Hooijer, *Oude Kerkordeningen*, 37, 41, 67.

<sup>30</sup> Contra Bangs, "Arminius as a Reformed Theologian," 212.

<sup>31</sup> Reitsma, *Geschiedenis van de Hervorming*, 164-66.

<sup>32</sup> Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 164.

that did not easily comport with the Reformed confessions and catechisms, but which were quite acceptable among the laity, including burghers in many of the towns and cities.<sup>33</sup>

The confessional and catechetical documents chosen by the synods place them fully in the Reformed tradition and bear witness to the process of confessionalization that gathered momentum with the Dutch Revolt. Brandt states as much in his initial discussion of the inception of “Reformed” preaching in the Netherlands. The discussion is positioned, significantly, at the end of the account of 1573, corresponding with Alva’s resignation and the brief lull in hostility as Don Luis de Requesens succeeded to the post. It was in this context that the provincial synods met at Edam (August 1572), Alkmaar (March 1573), and in south Holland (1573) marking not only the first Protestant synods held within the Netherlands, but also the establishment of the basic church polity of synods, classes, and consistories, and preparing the way for the first National Synod to meet at Dordrecht in 1578.<sup>34</sup>

Brandt depicts a diverse religious map, with the Reformed, the Lutherans, and the Anabaptists all accorded “their share of liberty of conscience, and the exercise of their Religion in private meetings,” at least as far as the Dutch authorities were concerned.<sup>35</sup> Brandt then identifies a variety of religious confession “among such as were usually distinguished by the name *Reformed*,” noting two ministers, John Ysbrandtson and Clement Martenson, who opposed “Calvin’s” doctrine of predestination. Martenson, a student of Hardenburg at Bremen, held to a Melancthonian doctrine. Brandt comments,

And though most of the Ministers of this country, through the instructions of their Tutors, embraced the opinions of Calvin with respect to the aforesaid doctrine; yet it is not the less certain, that from the beginning of the war, some Ministers, many of the Magistrates, and numberless members of the church were of a different persuasion; nor could it be otherwise, considering the credit which the writings of *Erasmus* had in these provinces, as also the Family-book of *Bullinger*, the Treatises of *Melancthon*, and the *Layman’s Guide of Anastasius Veluanus*.<sup>36</sup>

Brandt further identifies a theological difference between “the statesmen” who had learned “peace and toleration” by “reading the books of *Erasmus of Rotterdam*” and “the Ministers” who “had chiefly studied the books of *Calvin*, and some others.” The result of these differences between educated laity and the clergy is summarized by Brandt:

From hence it proceeded, that the word *Reformation*, or the *Reformed Religion* was understood in one sense by the Laity, in another by the Clergy; many of the latter meaning

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 365-67.

<sup>34</sup> See O. J. De Jong, “De eerste drie Noord-Hollandse synoden,” *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 58 (1977-1978): 190-204; cf. Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 367.

<sup>35</sup> Brandt, *History of the Reformation*, 1:308.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:308-9. Note that the *Family-book* of Bullinger is his *Decades* or *Hausbuch*.

nothing else by it, but *an agreement in all points with their Teachers or Tutors*; but the former, *a religious worship, purged from great abuses, and not too much limited with respect to opinions about disputable points*.<sup>37</sup>

The conclusions of Brandt, the seventeenth-century Arminian historian and apologist, are highly significant, inasmuch as they correctly identify the diversity of theological opinion and correctly (as the synodical decisions corroborate) identify the clergy as largely Reformed in the confessional sense.

One must differ with Brandt only on the citation of Bullinger's *Decades* as agreeable to the teachings of Erasmus, Melancthon, and Veluanus on grace and predestination: Bullinger's doctrine offers not a hint of synergism, whereas the theologies of Erasmus, Melancthon, and Veluanus are quite synergistic—in the case of Veluanus's popular *Leken Wechwyser* or *Layman's Guidebook*,<sup>38</sup> offering a doctrine of conditional election. Bullinger's definition is arguably infralapsarian in tendency, albeit not clearly so, but it is also a doctrine of double predestination, paralleling election with reprobation.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Brandt's placement of Bullinger among proponents of a synergistic view of the relationship between the human will and divine grace most certainly draws on the attempt of Arminius to plead the case of his own synergism by driving a wedge between the infralapsarian and supralapsarian views of his contemporaries. Arminius appealed to Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession, to Melancthon, and to various Dutch predecessors (Gaspar Koolhaes, Herman Herberts, Cornelius Wiggertson, and Tako Sybrants) against the supralapsarian definition of Gomarus,<sup>40</sup> as if these thinkers were all in agreement, and then proceeded to condemn somewhat less pointedly a doctrine akin to that of Bullinger's *Decades* and of the Second Helvetic Confession, without attaching any names to his descriptions.<sup>41</sup>

The provincial synod of Dordrecht, meeting in 1574, determined that every consistory ought to have a copy of the Belgic Confession and that, unless a national synod decided otherwise, the Heidelberg Catechism would be used for

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:309.

<sup>38</sup> Ioannes Anastasius Veluanus, *Der Leken Wechwyser*, in *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica* (ed. S. Cramer and F. Pijper; 10 vols.; Den Haag: Nijhoff, 1903–1914), 4:123–376. On Veluanus, see Reitsma, *Geschiedenis van de Hervorming*, 118–20; and G. Oorthuys, *Anastasius "Wechwyser," Bullingers "Huysboek," en Calvijns "Instituie" vergeken in hun leer van God en mensch* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1919).

<sup>39</sup> See *The Decades of Heinrich Bullinger* (trans. H. I.; 4 vols.; Cambridge: The Parker Society, 1849–1852), 3:185–94 (4.4); in particular, "the predestination of God is the eternal decree of God, whereby he hath ordained either to save or to destroy men; a most certain end of life and death being appointed for them" (3:185). Cf. Cornelius Venema, "Heinrich Bullinger's Correspondence on Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination, 1551–1553," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 17 (1986): 445–46; Venema, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination: Author of "the Other Reformed Tradition"?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002). Note that Brandt's association of Bullinger with a synergistic Dutch theology leading to Arminius and the Remonstrants is perpetuated in J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980), 211–14; also note Baker, "Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29 (1998): 359–76.

<sup>40</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae* 1, in *Opera*, 105, 115 (*Works*, 1:622, 642–43).

<sup>41</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae* 1, in *Opera*, 116–18 (*Works*, 1:645–51).

instruction in all the churches.<sup>42</sup> The second Synod of Dordrecht (1578) entitled its proceedings *Acta ofte handelinge des Nationalen Synodi der Nederlandschen Duytschen ende Walschen Kerken soo wel inlandischen als wtländischen*: it clearly viewed itself as a “national synod.” In addition, its concluding register of delegations identifies the Synod of Dordrecht as consisting in delegates from twenty-four *particuliere Synoden*, representing Holland, South Holland, Zeeland, Brabant, ‘t Graafschap van Valkenburg, Gelderland, Het Overquartier, Utrecht, West Vriesland, Groningerland, Overyssle, Vlaanderen, the Walloon churches, and the exiled or “dispersed” churches in England and Germany.<sup>43</sup> And, although he notes, probably with some irony, that it was assembled with the permission (but without the formal call) of the States General, Brandt nonetheless identifies the 1578 Synod of Dordrecht as “the first National Synod at Dort.”<sup>44</sup> Brandt also identifies as a “national synod” the Synod of Middelburg (1581), at which the Belgic Confession was adopted as a standard for subscription.<sup>45</sup>

So also the Synod of Den Haag (1585–1586): it was called by the Earl of Leicester, at the request of the Dutch clergy, “without taking notice of, or owning the authority of the States in that matter”; yet, Brandt has no difficulty in identifying it as a “national synod.” It was here that Herberts, a minister from Gouda, and Koolhaes, then an excommunicated minister of Leiden, were questioned concerning their views on the Belgic Confession. (Koolhaes was an eminent reformist preacher who had delivered the first lectures in theology at Leiden University in 1575 prior to the arrival of Gulielmus Feuguereus.)<sup>46</sup> Among other points, the Synod stipulated that Koolhaes repudiate the claim that “the universal grace of God extended itself to all, and every particular man.”<sup>47</sup> Certainly, then, by 1586, the Belgic Confession was understood to be normative and its Reformed doctrine inimical to a theology of universal grace. One can, moreover, read through Brandt’s entire history and find that he reserves the term “Reformed” for the opponents of universal grace: the seventeenth-century Arminian historian does not claim the name “Reformed” for his spiritual ancestors.

