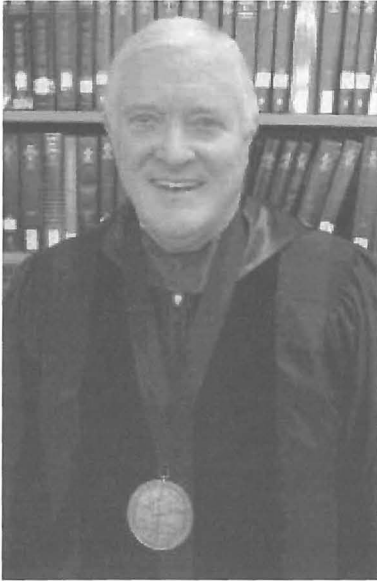


Anabaptism and James Arminius: A Study in Soteriological Kinship and Its Implications¹



JERRY SUTTON
*Academic Dean
Midwestern Baptist
Theological Seminary
Kansas City, MO 64118
JSutton@mbts.edu*

As research progresses many links are being discovered between English General Baptists as they emerged in the seventeenth century, and Continental Anabaptism, particularly the Mennonites. The factuality of relationships of John Smyth, Thomas Helwys and others with the Dutch Mennonites are incontestable. Irvin Horst has done much spade-work to establish the presence and identity of Anabaptists in England during the Reformation era on the other side of the English Channel.²

Nonetheless many scholars and particularly British scholars contend that the rise of the English Baptists was essentially independent from any Anabaptist influence. If anything, the theology of the English General Baptists—the most probable link to Anabaptists by either of the two early branches—was molded not by the European Radical Reformation but

¹ This article is based on research conducted by Dr. Sutton while studying with William R. Estep, noted Baptist historian of the Reformation and Anabaptist movements.

² Tom Nettles, "Smyth and Helwys: The Key to Anabaptist—Baptist Relations," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 19 (Fall 1976) :101-104; W. R. Estep, "On the Origin of the English Baptists," *Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX, 1979* (mimeographed); Irvin B. Horst, *The Radical Brethren* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1972).

rather by the Magisterial Reform referring to the Dutch theologian, James Arminius. Much evidence exists to support the contention that the English General Baptists were Arminian with respect to their theology.

However, little or no work has been done to examine the influence of the Anabaptists on Arminius. Could it be that his theology or at least soteriology was in fact similar if not identical to that of the normative Anabaptists? The purpose of this paper is to examine the possibilities of an affirmative answer to that question, while yet realizing that this is in actuality only a preliminary study of further research.

The methodology of the paper will be, first, to establish the fact that General Baptists have been historically and consistently labeled Arminian in their theology; and to ascertain what part of their theology was Arminian. Second, shifting focus to the Netherlands, the Dutch Reformation's Sacramentist, Anabaptist and Reformed phases will be summarized in order to establish the context within which the events herein discussed transpired. Next, the paper will examine possible lines of transmission and interaction of James Arminius with the Anabaptists; did he have contact with them? Was there any means by which he could have become familiar with their theology? Section four will seek to sketch Arminius' theology as it was presented, opposed, supported and adhered to, by participants in the last phase of Dutch Reformation. The final section will endeavor to compare Arminius' major soteriological doctrines with those of normative Anabaptist writers, particularly Hubmaier, Marpeck, Menno and de Ries.

The conclusion will attempt to assess the evidence and render a tentative verdict on the possibility of Anabaptist influence on the rise of English General Baptists by way of James Arminius.

I: THE GENERAL BAPTISTS AND ARMINIANISM

Much ink has been spilled in the academic war being waged to determine the origin of the English Baptists. Some contend that English Baptists are of Anabaptist sources while others opt for an indigenous heritage. Representing the latter, Kliever wrote, "the essential theological tradition as well as the distinctive features of early General Baptists are accounted for by their English Puritan Separatist background."³ Concerning the Anabaptists, B. R. White wrote,

Although there were certainly radical sectaries in England spo-

³ Lonnie Kliever, "General Baptist Origins: the Question of Anabaptist Influence." *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36 (Oct 1962): 321.

radically even during the reign of Elizabeth I, there seems to be no evidence extant of any direct influence they may have exerted over either individual Separatists or their teaching.⁴

White concluded, with qualifications, that:

It may, therefore, be fairly claimed that, when a plausible source of Separatist views is available in Elizabethan Puritanism and its natural developments, the onus of proof lies upon those who would affirm that the European Anabaptists had any measurable influence upon the shaping of English Separatism.⁵

In contrast to White's assurance that the rise of English Baptists can be traced from indigenous movements in Great Britain, others suggest that the Anabaptists, indeed, were influential. Ernest Payne wrote, "some Anabaptist influence, direct and indirect, almost certainly went into the making of the earlier Baptist communities."⁶ Horst continued, "one may not claim that Anabaptism was the exclusive source of these insights (leading to the rise of the General Baptists), but evidence is overwhelming that it was a major influence."⁷

Although discounting the influence of European Anabaptists upon English Separation broadly, and English General Baptists specifically, White accepts without reservation that John Smyth was influenced by the "Dutch moderate Calvinist theologian James Arminius." "The Controversy over Arminius and his views was raging in the Netherlands at this very time, and no one in Amsterdam who had a theological interest at all could fail to be aware of the issues involved."⁸ Many historians have concluded that English General Baptist theological distinctives originated in Arminius. Interestingly, Anabaptism and Arminianism are similar in some respects. Underwood wrote that the Anabaptist movement anticipated Arminius by about a century with respect to its reaction against Calvinism.⁹ Speaking of Henry Hart, an English Anabaptist (referred to

⁴ B.R. White, *The English Separatist Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 162.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 164

⁶ Ernest A. Payne, cited in R. T. Kendall, "An Investigation into the Theological Controversies that Separated the General Baptists from the Particular Baptists," *Baptist Reformation Review* 8.2 (1979): 8.

⁷ Cited in William R. Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1975), 208.

⁸ White, 139.

⁹ A. C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: The Baptist Union, 1947, 1970), 22.

as such by the Reformers of his day), Estep suggested that "he was clearly Arminian before Arminius." Not discounting the continually growing evidence of Anabaptist influence upon the emerging English Baptists, many historians point to the Arminian label applied to the General Baptists.¹⁰

Needless to say, of all the possible labels of identity "Arminian" is the one which stuck. Most Baptist histories utilize this descriptive adjective when referring to the English General Baptists. For example, Underwood wrote that "John Smyth adopted Arminian opinions," and refers to the General Baptists as the "Arminian Baptists."¹¹ Torbet classified the General Baptists as "those holding to the Arminian view of general or unlimited atonement."¹² What is positively known, wrote Kendall, is the fact that historians have called General Baptists also Arminian Baptists.¹³ Many early records bear out this conclusion. By surveying records and observations published in the Baptist Quarterly the plethora of references equating General Baptists and Arminian Baptists can be seen.

Joshua Thomas (of Leominster) maintained that "a confession of faith was needed...to make it clear whether we were...Calvinist or Arminian." Wheeler Robinson reflecting on English Baptist history wrote, "Baptist thought was vigorous enough to generate two branches, General and Particular, Arminian and Calvinist." In an article on "Baptists in East Kent" information is given concerning the organization of a gathered church in February 1645-46. Considering that same church, records read that "in 1654 the errors of Arminius were troubling the district." Concerning General Baptists in Scotland, Hannen records that a Baptist, Mr. Browne, in Cuper debated the Presbytery's representative, a Mr. James Wood. In the course of debate concerning the fall, Woods said to Browne, "this position was that of Dr. Arminius." In 1685, Thomas Grantham is noted as holding to "Arminian views." Jewson wrote, "He seems to have settled at Norwich about 1685, and besides forming the church here he organized General Baptist Churches at Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn."¹⁴

¹⁰ L. B. Horst, *The Radical Brethren* (Nieuwkoop: B. DeGraff, 1972); 134, Wm. Estep, Class Lecture Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Feb 20, 1980.

¹¹ Underwood, *History*, 40, 72, 131.

¹² Robert Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (3rd ed.; Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1978), 20.

¹³ Kendall, "Investigation," 9. One notable exception is Robert Baker, *The Southern Baptist Convention and its People* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1974).

¹⁴ Gwingli Jenkins, "The Baptist and the New Testament," *Baptist Quarterly* 7 (1934-35); 60; A.A. Alnwick, "Wesley and Ourselves," *Baptist Quarterly* 9 (1938-39) :480, "Baptists in East Kent," *Baptist Quarterly* 2 (1924-25): 91; R.B.

Another article records the statement that “one line of cleavage made Baptists either Calvinistic or Arminian.” It continued, “the Arminian Baptists under William Bound were too fond of acting on the defensive, lacked breadth of outlook. “Nevertheless, “a Radnor woman in 1672 was sorely tempted by Satan to be rebaptised and join the Arminians.” Concerning Baptist life early in the eighteenth century, another entry records, “with 1706, the General Baptist Church at Staplehurst and Smarden had defined its position, orthodox and Arminian.”¹⁵ These references provide sufficient evidence upon which to draw two conclusions. First, historians have considered General Baptist to be Arminian; and second, English Baptists have come to that same conclusion. But the question remains, “Arminian in what respect?” What was uniquely Arminian in the life of the General Baptists? Arminius was an active and faithful pastor-teacher in the state church. Arminius was semi-Erastian in his understanding of church-state relations. Neither General Baptists nor Particular Baptists, both adhering to Separatist sentiments, would opt for a church controlled by the state. Arminius was basically Presbyterian in his understanding of church polity. This was a far cry from the congregational polity practiced by English Baptists.

Arminius was also an advocate of toleration. With respect to toleration or the lack of it in the Dutch Reformation two sides emerged. Both wanted to present a united front against the onslaught of the Catholic counter-reformation. However, the means were different. One side, which would be Arminius’ position, advocated tolerance both as its conviction and as the key to unity against Catholicism. The other side, comprised of hyper-Calvinists, asserted doctrinal conformity as the means for achieving unity. The issue for Arminius was summed up by Burgomaster Hooft, “It is inconsistent to complain of intolerance under Popish government and then to practice the same intolerance.”¹⁶

By virtue of English Baptist identity as a Separatist movement, they stand in favor of toleration in terms of how Arminius understood it. However both General and Particular Baptists held to this idea so the Arminian understanding of toleration is not the distinguishing mark of Arminian Baptists.

If General Baptists were not uniquely Arminian in their concepts of

Hannen, “Cuper, Fife, 1652, 1659,” *Baptist Quarterly* 10 (1940-41): 46; C.B Jewson, “The Old General Baptist Church at Norwich,” *Baptist Quarterly* 9 (1938-39): 430.

¹⁵ “Wales Under the Indulgence, 1672-75,” *Baptist Quarterly* 2 (1924-25): 281; “Baptists in the Weald,” *Baptist Quarterly* 2 (1924-25): 378.

¹⁶ Gerardt Brandt, *Historie der Reformatie en andre Kerkelyke Geschiedenissen in en ontrent de Nederlanden* (Amsterdam: Jan Rieuwertsz. Hendrick en Dirk Boom, 1671-1704), 1:817.

ecclesiology, church-state relations, church polity and toleration, in what respect were they uniquely Arminian? Abundant evidence concludes that English General Baptists were uniquely Arminian only in their soteriology. Note that the soteriological issue was the primary but not exclusive factor contribution to the polarities in the Dutch Reformation.