It remains the case that these synods were the foundational convocations of the Dutch Reformed Church, that they all adopted the Belgic Confession, and that there were no alternative synods held or alternative confessions adopted. As to the question of whether these synods were truly representative of the Dutch Reformed Church, it is worth noting that no one at the time, not even the Remonstrant Gerard Brandt, disputed the point that they were indeed valid “provincial” and “national synods.” The two earliest of the Dutch synods,

<sup>42</sup> *Acta ofte Handelingen des Provinciale Synodi der Kerken van Holland en Zeeland, gehouden binnen Dordrecht . . . 1574*, Articles 1 and 2, in Hooijer, *Oude Kerkordeningen*, 97.

<sup>43</sup> Rutgers, *Acta van de Nederlandsche Synoden*, 234, 278–81, 315–17; cf. Hooijer, *Oude Kerkordeningen*, 145, 168–70.

<sup>44</sup> Brandt, *History of the Reformation*, 1:339.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:381–82.

<sup>46</sup> Brandt, *History of the Reformation*, 1:312; on Koolhaes, see Reitsma, *Geschiedenis van de Hervorming*, 216–19.

<sup>47</sup> Brandt, *History of the Reformation*, 1:405–6; cf. Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 371.

Wesel and Emden, could hardly have been expected to satisfy Hoenderdaal's and Bangs's criterion of meeting within the country: they were synods meeting "under the cross," in the time of greatest Spanish oppression under Alva. But here one must also question the criterion: these were representative synods at which the clergy and elders had been chosen by churches throughout the Netherlands, and they met in Wesel and Emden only because persecution prevented meeting within the boundaries of their own land. Representative character rather than location ought to define these as national synods.

The three national synods (Dordrecht, 1578; Middelburg, 1581; and Den Haag, 1586) were admittedly not called by the States General, but this criterion proposed by Hoenderdaal and Bangs was certainly not a determining factor in identifying "national synods" in the sixteenth century: no less a statesman than the ill-fated Oldenbarneveltdt questioned the legitimacy of the call of the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) by the States General. Indeed, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century identification of a synod as a "national synod" clearly rested on its composition, namely, of delegates from local or "particular synods": these synods were, in the strictest sense, representative of the national church.<sup>48</sup> What is more, the church orders arising from these synods had also already begun to define the nature of confessional subscription—not, of course, without dissent over various issues raised both by the church order and the doctrinal standards.<sup>49</sup> And Arminius recognized the issue: as part of the resolution of his early controversy with other clergy in Amsterdam, he declared to the classis that he was "not conscious" of holding or teaching anything inconsistent with the "Confession and Catechism" and that he would in the future teach the truths of "the apostles and prophets, as these are explained in the Catechism and Confession, and everywhere taught in the Reformed churches" and that he would "oblige" the doctrine and the ecclesiastical discipline found in those confessional documents "and in the articles of the last General Synod,"<sup>50</sup> namely, Den Haag. Arminius himself, in other words, recognized both the authority of the confessional standards and of the synodical decisions concerning those standards. And finally, the Synod of Dort, which was, by all of the standards proposed by Hoenderdaal and Bangs, a national, representative synod, ratified the consistent confessional decisions of all previous Dutch synods.

To claim that the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism were not the authoritative standards of the Dutch Reformed Church prior to the conclusion of the Arminian controversy and that the synods that ratified them were less than authoritative in the Dutch church is, therefore, seriously to misstate the case.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, it is to propose an interpretation of the confessional standards

<sup>48</sup> See the description of the organization of the Dutch Reformed Church in its early synods in Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 367–68.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Brandt, *History of the Reformation*, 1:370–88, 405–6; with Reitsma, *Geschiedenis van de Hervorming*, 194–204, 207–9; and Israel, *Dutch Republic*, 370–72.

<sup>50</sup> Brandt, *Life of Arminius*, 73–74.

<sup>51</sup> Contra Bangs, "Arminius as a Reformed Theologian," 212.

and of the synods that ratified them that was not held in Arminius's own time—not even by Arminius! Certainly there were theological currents in the Netherlands that did not coincide with the theology of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. As the elder Brandt's *History* amply documents, there was ongoing debate in the Dutch Protestant churches over grace, free choice, and election from the beginnings of Reformed preaching in the Netherlands to the time of the Synod of Dort (1618–1619). But, as even Brandt recognized, in each case, the synods that affirmed the Belgic Confession also held against various forms of synergistic theology: the confessional foundation of the synodical decisions was consistently the Belgic Confession; the doctrine upheld by the gathered clergy was consistently identified (together with that of the Confession) as Reformed; and the basic doctrinal position advanced both in the Confession and in the synods was anti-synergistic, namely, monergistic.

### III. *Arminius and the Confessional Standards*

When Arminius accepted the chair of theology at Leiden and succeeded the recently deceased Franciscus Junius, he met with initial opposition, particularly from his own classis. His appointment went forward when, upon meeting with the curators of the University and the deputies of the synod, he condemned all Pelagianism “without reservation,” indicated that he “approved” of Augustine's refutation of Pelagian errors, and “promised that he would teach nothing that differed from the received doctrine of the churches,”<sup>52</sup> presumably the teaching of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. If it is, as Bangs has argued, unclear whether Arminius ever subscribed to the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism as a minister in the Dutch church,<sup>53</sup> it remains that, in accord with the decision of the National Synod of Middelburg in 1581, it would have been assumed that he subscribed both as a minister and as a professor of theology. Even so, Arminius's own statements concerning the Belgic Confession, including his *Declaration of Sentiments* before the States General, assume its authority and indicate his subscription, if not when he was appointed to the pulpit, certainly when he assumed his role as professor. As Arminius wrote in the *Declaration of Sentiments*,

If it be decided, that [my opinions] are contrary to the Confession, then I have been engaged in teaching something in opposition to a document, “against which never to propound any doctrine,” was the faithful promise which I made, when I signed it with my own hand: if, therefore, I be found thus criminal, I ought to be visited with punishment.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> *Preface to the Reformed Churches*, 72. This datum, from the historical preface to the Canons of Dort, is confirmed by Arminius and his several biographers: cf. Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae*, in *Opera*, 98-99 (*Works*, 1:609); Arminius, *Letter to Sebastian Egberts*, 3 May 1607, in *Works*, 1:609 note; Arminius, *Letter to Hippolytus à Collibus*, in *Works*, 2:690; with Brandt, *Life*, 98, 176, 178-79.

<sup>53</sup> Bangs, *Arminius*, 110, 116.

<sup>54</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae*, in *Opera*, 98-99 (*Works*, 1:609).

Surely, this is the reason that Arminius was so concerned not only to affirm his own allegiance to the Confession but also to argue that the supralapsarians, among whom were numbered his chief opponents, were themselves at variance with the confessional documents.<sup>55</sup> All, moreover, of Arminius's colleagues on the theological faculty—Kuchlinus (his uncle by marriage), Gomarus, and Trelcatius—were supralapsarian.

The question of the relationship of Arminius's theology to the confessional documents, like the related question of his "Reformed" identity and the identification of Reformed confessional norms in his time, remains a significant issue in discussions of his thought. After surveying Arminius's theology and his comments on the Reformed confessions, Bangs concluded that "Arminius felt himself to be in no essential disagreement with the Confession and the Catechism, . . . made no attack on them, but . . . was nevertheless not entirely pleased with them because of their ambiguity."<sup>56</sup> More recently Lake has argued that Arminius was "in no significant way, in disagreement with the Calvinistic tradition on the issue of the freedom of the will," and also that the Synod of Dort "was unjustified" in its exclusion of his followers, given Arminius's ability to interpret the Confession and the Catechism in his own favor: "Both the creed and the catechism were ambiguous enough to allow for considerable latitude in interpretation."<sup>57</sup> This, certainly, was Arminius's own claim concerning his theology, namely, that his thought stood within the bounds of the confessional standards, given the breadth of interpretation to which they were susceptible. The issue, however, concerns the nature and credibility of the claim.