Arminius' soteriology bears an amazing resemblance to that of the normative Anabaptists. Before surveying Arminius' interaction with the Dutch Anabaptists and comparing his soteriology with that of some of the more prolific Anabaptist leaders, an overview of the Dutch Reformation in order to provide the context of this study should prove helpful.

II: OVERVIEW OF THE DUTCH REFORMATION

The Dutch Reformation came in three phases which somewhat overlapped. Phase one was dominated by the Sacramentists (1500-1530). Next, the Anabaptist rose in prominence (1530-1566). And finally, with the influx of Calvinists from the south came the dominance of the Dutch Reformed Church (1566-1609).¹⁷

The Sacramentists or Sacramentarians were so-called because they believed that the Lord's Supper was a "Sacrament."¹⁸ Sacramentarianism was a loose designation for a host of individuals who opposed abuses in the church. "The Sacramentists" wrote Williams, "originally preferred for themselves the designation 'Evangelicals' (evangelischen), analogous to, although probably not dependent upon, Evangelism in the Romance lands." Modern scholarship has grouped them with the Biblical humanists.¹⁹

Sacramentarianism found various expressions in different classes. One was the "chambers of rhetoric" (rederijkerskamers) which were organized by the burghers for festive celebrations of local saints and major events of the liturgical year. Williams suggested that many Sacramentarians, and later, Anabaptists were in some stage of their careers rederijkers.²⁰

Summarizing the Sacramentarian movement Bangs wrote:

Some of them had heard of Luther; others simply objected to what they saw around them. There was Wouter, in Utrecht, and John Sartorius, Cornelius Hoen, John Pistorius, and William

¹⁷ G. H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1975), 764.

¹⁸ Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1971), 20, 21.

¹⁹ Williams, *Radical*, 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

Gnapheus, and they had followers, who suffered with them, for it was dangerous business. Pistorius taught that the decrees and canons of the church are not to be taken lightly; they are to be honored 'so far as they agree with the word of God.' Arminius was in this sturdy tradition. Hinne Rode was one of them, who taught Zwingli to say 'this signifies.' When a Sacramentist disciple, the widow Weynken Claesdochter, was offered the oil of unction before her execution, her refusal was curt: 'Oil is good for salad or for oiling your shoes.'²¹

The Sacramentists seem to have been nurtured on what Bangs calls "the old Dutch biblical piety."²²

In the 1530s the Sacramentarian movement gave way to the rise of Anabaptism. The first Anabaptist leader in the Netherlands was Melchoir Hofmann. Having been an ardent supporter of Luther and a zealous evangelist, he nevertheless parted ways with Luther feeling that he did not go far enough in his return to Scriptures and break with tradition. Only two months after his own baptism Hofmann went to Emden and experienced immediate success as an Anabaptist evangelist. Writing two decades after the event, Obbe Philips wrote:

Among these, Reformers and Anabaptist leaders whom he had named Melchoir Hofmann stood out. He came from upper Germany to Emden to baptize around three hundred persons publicly in the church at Emden, both burgher and peasant, lord and servant.²³

Eventually, because of his eschatological misunderstanding Hofmann was imprisoned at Strasburg destined never to depart alive. In time "the faithful in North Germany and Holland were caught up in the fanaticism at Munster."²⁴ The travesty and tragedy of Munster need not be recounted here.

Not all Anabaptists, or more properly participants in the Radical Reformation, were taken in by the Munster fiasco. Two brothers, Obbe and Dirk Philips, were leaders of the non-violent, biblical Anabaptists who were similar to the Swiss Brethren. From their midst and ministry a young priest, Menno Simons, was converted to Anabaptist principles.

Having been unconverted at the time he entered the priesthood,

²¹ Bangs, *Arminius*, 21.

²² *Ibid.* See also Cornelius Krahn, *Dutch Anabaptism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 44-79, for an overview of the Sacramentarian Movement.

²³ Cited in Estep, *Story*, 109.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

Menno later wrote that he was plagued by doubts, and eventually turned to the Scriptures to have them resolved. Menno's writings abound with Scripture. Having developed a reputation as a biblical preacher Menno was still disturbed because his life did not back up that which he preached. In his slow transition to Anabaptist principles he first became an evangelical humanist.²⁵

His conversion was precipitated by exposure to Anabaptist preachers who had tremendous zeal but were ignorant. Nonetheless, their lives put him to shame. His agony became intolerable when he heard of the execution of 300 Anabaptists in April 1535, one of whom was his brother.²⁶ He later wrote of his conversion experience:

My heart trembled within me. I prayed to God with sighs and tears that He would give to me, a sorrowing sinner, the gift of His grace, create within me a clean heart, and graciously through the merits of the crimson blood of Christ forgive my unclean walk and frivolous easy life and bestow upon me wisdom, Spirit, courage, and a manly spirit so that I might preach his exalted and adorable name and holy Word in purity, and make known His truth to His glory.²⁷

From his conversion in January 1536, until he joined the Anabaptists was approximately nine months.²⁸

Menno's ministry as an Anabaptist was not comfortable; persecution abounded. Working to build up the faithful, he visited the scattered Anabaptist groups of northern Europe and inspired them with his night-time preaching. He was also a voluminous writer. His most notable work was the *Foundation of Christian Doctrine* (1540). In it he renounced Munster and delineated his doctrine. Menno held, among other things, to a Hofmannite Christology, absolute pacifism and a use of the ban. The latter eventually caused problems.²⁹

After Menno's death on January 31, 1561, the leadership role of the "Mennonites" (named such so as to avoid the title Anabaptist which was still attached to Munster) fell on Dirk Phillips. Lacking Menno's leadership talents the movement soon fragmented. The polarities now ranged from the strict Frisians to the liberal Waterlanders (Doopsgezinden) who separated in 1555. Two notable events followed. First, the various Men-

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 115-16.

²⁶ Estep, *Story*, 117-18.

²⁷ Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 671.

²⁸ Estep, *Story*, 120.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 121-25.

nonite groups formed a loose connectionalism in 1568. And second, Hans de Ries, Jacob Scheedemaker and a few other ministers drew up the first Mennonite Confession of Faith in 1577.³⁰

The third stage of the Dutch Reformation witnessed the rise and eventual dominance of the Dutch Reformed Church. Bangs pointed out that the earliest Dutch Reformed leaders did not seem to be Calvinists at all, instead they appeared to be indigenous congregations of individuals nurtured on biblical piety. They were not seized by dogmatic insights but rather, they pressed toward a purified faith according to the Scripture.³¹ This indigenous movement, said Bangs, was sustained by such writings as Veluanus' *Layman's Guide* and Bullinger's *Housebook*.

As Calvinist clergy and people fled northward, from the attack by Spain and the Catholics, the Dutch Reformation became much more complicated. These Calvinists brought with them their talents, energy, money and theology which was precise and intolerant. Then, as the Remonstrant historian Gerardt Brandt commented, the term "Reform" came to have two meanings. It meant one thing to the old Hollanders, yet something quite different to the new preachers.³²

In the later 1500s Calvinism began to make heavy inroads into the Netherlands. Its appearance in organized form can hardly be said to antedate the year 1544. Usually its introduction has been traced to influences which spread from Geneva through France to the southern provinces where the French language was widely spoken. Here the first Calvinist churches were organized. Yet, its coming was much more complex.³³

DeJong traced its infiltration along three avenues. First, in the writings of Calvin, Zwingli, Oecolampadius and Bullinger. Second, many leaders from the Netherlands found themselves exiles from time to time. Some went to Geneva, others fled to places where Reformed churches in exile were organized, i.e. Emden and Heidelberg after 1550. A third avenue was found in the vigorous labors of those who returned to the southern provinces to organize and lead Reformed congregations and then fled North due to Spanish persecution, i.e. Plancius.³⁴

In the course of time, the Netherlands, while yet at war with Spain (the Dutch Reformation was intricately entwined with the Dutch struggle for political independence), prospered under the political leadership of John van Oldenbarnevelt, and the military leadership of William of Or-

³⁰ Ibid., 126-27.

³¹ Bangs, *Arminius*, 21.

³² Brandt cited in Bangs, *Arminius*, 22.

³³ Peter DeJong, "The Rise of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands," in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (ed. P. DeJong; Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 9.

³⁴ Ibid.

ange and later his son, Maurice. With the war, the center of commerce shifted to Amsterdam. The "Alteration" as the official clergy and monastics depart Amsterdam was called, occurred in 1578. The Alteration saw the Roman catholic clergy and monastics depart Amsterdam in early May of 1578, with Reformed church services beginning on May 11, 1578. This was a victory for the Reformers of 1566, who had first petitioned the Spanish regent, Margaret of Parma, requesting the withdrawal of the Inquisition and the lifting of placards or decrees against heretics.³⁵

The immediate result of the Alteration saw several changes. First was a revival of trade. Coupled with this came the beginning of rapid population growth. Many were refugees from the south, a key factor in the religious turmoil to come. The Alteration brought new regimes in both city and church.

In the course of history, a polarity developed in the Dutch Reformed Church. The antagonists were Arminius and his disciples, and the "Orthodox" Calvinists. It culminated ten years after Arminius' death. On April 24, 1619, the Synod of Dort (Dordrecht) sat for the 154th and the last time. Ostensibly summoned to resolve differences between Dutch Remonstrants (Arminians) and Contra-Remonstrants within a context of Calvinist theology, in reality it pronounced predetermined decrees on unconditioned election, limited atonement, man's total depravity, the irresistibility of grace and the perseverance of the elect.

The result of the Synod of Dort was that Oldenbarnevelt was beheaded and Remonstrants were denounced as heretics and banished. Some two hundred Remonstrant ministers were imprisoned. As Peter DeJong, a Reformed historian summarized, "the Synod of Dort marks the close of the first period in the history of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands." Interestingly enough N. van der Zijpp recorded that after his death many of Arminius' followers accepted the Mennonite Confession of Hans de Ries. Many Arminius scholars, particularly Carl Bangs, feel than Arminius' theological distinctives were derived from the Sacramentists. Bangs stated that "it is reasonable to conclude that Arminius was no Anabaptist and that he learned none of his theology from them." Nonetheless, Arminius' soteriology bears an amazing resemblance to that of the normative Anabaptists. The remainder of this monograph will focus on two aspects of Arminius' exposure to Anabaptists. First, his interaction with Anabaptists will be briefly surveyed and he had numerous contacts with them. And second, a comparison between Arminius' soteriology with that of some more notable Anabaptist leaders will con-

³⁵ William the Silent as he was known was assassinated in 1584 at Delft. W. Stephenson, *The Story of the Reformation* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1959), 115; Bangs, *Arminius*, 104.

clude this work.³⁶

III. INTERACTION BETWEEN ARMINIUS & THE ANABAPTISTS

Before examining the similarities between Anabaptist and Arminian soteriology, and evidence for the possible influence by the former upon the latter, the nature and extent of Arminius' contact with Anabaptism needs to be examined. What constituted Arminius' exposure to the Anabaptist movement?

Because of the untimely death of his father (1559), Arminius grew up under the watchcare of a parish priest, Aemilius, who was known for his Protestant sympathies.³⁷ In 1576, Arminius studied under Coolhaes at Leiden. Although theological issues were not a cause of dissention at that time in Holland, Coolhaes advocated, as his own, a policy of toleration. He was especially non-dogmatic, observed Bangs, on the doctrine of predestination. Coolhaes, who sided with Coornhert in support of broad toleration, suggested that "Lutherans and Mennonites" be permitted peaceful co-existence in Holland.³⁸

During his educational years Arminius under the influence of Aemilius, Coolhaes and others, developed a high tolerance level for those of other persuasions, those with whom he did not necessarily agree. From 1582 until 1586, Arminius matriculated at Geneva where he studied under Beza and other professors as well. He also studied for a while at Basel having been suspended from Geneva temporarily for advocating the philosophical method of Petrus Ramus. During his educational years we may assume that due to his own inquisitive mind (he was an outstanding student), his tolerance for those of different theological convictions, and the prevalence of Mennonites in the Netherlands, that at least he had some exposure to them although concrete evidence is lacking.