In his *Declaration of Sentiments*, on the basis of the Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 20 and 54, and the Belgic Confession, Article 16, Arminius argued the admissibility of his views of predestination, indeed, their agreement with the confessional documents.<sup>58</sup> Question and Answer 20 of the Heidelberg Catechism read,

*Question:* Are, therefore, all men, who have perished by Adam redeemed through Christ?

*Answer:* Not all, truly those only who are ingrafted into him by true faith, and receive his benefits.<sup>59</sup>

With specific reference to this text, Arminius indicated that it was confessionally legitimate to hold "that God has not absolutely predestinated any man to salvation; but that in his decree considered them as believers."<sup>60</sup> Given this reading,

<sup>55</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae* 1, in *Opera*, 105, 119-20 (*Works*, 1:622-23, 654).

<sup>56</sup> Bangs, *Arminius*, 224; cf. 350; and John C. Godbey, "Arminius and Predestination" (review of Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*), *JR* 53 (1973): 497.

<sup>57</sup> Lake, "He Died for All," 237.

<sup>58</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae* 1, in *Opera*, 119-20 (*Works*, 1:654).

<sup>59</sup> *Catechesis religionis Christianae, quae traditur in ecclesiis et scholis Palatinatus* (Heidelberg: Michael Schirat and Ioannes Mayr, 1563), q. 20: "Num igitur omnibus hominibus qui in Adamo perierant, per Christum salus redditur? Non omnibus, verum iis tantum qui vera fide ipsi inseruntur, eiusque beneficia amplectuntur," citing John 1:12; 3:36; Isa 53:11; Ps 2:12; Rom 11:17, 19, 20; Heb 4:2; 10:39.

<sup>60</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae* 1, in *Opera*, 105 (*Works*, 1:623); cf. the discussion in Bangs, "Arminius and the Reformation," 164.

moreover, the Catechism would present a doctrine diametrically opposed to at least two points in what Arminius took to be the supralapsarian Reformed model, namely, that “God has absolutely and precisely decreed to save certain particular men by his mercy and grace, but to condemn others by his justice” without any regard to their personal “righteousness or sin, obedience or disobedience,” and that God wills to draw his elect irresistibly to salvation through certain appointed means.<sup>61</sup> There is “open conflict,” Arminius avers, between the conclusion he has drawn from the Catechism and the supralapsarian view.<sup>62</sup>

At one level, Arminius was correct: the Catechism indicated only that the faithful were ingrafted into Christ and saved, and, in Question 20, did not at all raise the issue of the grounding of faith either in irresistible grace or in a divine decree. Since the text of the Catechism did not appeal to predestination at this point at all, it did not, therefore, offer any conclusion concerning precisely how human beings were considered in the eternal decree or concerning the nature of the decree as absolute or conditioned—whether the supralapsarian conclusion or Arminius’s own. What Arminius did not mention in his *Declaration*, however, was that he possessed at least one, perhaps two copies of Zacharias Ursinus’s commentary on the Catechism,<sup>63</sup> and that Ursinus, the primary author of the Catechism, had expanded at length, under Questions 20 and 22 on the nature of faith. Ursinus stated quite categorically, “Justifying faith is proper to the elect, and to them all: for it is given to all the elect, and only to them.”<sup>64</sup> Ursinus, certainly, did not assume that the Catechism could be construed to mean that God “in his decree considered” those destined for salvation “as believers” apart from their identity as the elect: those who have true faith and who receive the benefits of God are known to God as the elect and possess both faith and its benefits as the elect.

Bastingius, the other contemporary commentator on the Heidelberg Catechism, also presses the point of the ground of the salvation of some in God’s eternal will. In his comment on Question 20, he invokes the traditional sufficiency-efficiency distinction, declaring that Christ’s work is sufficient for all, efficient only for the elect, and adding the qualification that “a true faith is only proper to the elect.”<sup>65</sup> The catalogue of Arminius’s library indicates a copy of Bastingius’s commentary as well.<sup>66</sup> Arminius’s reading of the text of the Catechism was disingenuous, at best and, given his singling out the supralapsarian

<sup>61</sup> *Declaratio sententiae* 1, in *Opera*, 102 (*Works*, 1:618).

<sup>62</sup> *Declaratio sententiae* 1, in *Opera*, 105 (*Works*, 1:623).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *The Auction Catalogue of the Library of J. Arminius* (facsimile edition with an introduction by C. O. Bangs; Utrecht: HES, 1985), 4: “Tomus primus operum Theolog. Urzini,” which, in all editions of the era, contained the folio printing of *Explicationes catecheseos* 18: “Catechesis Ursini,” probably the catechetical lectures in octavo.

<sup>64</sup> Zacharias Ursinus, *Explicationum catechetiarum, quae tractationem locorum theologicorum* (2d ed.; Cambridge: Thomas Thomas, 1587), 244: “Fides iustificans tantum est Electorum propria, & quidem omnium. Datur enim solis & omnibus Electis.”

<sup>65</sup> Jeremias Bastingius, *An Exposition or Commentarie upon the Catechism taught in the Lowe Countryes* (Cambridge: John Legate, 1589), 22r-v.

<sup>66</sup> *Auction Catalogue of the Library of J. Arminius*, 8: “Bastingius in Catechesin Palatinam.”

definition as out of accord with the Catechism, evidences his own attempt to create a separation among the Reformed between supra- and infralapsarians.<sup>67</sup>

A similar conclusion is unavoidable in the case of Arminius's reading of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 54. The question and answer state,

*Question:* What do you believe concerning the holy and catholic church of Christ?

*Answer:* I believe that the Son of God, from the beginning of the world to its end gathers, defends, and preserves to himself, by his Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church, chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am, and forever shall remain, a living member thereof.<sup>68</sup>

Arminius comments that, in the words of the Catechism, "election to eternal life" and "agreement in the faith" are in a simple parallel "in such a manner, that the latter is not rendered subordinate to the former." The Catechism must be understood as contrary to a supralapsarian teaching concerning election and faith. Indeed, Arminius continues, had the Catechism intended to argue a radically monergistic doctrine of predestination at this point, it would have stated, "The Son of God calls and gathers to himself, by his word and Spirit, a company chosen to eternal life, *that they may believe and agree together in the true faith.*"<sup>69</sup>

What Arminius surely knew, but did not note in his *Declaration*, was that Ursinus had clarified the catechetical answer in his lectures and had quite carefully excluded a reading of the Catechism like that offered by Arminius: in Ursinus's interpretation, the Catechism's answer quite clearly defines "the church of God" as "the gathering of human beings, elected from eternity by God to everlasting life."<sup>70</sup> Ursinus goes on to elaborate a distinction between the visible and the invisible church, indicating that the visible church contains many who are not regenerate, whereas the invisible church, contained within the visible, "consists of those who are chosen to eternal life" and "who are also regenerated." Still within his discussion of the church, Ursinus notes that there is no salvation outside the church because God has not only chosen the end to which people are elected, "he has also elected them to the means, which is to say to vocation, inward and outward."<sup>71</sup>

To this point in Ursinus's exposition, one might still argue, albeit with little routage in the text, that no priority of election over faith has been established, unless one presses the conclusion that faith arises out of calling. But even if Ursinus had not pressed the argument further, one would also have to conclude that he had rather definitively ruled out one of the other points raised by Arminius in connection with Question 20, namely, that the Catechism did not

<sup>67</sup> Evidenced more clearly still in the *Amica cum Francisco Iunio de praedestinatione per literas habita collatio* (in *Opera*, 445-619) = *Friendly Conference of James Arminius . . . with Mr. Francis Junius about Predestination* (*Works*, 3:1-248).

<sup>68</sup> *Catechesis religionis Christianae, quae traditur in ecclesiis et scholis Palatinatus*, q. 54.

<sup>69</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae* 1, in *Opera*, 105 (*Works*, 1:623).

<sup>70</sup> Ursinus, *Explicationum catecheticarum*, 528.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 534.

allow for the “supralapsarian” conclusion that God ordained the means of salvation as well as the ends. Not only does Ursinus declare that precisely this is implied by the Catechism, he also (contrary to Arminius’s logic) argues the point from a decidedly infralapsarian perspective. Indeed, the divine ordination of means is hardly a supralapsarian issue—Arminius himself argues the point in his theses on predestination and in his *Declaration of Sentiments*. The difference between his arguments and those of both supra- and infralapsarians, however, is their assumption that the grace provided through the appointed means is irresistible, in contrast to his assumption of a resistible grace.<sup>72</sup>

What follows in Ursinus’s lectures drives the point home even more forcefully: he inserts into the order of the Catechism an extended discourse on predestination as a doctrine that “arises from the doctrine of the church, and is conjoined to it.”<sup>73</sup> In the course of this discussion, moreover, Ursinus offers very specific comment in response to the question, “What are the effects of predestination?” The effects include “the whole work of salvation” and, therefore, “all of the degrees of our redemption,” which is to say,

- (1) The creation and gathering of the Church. (2) The sending or gift of Christ, the mediator, and of his sacrifice. (3) The effectual calling to the knowledge [of Christ] namely the conversion of the elect by the Spirit and the word. (4) Faith, justification, and regeneration. (5) Good works. (6) Final perseverance. (7) Resurrection to glory. (8) Glorification and life eternal.<sup>74</sup>

In short, if the meaning of the text of the Catechism had any relation to the theology of its primary author and expositor, Arminius’s reading of the text would be fully excluded. In Ursinus’s view, at least, the Catechism did not imply an absence or a denial of the precedence of election over faith. A similar conclusion is to be found in Bastingius’s exposition of the Catechism.<sup>75</sup> In short, Arminius’s constructions of the implications of the Heidelberg Catechism are in fundamental opposition to the meaning of the document as expressed by the two commentators of his own era, one of whom was the author of the Catechism.

With reference to the Belgic Confession, Bangs notes specifically the form of the article on the doctrine of predestination and argues Arminius’s adherence to one of two possible readings of the original text, “prior to revisions made at Dort.”<sup>76</sup> The text in question reads,

We believe, that the entire posterity of Adam, having been thus precipitated into perdition and ruin by the fault of the first man, God has demonstrated precisely who he is, namely, merciful and just. Merciful, in delivering and saving out of that perdition

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae* 1, in *Opera*, 102, 105, 119 (*Works*, 1:618, 623, 653); with Arminius, *Disputationes privatae* 19.6; and Arminius, *Articuli nonnulli* 15.

<sup>73</sup> Ursinus, *Explicationum catecheticarum*, 535.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 540.

<sup>75</sup> Bastingius, *Exposition or Commentarie upon the Catechism*, q. 55 (fol. 74r).

<sup>76</sup> Bangs, “Arminius as a Reformed Theologian,” 218.

those whom in his eternal and immutable counsel he has elected and chosen according to his pure goodness in Christ Jesus our Savior, without any regard to their just works: [just] in leaving the others in the ruin and desolation into which they have thrown themselves.<sup>77</sup>

Arminius had, in his *Declaration of Sentiments*, expressly indicated his conformity to the Confession, provided it was interpreted in a particular way: if the words “those whom” were understood as “believers” and the word “others” was understood as “unbelievers,” he stood in total agreement. He also noted his impression that this article of the Confession was incompatible with a supralapsarian view of predestination.<sup>78</sup> Bangs comments that Arminius saw that the text could mean either “that those who are ‘chosen in Jesus Christ’ are believers” or “that God selects certain persons to be believers”—Arminius opting for the first of these readings, his opponents for the second. Since “no formal decision had been made concerning” the meaning of this article of the Confession, Bangs concludes, “It is anachronistic to read Arminius out of the Dutch Reformed Church for taking the position he did.”<sup>79</sup>

There are two issues raised here by Bangs: one is the issue of the objective possibility of reading Article 16 of the Belgic Confession in each of two diametrically opposed ways; the other is the issue of whether or not a “formal decision” concerning the meaning of Article 16 had been made prior to the debate with Arminius. It is significant that the revisions made by the Synod of Dort did not alter this particular text of the Confession: there was no attempt to edit the text so as to make its meaning any clearer or any more antagonistic to the Remonstrant position. Thus, too, the revisions in the Confession made by the Synod do not indicate any effort to condemn Arminius’s teaching retroactively by the alteration of an article, presumably because there was no need to do so. Glossing the Confession as stating that “those whom in his eternal and immutable counsel he has elected and chosen according to his pure goodness in Christ Jesus our Savior, without any regard to their just works” are “believers” foreknown as faithful, hardly seems a viable construction. The phrase “elected and chosen according to his pure goodness,” although specifically qualified only by the phrase “without any regard to their just works,” does not comport well with any grounding of election on foreknowledge. The Confession subsequently, moreover, identifies faith as that which “the holy Spirit causes to appear in our heart,” not as something arising from our own doing and, therefore, not as something falling under foreknowledge rather than under the divine causality.<sup>80</sup> Thus, the alternative reading proposed by Arminius (and advocated by Bangs) does not comport well with the text of the Confession.

<sup>77</sup> *Confession de Foy* (1561) 16: “just” is omitted in the 1561 text, added in later editions (my translation).

<sup>78</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae* 1, in *Opera*, 119-20; cf. 105 (*Works*, 1:654; cf. 622).

<sup>79</sup> Bangs, “Arminius as a Reformed Theologian,” 218.

<sup>80</sup> *Confession de Foy* (1561) 22: “Le saint Esprit vient apparoir en nostre coeur une vraye foy.”

Nor can we agree with Bangs that the condemnation of Arminius's reading of Article 16 is anachronistic, given the absence of a formal ecclesiastical decision on the precise meaning of the text since, in fact, there had been just such a decision, indeed, several related decisions. At the National Synod of Middelburg in 1581, the gathered clergy voted to require all "Ministers, Elders, Deacons, Professors of Divinity, and Schoolmasters" to "subscribe the *Confession of Faith* of the *Netherland* churches." The same synod examined the writings of Koolhaes, identifying them as "contrary to pure doctrine, and inconsistent with themselves," and demanded that he admit his error. The States of Holland agreed and, on Koolhaes's refusal, indicated that "the Clergy should proceed in their censures."<sup>81</sup> Excommunication followed by decision of a regional synod held at Haarlem in the following year, with the classes of Gouda, Den Haag, and Dort protesting the decision. The synod came to no final conclusion on precisely how to handle the problem of debate over the doctrine of predestination.<sup>82</sup> As for Koolhaes, he had specifically stated in a tract of 1580 that "he would hold for his brethren all those that agreed with the *Reformed* in every point, save that about Eternal Election," that "the word of God did not subject men to the opinions of *Calvin*, *Zwinglius*, *Luther*, and others," and that he held to the belief "that God is by no means the occasion of any man's damnation; nor is man the cause of his own salvation; and that therefore whoever is saved, is saved by Grace; and whoever is damned, is damned through his own Wickedness."<sup>83</sup>

Arminius was certainly aware of the synodical decision of 1585 concerning Herberts's views on predestination and Koolhaes's construction of the text of the Confession, nearly identical to Arminius's subsequent reading: as far as the national Synod of Den Haag was concerned, a universalist reading of the confessional article was impossible. Herberts expressed his willingness to subscribe to the Belgic Confession, provided that Article 16 were not understood in such a way as to render God the "author of sin." In Herberts's case, the magistrates of Gouda and the States of Holland intervened, the former promising to maintain his ministerial salary and shield him against excommunication, the latter requesting mediation and some accommodation of the parties in dispute. The synod agreed to permit Herberts to subscribe with his reservation.<sup>84</sup> As for Koolhaes, the excommunicated preacher had not entered the pulpit since the decision of the Synod of Haarlem, but he had written on the subject of predestination. He was ordered to appear before the synod and promised restoration to his pastorate if he would acknowledge that the Confession was scriptural apart from his reservations concerning reprobation; if he would consent to having his writings suppressed; and if he would declare concerning the confessional article on predestination,

<sup>81</sup> Brandt, *History of the Reformation*, 1:382.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:388.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:370.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:405.