Arminius returned to Amsterdam in 1587, to assume pastoral duties. The Merchants Guild of Amsterdam, composed of wealthy business men and town officials, had underwritten the expense of his education. Arminius had contracted with them that on completion he would return to Amsterdam and assume responsibilities as one of their ministers. Amsterdam, like Arminius, had an affinity for, and history of, toleration.

³⁶ Robert Roberts, "John Hale and the Synod of Dort," in *Councils and Assemblies* (ed. G. J. Cummings and D. Baker; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 277; DeJong, 24; *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s. v. "Arminius, Jacobus," by D. van der Zijpp; Bangs, 171.

³⁷ Bangs, *Arminius*, 34.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

Paraphrasing a report from the 1530s in the *Ook Dat* was Amsterdam, Bangs wrote: "There were numerous instances in which they looked the other way in order not to see Sacramentarian and Anabaptist activities that were forbidden by placards from higher authorities. When the first Anabaptists had been taken away from Amsterdam and condemned and executed in the Hague, the magistrate privately resolved to hinder a repetition of the event."³⁹

When Arminius came to Amsterdam, the Mennonites were plentiful. Two of the town's Burgomasters had Mennonites in their immediate family. One was Cornelis Hooft, who became a strong supporter of Arminius. Hooft's wife, Anna Blaeu, was an Anabaptist and their children were not baptized as infants. Wilhem Baerdesen, one of the burgomasters granting Arminius funds from the Merchants Guild, had a wife and a sister who were Anabaptist.⁴⁰ Furthermore, Laurens Jacobsz Reael, whose daughter (Lijsbet) Arminius married in 1590, had like many other town leaders been a member of the Chambers of Rhetoric. Research is discovering the contribution that this group made to the rise of tism.⁴¹ Nevertheless, those who supported Arminius were sympathetic with, if not supporters of, the Mennonites.

In his pastoral duties Arminius was assigned to remonstrate periodically with those who had fallen into disfavor with the Reformed Church. One such person was a woman communicant, Mayken Bresmans, who was suspected of having "gone over to the Mennonites." A week later, September 29, 1588, the consistory recorded Arminius report that "...the call had been made, that the woman had just given birth to a child on September 21, so that they had not examined her about her faith, that she said she was not in contact with the Anabaptist at the moment but was sympathetic with them, that she was at rest in her soul, and that she kindly requested the two visitors to stay out of her house."⁴² Another incident similar to this one was recorded in February 1596. Arminius reported that he had had a talk with "two Anabaptists, Paulus, a carpenter and his wife. They persisted in their point of view," he said.⁴³

Another interesting occasion concerns Arminius' interaction with Dirk V. Coonhert, the "Libertine" as he was called. Arminius was assigned to respond to his attacks on Calvin's (Beza's?) Doctrines of Pre-

³⁹ R. B. Evenhuis, *Ook Dat Was Amsterdam* (2 vols.; Amsterdam: W. ten Have, 1965, 1967), 23-25, cited in Bangs, *Arminius*, 88-89.

⁴⁰ Bangs, *Arminius*, 123.

⁴¹ Leonard Verduin, "The Chambers of Rhetoric and Anabaptist origins in the Low Countries," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 34 (July 1960): 192-96.

⁴² *Protocollen der Kerkeraad Amsterdam* 1.420, cited in Bangs, *Arminius*, 125.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2.187, cited in Bangs, *Arminius*, 154.

destination, Justification and the punishment of heretics by death.⁴⁴ Because of the intervention of Lydius, Arminius was dismissed from his assignment. "Later writers," said Bangs, "often carelessly conflate these stories, sometimes to assert that Arminius was trying to refute Coornhert and went over to Coornhert's humanism."⁴⁵ Nonetheless, later writings of Arminius would confirm the similarity between Coornhert and Arminius particularly in opposition to hyper-Calvinism.

The point of interest in the aforementioned encounter is the fact that Arminius did know and interact with Coornhert. Why? Because Coornhert, although never severing official ties with the Roman Church, nevertheless "had considerable influence on the Dutch Mennonites especially on the Waterlander branch" and "was a close friend of Hans de Ries."⁴⁶ All this transpired in the last few years of the 1580s.

In May 1593, Arminius was questioned by the Amsterdam consistory concerning his public exposition of Romans nine which did not reflect the supralapsarian theory of Beza. The primary critique was expressed in that. "Martinists (Lutherns), Anabaptists (Mennonites) and even libertines (humanists of the style of Coornhert) gloried in his discourses."⁴⁷ Integral to his pastoral duties, Arminius, found himself remonstrating periodically with the Anabaptists in their homes urging them to return to the Reformed Church. Bangs deduced that evidently the Mennonites "were having considerable success in drawing off members of the Reformed churches, and action against them was deemed necessary."⁴⁸

At the Synod of North Holland which met in June 1599, the group voted to collect arguments against the Anabaptists and then publish them for the instruction of the weak. Collaborating with the Synod of South Holland, the two Synods together agreed to assign Arminius the task to "confute them from Scriptures."⁴⁹

Arminius reluctantly accepted and requested that any Dutch minister with Anabaptist tracts to please send them to Amsterdam where he could read, evaluate and refute them. The next year, 1601, Arminius had not written his refutation. However, he did offer a progress report: "he had studied all the Anabaptist books he could find and had abstracted the

⁴⁴ W. R. Bagnall, "The Life of Arminius," in James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius* (3 vols.; trans. James Nichols & W.R. Bagnall; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker [repr.] 1977), 1.12-13.