All those who are saved, are not saved by their own merits, worth, or holiness, but by the pure Grace and Mercy of God (which operates the good will in the Elect) and that such as are damned, are damned through their own fault, and that God is by no means the cause of it.<sup>85</sup>

The proposed agreement continued that

if he were to own this doctrine, he should be received into the bosom of the Church, and born with, in what he did not as yet fully understand concerning it; provided he continued silent, and did not advance or maintain, that, The universal Grace of God extended itself to all, and every particular man.<sup>86</sup>

At this point, the importance of Hoenderdaal's view of the early synods to Bangs's argument becomes clear: only if the early synods are understood as lacking normative authority in the Dutch church can one claim that no "formal decision" had been made either to view the Belgic Confession as a norm of doctrine or against a universalistic or synergistic reading of the Confession. But Bangs's and Hoenderdaal's interpretation of the synods respects neither the synods' own understanding of their work nor the understanding of the synods recorded in writings of the era. Arminius's own argumentation concerning the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism presumes the normative status of the confessional documents and, by extension, of the synods that ratified them for the church. Nowhere does Arminius himself call either these synods or the confessional standards into question. The very most he proposes is a revision of the Belgic Confession. And on this point even the testimony of the older Remonstrant histories goes against Bangs's (and Hoenderdaal's) argument. Brandt never disputed the status of the early synods despite his distaste for their results.

It is clear from Arminius's *Declaration of Sentiments*, moreover, that his antagonism to the Reformed doctrine of predestination was not merely an antagonism to the supralapsarian "double predestination" of Beza, his Leiden colleagues, and various others, like Perkins. Arminius clearly set himself against an infralapsarian "double predestination," akin to the language of the Belgic Confession, Calvin's *Institutes*, Bullinger's *Decades*, and Ursinus's lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism, and against an infralapsarian "single predestination," like that sometimes attributed to Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession, despite his appeals to several of these documents against his supralapsarian opponents.<sup>87</sup> Thus, once he had moved through a lengthy discourse against the supralapsarian form of the doctrine of predestination, Arminius presented two other forms of the doctrine, each in his view somewhat less odious, but both in his view clearly

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:406.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae* 1, in *Opera*, 105 (*Works*, 1:622-23); note that Second Helvetic Confession 10, albeit sometimes read as indicating a single predestination, can more easily be read as indicating double predestination—and in either case is quite inimical to Arminius's understanding of the doctrine; cf. Venema, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Doctrine of Predestination*, 95-99.

in error. His appeal to Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession against the supralapsarians only served to confuse the issues.

We also should note in passing the British debate of the decade preceding Arminius's years in Leiden, namely, the debate over the teachings of Peter Baro and his student William Barrett that led to the Lambeth Articles of 1595.<sup>88</sup> Arminius was surely aware of the earlier controversy and of the close resemblance between his views and those of Barrett and Baro. Like Arminius, they argued pointedly against both supra- and infralapsarian formulations of the doctrine and raised the issue that a synergistic understanding of predestination could be compatible with Reformed confessionality, in this case, with the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England which are even more broadly stated than the Belgic Confession. The Lambeth Articles, which were designed to resolve the debate, are indeterminate on the question of the supra- and infralapsarian definitions but clearly rule out synergism.<sup>89</sup>

What should remain incontestable is that, however Arminius and his allies in the Dutch Reformed Church attempted to interpret the words of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, authorial intention and the plain reading of the text by most Reformed clergy and theologians stood against them. To claim with Lake that the documents are ambiguous is to confuse brevity and generality with lack of clarity; to follow Bangs in holding that Arminius was displeased with ambiguity is to avoid entirely coming to terms with the nature of the confessional debate. The problem was not, as Bangs avers, that "the supralapsarians took cover" under the ambiguities of the confessions. The confessionality of the supralapsarians was not in question, and it was Arminius who attempted to argue (unsuccessfully, it must be noted) that the supralapsarian formulations were contrary to the confessions.<sup>90</sup> The ambiguities abetted Arminius's cause, for although the language of the Belgic Confession indicated an eternal election to salvation apart from any consideration of meritorious works and did not specifically raise the issue of election on the ground of foreseen faith,<sup>91</sup> the insertion of such a concept into the Confession would certainly violate its intention. And it must be remembered that, at the same time that

<sup>88</sup> See Keith D. Stanglin, "'Arminius *Avant la Lettre*': Peter Baro, Jacob Arminius, and the Bond of Predestinarian Polemic," *WTJ* 67 (2005): 51-74. The controversy is also discussed in H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 376-90; also note Nicholas R. N. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 35-38; Peter White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 110-17; Mark R. Shaw, "William Perkins and the New Pelagians: Another Look at the Predestination Controversy of the 1590s," *WTJ* 58 (1996): 267-301.

<sup>89</sup> Lambeth Articles 1, in Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3:523-24.

<sup>90</sup> Contra Bangs, *Arminius*, 224, 315.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *Confession de foy . . . és pays bas* 16: "Misericordieux, en retirant & sauvant de ceste perdition ceux lesquels en son conseil éternel & immuable il a eslus & choisis par sa pure bonté en Iesus Christ nostre Seigneur, sans aucun esgard de leurs oeuvres iustes." The text of later editions of the *Belgic Confession* is not significantly altered: see the collation of texts in Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De nederlandsche belijdenisgeschriften*, 96-98; cf. Schaff, *Creeeds*, 3:401.

Arminius insisted on his adherence to the confessional standards, he was also arguing for confessional revision, a point that Bangs acknowledges to be “a curious duality.”<sup>92</sup> Arminius, nonetheless, remains Reformed in the ecclesial sense, and his interest in confessional revision evidences his desire to remain in a doctrinally more inclusive Reformed church: he evidenced, in other words, genuine elements of dissent from the synodical and majority Reformed reading of the confessional documents, but no schismatic intentions.

#### *IV. Arminius and Developments in Reformed Theology in the Late Sixteenth Century*

There can be no debate over the point made by Bangs and Clarke that Dutch Protestant theology in the sixteenth century was quite diverse and that most of Arminius’s teachings, including his synergism, had antecedents in earlier Dutch religious thought and that in a general or colloquial, albeit not a confessional sense, these antecedents had been thought of as Reformed. In addition, the issue is complicated by the fact that Arminius’s own theological training, whether in Leiden or in Geneva, was Reformed and that his teaching on a significant series of points belonged to the Reformed tradition and, indeed, had been formulated as part of the curriculum in the faculty at Leiden during his tenure as professor.<sup>93</sup> On such topics as the nature of theology, the authority of Scripture, justification, the church, and the evils of the papacy, Arminius’s theology appears to be in accord with Reformed theology in general and compatible with that of his Leiden colleagues in particular.<sup>94</sup>

These basic understandings, however, in no way remove the problem that several of Arminius’s views stood in marked contrast to the confessional teachings of his own church, and not merely retroactively in view of the decisions of the Synod of Dort in 1619. Specifically, it is not at all difficult to identify confessional distinctions in the midst of the earlier theological and religious diversity of the Netherlands: there is an identifiable line of Reformed confessional theology in Dutch Protestantism after the synods of Wesel and Emden, just as there is an identifiable synergistic protest against that confessionalism. It is not credible, however, as Bangs would have it, to associate synergistic views of salvation with the term “Reformed,” taken in a confessional as distinct from a colloquial sense. Nor, indeed, does the relatively high level of agreement between Arminius and his colleagues on a series of issues not in confessional debate resolve the issue or blunt their claims.

The claims that Arminius was not confessionally Reformed began early in his career as a minister in Amsterdam. There, in 1592, he was accused by Petrus

<sup>92</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae* 10, in *Opera*, 127-32 (*Works*, 1:701-30); cf. Bangs, *Arminius*, 315.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 24-25, 42-43, 55-56; with Stanglin, *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation*, 77-81, 93-98, 104-14.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 55-70, with the discussion of Arminius’s understanding of justification in ch. 8.