⁴⁵ Bangs, 139.

⁴⁶ *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Coornhert, Dirk V." by N. von der Zijpp.

⁴⁷ *Protocollen*, 2.110 cited in Bangs, *Arminius*, 148.

⁴⁸ Bangs, *Arminius*, 167.

⁴⁹ Gerard Brandt, *The History of the Reformation and other Ecclesiastical Transactions In and About the Low Countries* (4 vols.; London: T. Wood, 1720): 2.4.

most important doctrinal positions, and he requested the Brethren share with him any more such books which he might not have seen."⁵⁰ In 1602, he reported to the North Holland synod that he had begun the work but was experiencing difficulty because of the "great many articles of faith in which many different things were being taught."⁵¹ For the next four years Arminius made little noticeable progress. Although pushed by the Synods, Arminius never wrote the full refutation which he had been commissioned to write, and in 1606, he was granted a dismissal from the assignment.

But the question remains, "why did he not complete the assignment?" Arminius himself gave some reasons. Brandt records that some of the "clergy...were not well satisfied with him; and they suspected him particularly upon the point of predestination. He likewise doubted whether this burden was laid upon him with good intent."⁵² Bangs records other reasons offered by Arminius. That he had too much work to do in preparing his lectures (in 1603 he moved from Amsterdam to Leiden to teach theology) was the excuse heard most often. Nonetheless, Arminius did not want to write his refutation although he had initially accepted the assignment. Could it be that he found too much in Anabaptist writings with which he was in sympathy?

Bangs wrote that Arminius declined not because he was reluctant to pursue heretics, because he had done so on a number of occasions. Neither was it because he had adopted Anabaptist views of the church and sacraments. Arminius was thoroughly Reformed in his ecclesiology. "The reason," suggests Bangs, "lies elsewhere."⁵³

In the controversy with the Anabaptists, the Reformed church had two points of contention. The first issue was the nature of the church and sacraments. The other was soteriology with its disagreements over predestination, and the nature and extent of grace and free will. Bangs observed that there were, "Anabaptist writings from the time on these subjects which show that Arminius would have been reluctant to make a blanket condemnation of all they were teaching."⁵⁴

The purpose of the material which has just been briefly presented is to establish two facts. First, Arminius had numerous contacts with the Anabaptists both in interaction with them personally and later in studying "all the Anabaptist literature available in the Netherlands." Second, hav-

⁵⁰ *Acta der Provinciale en Particuliere Synoden* (8 vols.; ed. J. Reitsma and S. D. von Veen; Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1892-99), 1.289-90, cited in Bangs, *Arminius*, 167.

⁵¹ Bangs, *Arminius*, 167.

⁵² Brandt, *History*, 2.4-5.

⁵³ Bangs, *Arminius*, 169.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

ing been assigned the responsibility of “thoroughly refuting the Anabaptists,” Arminius never completed his tasks. On hearing rumors that Arminius had completed the assignment and written a refutation of the Anabaptists, and that this document had recently been located, this writer (being unable to locate any information on the subject), called Dr. Bangs to verify the rumor. Dr. Bangs recounted that a document has been located in which Arminius did refute the Anabaptists, however, the refutation dealt with periphery matters and had no mention whatsoever of soteriology.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, Arminius did not “thoroughly refute” the Anabaptists and the obvious reason for this is the similarity of thought with respect to soteriology.

In the remaining two sections Arminius' main thoughts on soteriology will be viewed and summarized from this historical context. After the summary of his thoughts, the final section will compare Arminius' doctrine of salvation to representative Anabaptist soteriological writings.

IV: ARMINIUS, SOTERIOLOGY IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Before comparing Arminius' teachings on soteriology with those of prominent Anabaptist leaders, attention first needs to be directed to Arminius' own teachings. What did he believe? The most efficient method of presenting Arminius' soteriology will be to examine it in its historical context. Therefore, this section will proceed with a tri-focal chronological approach. First, we will examine Arminius' doctrine and the context from which it was articulated during his pastoral years in Amsterdam (1587-1603). Second, it will do the same thing for his professorial years in Leiden (1603-1609). It will conclude by presenting the summary of his soteriology as expressed by his disciples, the “Remonstrants,” at the Synod of Dort (1618-19).

The Pastoral Years at Amsterdam (1587-1603)

Arminius' antagonist in Amsterdam was Petrus Plancius who was not a mild Calvinist but the first of a new breed of rigid “high Calvinists.” Plancius was the first minister to propagate and emphasize the doctrines of predestination. J. Keuning, his biographer, says, “until Plancius went north, the preaching there was more Bible than dogma, more piety, than theology, with no trace of the doctrine of predestination to be found.”⁵⁶ Needless to say, it was just a matter of time until he and Arminius clashed.

⁵⁵ Telephone interview with Carl Bangs, St. Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, MO (28 March 1980).

⁵⁶ Cited in Bangs, *Arminius*, 141.