Plancius, a fellow pastor in classis Amsterdam, of interpreting Rom 7 in such a way as to contradict both the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism.<sup>95</sup> These accusations are significant to the question not only of Arminius's orthodoxy, but also of his honesty, given that Plancius has been identified as the initial source of the "insinuations" concerning Arminius's forthrightness in answering his detractors.<sup>96</sup> Even more, the accusations are of importance because one of the standard explanations offered by Bangs, Godby, and others of Plancius's opposition to Arminius is his identification as a supralapsarian and therefore as one of "the first of the new sort of rigid Calvinists to be called to Amsterdam."<sup>97</sup> In fact, Plancius's opposition evidences neither "rigid Calvinism" nor supralapsarianism, even though he may well have held a supralapsarian view of predestination.

Although the sermons on Rom 7 to which Plancius took exception have not survived in their original form, Arminius's exegesis of Rom 7 is extensively documented in the lengthy dissertation on the text, begun *ca.* 1591–1593, completed probably in 1600, and finally published posthumously in 1612.<sup>98</sup> In his introductory statements, Arminius offers both his own thesis concerning the subject of Rom 7 and a refutation of the alternative interpretation, noting that the issue had become a matter of great importance in his time, namely, does the chapter refer to an unregenerate person under the law or a regenerate person under grace? The issue, moreover, was one that had attained virtually confessional status: Arminius comments that those who identified the subject of the chapter as unregenerate and "living under the law" were viewed as slipping toward Pelagianism and as having fallen outside of the bounds of the confessions of the church. In the face of this argumentation, Arminius indicates that in his treatise, he "will show, that in this passage the Apostle does not speak about himself, nor about a man living under grace, but that he has transferred himself to the person of a man placed under the law." Further, Arminius indicates that he will demonstrate that this view was never held to be heretical, that "it has always had some defenders," and that it not only does not conduce to Pelagianism but distinctly opposes it. He will further show that the opposite view, argued as a standard of orthodoxy by some of his contemporaries, "is not only injurious to grace, but likewise adverse to good morals."<sup>99</sup>

The debate over the meaning of this chapter is at least as old as Augustine, whose earliest thoughts on the matter were along the lines proposed by Arminius, but whose later thoughts went in the opposite direction, specifically, in the direction argued by Arminius's opponents in debate. As Steinmetz has pointed

<sup>95</sup> Brandt, *Life*, 67-70; cf. the account in Bangs, *Arminius*, 140, 142-47; on Plancius, see J. Keuning, *Petrus Plancius: Theoloog en geograf, 1552-1622* (Amsterdam: van Kampen, 1946).

<sup>96</sup> Thus Clarke, "Arminius's Understanding of Calvin," 25.

<sup>97</sup> Bangs, *Arminius*, 117; Godbey, "Arminius and Predestination," 491, 495.

<sup>98</sup> Arminius, *Dissertatio de vero sensu cap. VII ad Romanos*, in *Opera*, 809-934 = *A Dissertation on the True and Genuine Sense of the Seventh Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans*, in *Works*, 2:471-683.

<sup>99</sup> Arminius, *Dissertation on the Seventh Chapter of Romans*, in *Works*, 2:490-91.

out, differences over the interpretation of Rom 7 characteristic of the patristic period not only carried over into medieval and Reformation era exegesis but, in the era of the Reformation, crossed confessional lines.<sup>100</sup> The majority view in the early sixteenth century, moreover, echoed the late Augustine: the subject of Rom 7 was a human being under grace, not a human being under the law. Among the exegetes who could be called Reformed, only Bernardino Ochino disagreed; Zwingli, Bucer, Oecolampadius, Calvin, Beza, and Bullinger all held that the conflict in the Pauline text referred to the life of a believer. Significantly, Bullinger (who is sometimes identified as a major Reformed alternative to Calvin)<sup>101</sup> had no substantial disagreement with Calvin on this point.<sup>102</sup>

A similar conclusion must be drawn from Arminius's reading of Rom 9, also among the texts on which he preached as a minister in Amsterdam and on which he produced an extended treatise. Arminius's *Analysis of the Ninth Chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*<sup>103</sup> was begun in 1593 in connection with his series of sermons on Romans and was sent to Gellius Sneecanus for his examination after Arminius had read Sneecanus's study of Rom 9, published in 1596.<sup>104</sup> The treatise was finally published in 1612 as an appendix to Arminius's *Modest Examination of . . . William Perkins . . . On the Mode and Order of Predestination*, without any indication of alteration in the years following Sneecanus's receipt.<sup>105</sup> Arminius begins by noting their views were quite similar and that he hoped to strengthen their case by sharing his reasoning with Sneecanus. The underlying question posed by Paul, whether God's promise is made ineffectual if "the Jews who seek righteousness, not from faith, but from the law of God are rejected," can be answered in two ways: one can argue, as "Beza and others," that the promise invites all of the Jews "to participation in the covenant" but that God by an eternal decree had ordained to save only some, or, as Sneecanus and now Arminius hold, that God's promise itself is offered to all who "strive to obtain righteousness and salvation by faith" but not to those who "seek after the same from the law."<sup>106</sup> Indeed, those who "strive . . . by faith" are the genuine "children of the promise" and those who seek salvation by the law are the "children of flesh," the former typified by Isaac and Jacob, the latter by Ishmael and Esau.<sup>107</sup> The upshot of Arminius's argument is that Paul's claim was not merely that some are accepted by God and others rejected, but that these two groups were "distinguished by certain qualities" that can be identified in the types and

<sup>100</sup> David C. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 110-18.

<sup>101</sup> As, e.g., by Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant*, 193-200; and Baker, "Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect," 359-76.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. Heinrich Bullinger, *In . . . Pauli ad Romanos Epistolam, . . . Commentarius* (Zurich: Christoph Froschauer, 1533).

<sup>103</sup> Arminius, *Analysis cap. LX ad Romanos, cum Aphorismis*, in *Opera*, 778-807 (*Works*, 3:485-519).

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Nichols's comments in Arminius, *Works*, 1:112, 127-28; with Brandt, *Life of Arminius*, 101-2.

<sup>105</sup> Arminius, *Examen modestum libellus, quem D. Gulielmus Perkinsus . . . edidit . . . de praedestinationis modo et ordine* (Leiden: Godfrid Basson, 1612), in *Opera*, 621-777 (*Works*, 3:249-484).

<sup>106</sup> *Analysis cap. LX ad Romanos*, in *Opera*, 778-80 (*Works*, 3:485-88).

<sup>107</sup> *Analysis cap. LX ad Romanos*, in *Opera*, 781-82 (*Works*, 3:489-90).

therefore in the antitypes. The passage “treats not of the divine decrees or purpose by which the one are elected and the other reprobated, considered simply in their own nature, whether pure or corrupt; but of such a purpose as includes that description of the elect,” namely, as “those who are of faith.”<sup>108</sup>

Where the usual Reformed exegesis of the era emphasized that Paul had identified Jacob as chosen and Esau as rejected when they were “not yet born, neither having done any good or evil” and, therefore, presumably, neither seeking salvation in faith or in the law, in Arminius’s reading Jacob and Esau are to be understood not as “persons in themselves” but as “types” of the “children of the promise” and the “children of the flesh,” who in the antitypes look either to faith or to the law for salvation. Whereas the Reformed exegesis of the day, on the ground of the unborn status of the children, serves to remove any and all consideration of qualities in Jacob and Esau or, indeed, in their antitypes, as a basis for the divine willing of election and rejection, the Arminian exegesis passes over the unborn status of the children and presses the consideration of qualities as a result of the typology of promise and flesh arising from the pairing of Isaac and Ishmael prior to the mention of Jacob and Esau.<sup>109</sup> Arminius’s contemporary William Perkins came to precisely the opposite conclusion concerning the text:

The distinction between Isaac and Ismael, whereby one is in the covenant of grace, the other not; stands not in their foreseen faith and unbelief, and the fruites of them: but in the purpose and will of God itselfe. For Isaac is called *the child of promise*, because by vertue of it he was borne and beleevd.<sup>110</sup>

Arminius took his stand not merely against Beza, but against the majority position of the Reformed exegetes of his own and of the preceding era.

It is also the case that the detailed formulation of Reformed doctrine in the generation prior to Arminius stood against any consideration of his distinctive views on soteriology as compatible with the Reformed tradition. This point is rather different from the frequently made claim that Arminius found himself confronted with a “Bezan orthodoxy” somehow different from the earlier Reformed theology. There was no Bezan monolith. On the other hand, there was an established Reformed orthodoxy that included predecessors of both the supra- and the infralapsarian positions of the seventeenth century and that, in its diversity, covered the full spectrum of Reformed opinion. Such diverse writers as Ursinus, Olevianus, Danaeus, Zanchi, Polanus, Perkins, Keckermann,

<sup>108</sup> *Analysis cap. IX ad Romanos*, in *Opera*, 785 (*Works*, 3:496).

<sup>109</sup> *Analysis cap. IX ad Romanos*, in *Opera*, 781-83 (*Works*, 3:490-92); cf. the comments on Rom 9:8, 11 in John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1864), 346-51; Theodore Beza, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* (Geneva: n.p., 1594), loc. cit.; Robert Rollock, *Analysis dialectica . . . in Pauli Apostoli Epistolam ad Romanos* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1593), 228, 232-33; Johannes Piscator, *Analysis logica omnium Epistolarum Pauli* (London: George Bishop, 1608), 109-10, 114.

<sup>110</sup> William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Creede or Symbole*, in *Workes* (3 vols.; Cambridge: John Legate, 1608-1609), 1:278 col. 2-279 col. 1.

and Junius either defined predestination in terms that would prove unacceptable to Arminius or, in their polemics against Roman adversaries, explicitly excluded as erroneous aspects of the older tradition or various contemporary views concerning predestination that were shortly to become fundamental premisses of Arminius's teaching.

During the rather stormy years of Arminius's tenure at the University of Leiden, charges were leveled against his theology, its sources and antecedents, and he rebutted the charges with a series of counter claims. At the same time, he noted to his friend Borrius in a letter of July 25, 1605, that he spoke carefully and with reserve in order "to conduce to peace." He continued,

I have advanced nothing which I consider at all allied to a falsity. But I have been silent upon some truths, which I might have published: for I know, that it is one thing to be silent respecting a truth, and another to utter a falsehood; the latter of which it is never lawful to do, while the former is occasionally, nay very often, expedient.<sup>111</sup>

Arminius's specific reference here is to a disputation on free choice over which he had presided two days previously.<sup>112</sup> He was reticent to engage in polemics and viewed discretion as the better part of valor.

Given Arminius's silence and his care in formulation, some of the claims and counter claims are difficult to root in Arminius's theological arguments. This difficulty is surely true of the accusation that he praised the work of Socinus,<sup>113</sup> although it remains true that Arminius's exegesis of Rom 7 (only published posthumously) echoed Socinus's interpretation.<sup>114</sup> Other accusations, however, which surfaced in late 1608, can be at least partially substantiated from his writings, notably the claim that he taught the virtues of Aquinas, Suárez, and Molina.<sup>115</sup> On this particular charge, we have the explicit statement of Arminius that he never recommended these theologians, but we also have the datum that he possessed quite a fine collection of their works in his personal library and that he used their ideas quite consistently in his theological argumentation.<sup>116</sup> We may never know with certainty whether Arminius actually recommended Aquinas, Suárez, and Molina to his students as sources of sound theology, or whether the angry student merely inferred the recommendation from Arminius's positive use of the ideas of Aquinas, Suárez, and Molina, without reference to their names or writings. And, of course, many of Arminius's colleagues and adversaries had fine personal libraries: indeed his arch-opponent, Francis

<sup>111</sup> *Letter to Borrius*, 25 July 1605, *Ep. Ecd.* 78; excerpted in *Works*, 1:267-68, 612; 2:190.

<sup>112</sup> *Disputationum theologicarum quarto repetitarum decima-quarta de Libero hominis arbitrio eiusque viribus. Sub praesidio I Arminii. Resp. Paulus Leonardi F. de Leonardis . . . 23 Julii 1605* (Leiden: ex off. Joann. Patii, 1605); trans. in *Works*, 2:189-96.

<sup>113</sup> See Carl Bangs, "Arminius and Socinianism," in *Socinianism and Its Role in the Culture of the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (ed. L. Szczucki, Z. Ogonowski, and J. Tazbir; Warsaw: PWN, 1983), 81-84.

<sup>114</sup> On Socinus's reading of Rom 7, see Steinmetz, *Cabin in Context*, 112.

<sup>115</sup> Sepp, *Het Godgeleerd Onderwijs in Nederland*, 1:118, citing a letter from Caspar Sibelius, a student at Leiden; cf. the discussion in Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 27-28.

<sup>116</sup> See *Auction Catalogue of the Library of J. Arminius*, 3-4 (Albert the Great, Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas); 8-9, 11, 14 (Suárez, Driedo, Bellarmine, Molina); cf. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 44-47.

Gomarus, had an enormous library and, like Arminius, he owned and read widely in the works not only of the Reformers but also of the medieval scholastics, Reformation-era heretics, and contemporary Roman Catholic thinkers.<sup>117</sup>

Arminius defended himself against accusations of students and of Gomarus that he had recommended the writings of the contemporary Jesuit theologians Suárez and Molina with the counter statement that “the rumor about my advising the students to read the works of the Jesuits and of Coornheert, I can call by no other name than a lie.”<sup>118</sup> Yet, as Dekker has recently shown, Arminius’s doctrines of divine knowledge and predestination were distinctly Molinist. This is not merely to say that Arminius read and appreciated certain of Molina’s ideas, but that the crucial Molinist concept of a divine *scientia media*, according to which God could foreknow, without in any way having caused, the future contingent acts and choices of human beings, lay at the very heart of Arminius’s theological enterprise, specifically of his doctrine of divine predestination as grounded in foreknown belief.<sup>119</sup> In addition, Arminius used Suárez’s metaphysics substantively in his own theological formulations.<sup>120</sup> Of course, he merely denied that he had recommended the Jesuit theology to his students, not that he had used it in formulating his own theology.

In his last major pronouncement, the *Declaration of Sentiments*, Arminius opposed three specific forms of the Reformed doctrine of predestination: supralapsarianism, plus the double predestinarian and the single predestinarian forms of infralapsarianism. In his lengthy attack on the first of these forms of the doctrine, he noted that it “had been rejected both in former times and in our own days, by the greater part of Christianity.”<sup>121</sup> As proof of the point, Arminius noted the mature theology of Luther and Melancthon; the teaching of the Danish Lutheran, Nicholas Hemmingius; and the views of various Dutch predecessors of his own opinion, Jasper Koolhaes, Herman Herberts, Cornelius Wiggertson, and Tako Sybrants.<sup>122</sup> The list of allies here is significant for, apart from the debatable reference to Luther, Arminius has chosen a series of theologians and pastors either known for producing synergistic theologies (Melancthon, Hemmingius, and Wiggertson) or for having reservations concerning the doctrine of predestination as held by the Reformed and found in the Belgic Confession (Koolhaes, Herberts, Wiggertson, and Sybrants).

<sup>117</sup> See *The Auction Catalogue of the Library of F. Gomarus* (facsimile edition with an introduction and indexes by E. Dekker, J. Knoop, and C. M. L. Verdegaal; Utrecht: HES, 1996), 4-5, 18 (Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Durandus, Bonaventure, etc.); 21 (Molina); 20, 39, 74 (Socinus); 15, 22 (Suárez).

<sup>118</sup> *Letter to Sebastian Egberts*, 10 December 1608, *Ep. Eccl.* 123; excerpted in *Works*, 1:580-81, 598, 736-37; cf. Brandt, *Life*, 299-300, 343-44.

<sup>119</sup> Eef Dekker, “Was Arminius a Molinist?,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 27 (1996): 337-52; also see Dekker, *Rijker dan Midas: Vrijheid, genade en predestinatie in de theologie van Jacobus Arminius (1559-1609)* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1993), esp. 76-99, 157-61, 167-68; cf. the similar conclusions in Muller, *God, Creation and Providence*, 154-66; and below ch. 5.