On November 6, 1588, Arminius began preaching from Romans and Malachi addressing early issues of grace and predestination. It was following his public exposition of Romans seven that the first round of strife was to raise its ugly head.⁵⁷

The basis of the conflict was over Arminius' interpretation of Romans 7:14, "I am carnal, sold under sin." Does the Apostle, as Arminius puts it, "treat about a man who is still unregenerate or about one who is already regenerate through the spirit of Christ?" The Calvinist interpretation ascribed Paul's words about difficulty of following the law of God to the man to whom Christian salvation had come; this is a difficulty that would always be with the Christian. Arminius however, felt that this contradicted Romans 6:14, "ye are not under law, but under grace." Arminius concluded that Paul must be speaking of unregenerate man because "the regenerate obtain the forgiveness of sins through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of his Spirit."⁵⁸ Arminius was unwilling to apply the words, "I am carnal, sold under sin," to the life of a believer. In Arminius' words, "He who approves not of that which he does, nor does that which he would is the slave of another, that is, of sin. . . But the man about whom the apostle is treating approves not of that which he does, nor does what he would, but he does that which he hates. Therefore, the man who is in the place of the subject of discussion is the slave of another, that is, of sin; and therefore the same man is unregenerate and not placed under grace."⁵⁹

This interpretation of Scripture precipitated the first round of theological conflict. Plancius accused Arminius of heresy. The unregenerate man, asserted Plancius, could not have as much godliness as is described in this section. Plancius accused Arminius of being Pelagian and Socinian. As a result of the accusations, the issue was brought up before the consistory and then the town council. The meeting before the magistrates was held on February 11, 1592. Arminius acknowledged that his exposition of Romans seven differed from some of the Reformed, but he denied that he was outside what was permitted by the Confession and the Catechism.⁶⁰ He had supposed that he could exercise the liberty enjoyed by all Christian teachers of expounding Scripture according to the dictates of conscience.

The outcome of the meeting saw Plancius implicitly rebuked for only

⁵⁷ For Arminius' development of Romans 7 see Arminius, *Writings*, 2.195-243.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.233.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.253.

⁶⁰ Morley Rattenbury, "The Historical Background and Life of Arminius," *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* 185 (October 1960): 245. See Arminius *Writings*, 2.388-403 for his refutation of this accusation.

he had made “declamatory statements.” Arminius was to exercise care in the utterance of “new doctrines,” but was not condemned. Why? It affirmed that there might well be doctrinal matters that were not yet settled in the Reformed church and which should be proper matters for discussion in a town council. Thus the oligarchy stood firm (1) in its support of toleration, (2) its support of its adopted son Arminius, and (3) in support of its own role as the guardian of the peace of the church. Bangs observes that before the burgomasters “Arminius was surrounded by friends. When the case was taken to the Town Hall, Brer Rabbit was in the briar patch.”⁶¹

For the time being there was peace in the church. However, doctrinal controversy revived early in 1593, as Arminius preached on Romans nine. Pieter Dirksen and Burgomaster Claes Oetgens joined Plancius in complaining of Arminius’ exegesis and exposition of Scripture.

By now it was apparent that there were two parties in the city. One was a high Calvinist party with Plancius its theological leader and Oetgens its political leader. The other was gathered around Jan Egbertsz Bisschop, a prominent Amsterdam merchant, and looked to Arminius for its theological leadership.⁶²

The issue over Romans nine was to be the wedge between the warring factions and the primary theological catalyst toward the polarity in the Dutch Reformed church. Romans nine dealt with election and concepts of predestination. The high Calvinists, Plancius, et. al., clung to the Bezan interpretation of Romans nine through eleven, “supralapsarianism,” which taught a limited atonement, irresistible grace and unconditional election of the saved and reprobation for the damned.

A precedent for this issue can be found in the case of Snecanus who asserted that “the doctrine of conditional predestination is not only conformable to the Word of God but cannot be charged with novelty.” Beza spoke of this view as absurd;⁶³ he had built upon Romans nine a doctrine of double predestination. In his Introduction to the Ninth Chapter of Romans, Snecanus presented arguments very similar to Arminius.⁶⁴

Arminius put his analysis of Romans nine (his sermons are no longer extant) in a letter to Snecanus, writing of their “mutual agreement”⁶⁵ upon the interpretation of it. What were the major emphases of Arminius’ interpretation?

First, Arminius asserts that the interpretation of Beza is wrong because he asks the wrong question and is looking for an answer about

⁶¹ Bangs, *Arminius*, 145.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 147.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 193-94.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Arminius, *Writings* 3.527. The entire letter is contained in 527-65.

which Paul is not dealing. The false question is, "Will the Word of God fail even if most of the Jews are rejected?" The corresponding answer is, "God determined that only some of the Jews were to be partakers." Therefore, Beza's supralapsarianism. The problem with this is the question is inadequate. The correct question is, "Does not the word of God become of none effect if those Jews who seek righteousness not of faith but of the law are rejected by God?" The answer is, "God, in His word and in the declaration of His promise, signified that he considered in the relation of children only those Jews who should seek righteousness and salvation by faith, but in relation of foreigners those who should seek the same by the law." Arminius grounds his interpretation in Romans 4:9-10 and Galatians 3-4.⁶⁶

Next, Arminius examines Paul's use of types and antitypes. Confusion arises over Isaac and Ishmael, and Esau and Jacob when they are taken as examples in themselves of God's purpose rather than as types of the children of the flesh and children of the promise. The crux of Arminius' argument is found here. He asserts a predestination of classes, those who seek righteousness by works and those who seek it by faith.⁶⁷ Arminius also criticizes Beza in respect to predestination saying, "an act which is inevitable on account of the determination of any decrees does not deserve the name of sin," only those who sin voluntarily and of their own choice can be held blameworthy.⁶⁸

Arminius also took issue with Beza on the concept of orders of decrees with respect to the word translated "lump." Beza in his supralapsarian interpretation asserts that this is the aggregate of fallen man.⁶⁹

This is a summation of Arminius' arguments for Romans nine. In it is contained the theology which polarizes the Reformed church. Here, the issue is doctrinal and particularly election. Beza suggests a double-predestination while Arminius teaches a predestination of classes, i.e., those in Christ are saved. These treatises on Romans seven and nine, plus his critique of Perkins and his correspondence with Franciscus Junius (1597), comprise the extant writings of Arminius from his Amsterdam Pastorate. Later his sentiments crystallize.