<sup>120</sup> See Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 119-22, 126, 130-31, 218.

<sup>121</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae*, in *Opera*, 114 (*Works*, 1:639).

<sup>122</sup> Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae*, in *Opera*, 115; cf. 97 (*Works*, 1:642-43; cf. 602-3); and cf. Nichols’s extended historical note in *Works*, 1:602-5.

### V. Conclusions

Given the diversity of the Reformed tradition, notably the differences between Calvin and Bullinger on predestination and the sacraments, or the difference between Calvin and Vermigli on divine permission, there remains some validity in Bangs's comment that a comparison of Calvin with Arminius would yield "possibly no less agreement or more dissent than would be found among later Calvinists."<sup>123</sup> One can certainly tabulate more similarities than differences, and not only between Arminius and Calvin: there are more similarities than differences between Arminius's and Gomarus's theologies. And one could certainly tabulate differences between Calvin's and Gomarus's theologies. Arminius's teaching, particularly the teaching contained in his series of *Public and Private Disputations*, can be identified as belonging to the "Leiden theology" of the day, rooted in the disputations of Francis Junius and pointing toward the disputations in the Leiden faculty's *Synopsis purioris theologiae* of 1626.<sup>124</sup> The problem with Bangs's proposition, however, is that such tabulations ignore the theological boundaries set by the Reformed confessions: the differences among Calvin, Bullinger, Vermigli, Beza, and Gomarus, notable as they are, all fall within the bounds of the Reformed confessional tradition, whereas many of the differences between Arminius and all of these Reformed theologians press him beyond the boundaries of that confessional tradition.

In one sense, certainly, Arminius was Reformed: he was a pastor and teacher in the Dutch Reformed Church and he had received his theological training completely at the hands of Reformed teachers in Reformed institutions of higher learning. Nonetheless, the evidence concerning Arminius's relationship to the Reformed tradition ineluctably points to the conclusion that, on the disputed points of doctrine, he cannot properly be called a Reformed theologian. His theology was conceived as an alternative to the plain and assumed meaning of the only Reformed confessional documents then in use in the Dutch churches. These documents, the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, had been identified, moreover, as normative for the Reformed Church of the Netherlands by a series of provincial and national synods, at which predecessors of Arminius had been admonished and condemned for holding doctrines similar to those later espoused by Arminius. His theology also ran counter to all of the other Reformed confessional documents then in use on the continent of Europe. This is a *historical* conclusion drawn from a review of his predecessors and sources, not merely a dogmatic conclusion grounded on later synodical decisions. Moreover, those decisions, notably the decision of the Synod of Dort, merely paralleled and confirmed, against Arminius's followers, the complaints that had been made against Arminius's theology during his time as a pastor in Amsterdam and during his tenure as a professor at Leiden. Fundamental points in Arminius's theology, virtually from the moment that he began to utter it, were not Reformed. His views on the exegesis of Romans and on such topics as human

<sup>123</sup> Bangs, "Arminius as a Reformed Theologian," 216.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence*, 24-26.

nature, grace, and election were inimical to the theology of the Reformed confessions—and not merely inimical to a Calvinian or, indeed, a Bezan interpretation of the documents, but also to a Bullingerian understanding.

The evidence also points toward the conclusion that Arminius, a pastor and professor under extreme pressure from colleagues, from the church, and ultimately from the civil authorities, was less than forthcoming about his views. Arminius in fact noted his efforts to be “silent upon some truths” and “expedient” in his remarks.<sup>125</sup> His affirmations of the Reformed confessional standards were made in the context of rationalizations about the meaning of the confessional texts, rationalizations that themselves were at variance with the views of the authors of the documents. His explicit notices of theologians whose views were in agreement with his own consistently pointed either toward earlier Dutch writers whose views were also questioned (Veluanus, Wiggertson, Koolhaes, Sybrants, and Snecanus) or toward Lutheran theologians (Melanchthon and Hemmingsen) known for their advocacy of synergism. His explicit denials concerning his positive use of the synergistic Roman Catholic thinkers of his time have proved—let us be clear on this point—false. If Arminius was “a normally honest man,” as Clarke avers, he was certainly not forthcoming concerning the theological engine that ran his system, namely, the *scientia media* of the Jesuit, Luiz Molina. Nor was he forthcoming about the synergistic implications of his use of *scientia media*.

In conclusion, was Arminius Reformed? The answer remains mixed: in terms of his theological training, churchly allegiance, pastoral charge, and by stated subscription to confessional standards, namely the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, he was Reformed. Certainly, also, he was Reformed in the generic or colloquial sense of being of the Protestant rather than of the Roman faith. By documentable theological conviction, however, he placed himself outside the Reformed understanding of the confessions of the Dutch Reformed churches, as it had been established in earlier debates both in the Netherlands and elsewhere. He was not schismatic nor was he a vociferous opponent of the confessions. Rather, he sought revision, namely, a revision that would render the documents broader in definition and consistently less specific on controverted points of doctrine. Given that his own teachings on predestination were neither fully published until the year before his death nor condemned by synodical decision until a decade later, there is a rather technical sense belonging to church order in which one can argue that Arminius was Reformed, albeit dissident, until the day he died.

The statement that Arminius's theology was not Reformed is hardly a retrospective theological judgment based on the Canons of Dort. It rests on the confessional and theological standards of Arminius's own lifetime juxtaposed with his own clear theological preferences. It was, moreover, the conclusion drawn by a large number of his colleagues and other contemporaries who had themselves subscribed to the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism—and

<sup>125</sup> *Letter to Borrius*, 25 July 1605.

who neither viewed the documents as ambiguous nor were satisfied by Arminius's own arguments and explanations, as found in the *Declaration of Sentiments*. Arminius's appeals to Bullinger, the Second Helvetic Confession, and the Reformed *Harmony of Confessions* fall into the same category as his arguments concerning the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism: there is a divergence between his soteriology and the soteriology of these works and their authors. His appeals to Melancthon, Veluanus, and Hemmingius, all synergistic in their soteriology, only serve to confirm the contemporary verdict.

As to the debate over whether Arminius was "a normally honest man," the phrase itself is curious, and when used as a framework for the discussion of Arminius and his theology, this rather odd historiographical premise cannot be left unchallenged. The personal "honesty" of a subject cannot be an absolute presupposition of research. A historian must place his trust in the basic documentation, and the personal character traits of individuals are known not as presuppositions but as the results of the study. The extant documentation contains accusations against Arminius, some of which impugned his honesty, brought forward by several other "normally honest" men. The historical record also points ineluctably toward the conclusion that Arminius did not always speak with utter candor; nor, indeed, is "candor" the term that one would readily apply to those opponents who protested on grounds of rumor and second- or third-hand complaint. Given the high pitch of the rhetoric, the incredible rancor of the controversy, and the high ecclesial, social, political, and academic stakes involved in the proof or disproof of Arminius's confessionality and orthodoxy, moreover, a historian can expect less than a perfectly candid and balanced account from all sides in the debate. The divergent histories produced by the Reformed and the Remonstrant parties in the aftermath of Dort bear out this generalization. The claims of honesty and dishonesty all fit into the larger framework of accusation and counter accusation; and the significance of the issue resides not in the assumption or denial that Arminius was a "normally honest man," but rather in the way in which his and, potentially, others' lack of candor in a very difficult situation aided, abetted, and defined the controversy itself.

Finally, once the historiographical mists have been dispelled—whether the mists of the past as generated by the surviving traces of the events and issues of Arminius's life and controversies, or the mists of the present spawned by writers whose intention has been to overturn both the traditional Reformed and the older Remonstrant understanding of Arminius as outside the confessional boundaries of the Reformed churches—there remains the issue of Arminius's place and importance in the theological development not only of Protestantism in general, but of Reformed Protestantism in the Netherlands at the beginning of the seventeenth century. His significance is not to be denied, and it rests, in large part, on the fact that despite its numerous points of correspondence both with the Reformed theology of his time and with the teachings of his colleagues at Leiden, in several crucial points concerning predestination and the *ordo salutis* Arminius's theology was not confessionally Reformed.