In summary Arminius wrote a poem to Snecanus stating his feelings on the theological issues:

If any man will show to me,
That I with Paul do not agree

⁶⁶ Ibid., 3. 529-33.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3.533-44.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 3.548.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 3.558.

with readiness I will abstain
 From my own sense, and his retain:
 But if, still further, one will show
 That I've dealt faith a deadly blow
 With deepest grief my fault I'll own,
 And try my error to atone.⁷⁰

Professorial Years at Leiden (1603-1609)

During his years in Amsterdam Arminius made his views known through both preaching and correspondence. When Franciscus Junius died of the plague in 1602, Arminius was proposed as his successor in the chair of theology at Leiden. However, vigorous opposition came from the supralapsarian clergy. He received the appointment nonetheless, a revealing commentary on the still-fluid theological situation in the Dutch churches in 1603. At the appointment of Arminius, theologico-political forces which had been coexisting somewhat peacefully since the beginnings of the Dutch Reformation came into conflict. Leiden became a center of contention with Arminius the spokesman for the “toleration” party and Franciscus Gomarus the leader and spokesman for the “supralapsarian” faction.

The issues surfacing in open conflict were a continuation of those which Arminius had earlier addressed. They crystallized in controversy over the doctrine of predestination with accompanying debate over grace and free will, and over the nature of the church. Would it be tolerant and open, subject to magisterial control, or intolerant “high” Calvinistic and doctrinally rigid? The latter issue would surface in debate over the proposed national synod. Dogmatic theology and the politics of church and state were intertwined in the six years of Arminius’ life as a professor at Leiden.

It might be wise at this point to dispel a misconception. Often times Calvin and Arminius are put in tension as having mutually exclusive systems of thought. What was Arminius’ attitude toward Calvin and his writings? The answer is found in a letter to Sebastian Egbertsz, “...after the reading of the Scripture... I recommend that the Commentaries of Calvin be read. For I affirm that in the interpretation of Scripture Calvin is incomparable..., so much so that I concede to him a certain spirit of prophecy in which he stands distinguished about others, above most, yea, above all.” However, Arminius is not as enthusiastic over Calvin’s Insti-

⁷⁰ Arminius, *Writings* (3 vols.; trans. James Nichols & William Nichols; London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green; vols. 1 & 2, 1825-28; Thomas Baker, vol. 3, 1875), 3.519. Note that the American edition, 3.565 translates the poem in a prose format.

tutes. "His Institutes...I give out to be read after the Catechism, as a more extended explanation. But here I add—with discrimination, as the writings of all men ought to be read."⁷¹

Likewise, Arminius verbalizes his loyalty to the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism. What Arminius dissented with was the "supralapsarian" interpretation of Scripture, not so much Calvin or even Creeds.

What events contributed to the ever widening polarities; what issues were at stake? The key issue at stake was the issue of predestination as taught by Beza, his followers, Plancius, Gomarus and the multitude of other "high Calvinists." Was it true to Scripture? Arminius thought not.

At Leiden, Arminius immediately set about to teach theology including predestination as he viewed it from his indigenous Dutch Reformed background. In his public disputation given for his Doctorate on July 10, 1603, Arminius said, "...though the understanding of God be certain and infallible, it does not impose of necessity in things, nay rather it establishes in them a contingency."⁷² Translated, this means that the fall was not decreed but based upon man's choice, a position contrary to Beza.

In another disputation (15), on February 7, 1604, Arminius speaking on "Divine Predestination" says, One caution ought to be strictly observed, that nothing be taught concerning (predestination) beyond what the Scriptures say, that it be propounded in the manner which the Scriptures have adopted, and that it be referred to the same end as that which the Scriptures proposed when they delivered it.⁷³ By this, Arminius is implying that those teaching "Supralapsarian Predestination" are going beyond Scripture into speculation. Later, on May 29, 1604, Arminius again pressed hard that the "first sin was contingent and not necessary,"⁷⁴ further exposing his polarity with supralapsarianism.

On October 31, 1604, the theological battle at Leiden began in earnest. Gomarus initiated it by holding a public disputation out of turn and not a part of the established schedule. He excused his speaking out of turn because error was abroad (speaking of Arminius). At the disputation he expounded Beza's predestination theories.⁷⁵

In his public disputations, Arminius challenged many of Gomarus' and Beza's theories. Arminius taught that predestination was "the decree of the good pleasure of God in Christ, by which he resolved from all

⁷¹ James Arminius, "Letter to Sebastian Egbertsz" (3 May 1607), in Casper Brandt, *The Life of James Arminius, D.D.* (trans. John Guthrie, Nashville, TN: E. Stevenson and F. A. Owen, 1857), 299-301.

⁷² Arminius, *Writings*, American ed., 1.447.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1.569.

⁷⁴ Brandt, *Life*, 195-97.

⁷⁵ Bangs, *Arminius*, 263-64.

eternity, to justify, adopt and endow with everlasting life, ...believers on whom he had decreed to bestow faith."⁷⁶In this definition believers are the elect, therefore, faith precedes election.

When accused of teaching "free will," a Pelagian concept, Arminius responded (speaking of man as a sinner):"In this state, the free will of man towards the true good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and weakened; but it is also imprisoned, destroyed, and lost. And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has not powers whatsoever except such as are excited by divine grace. For Christ said, 'without me ye can do nothing.'"⁷⁷Arminius later says "free will is unable to begin or to perfect any true and spiritual good without grace."⁷⁸ [The regenerate] are "made capable in Christ, cooperating now with God...this cooperation whatever it may be of knowledge, holiness, and power, is all begotten within him by the Holy Spirit."⁷⁹

Arminius does not deny predestination; however, he defines it differently from Beza developing his own Biblical theology. Of fundamental importance is the fact that for Arminius the doctrine of sin and inability, in which he agrees with Calvin, is explicitly presupposed as the problem to which predestination is the answer. This disagrees with Beza and his followers who made the decree of election refer to man as yet uncreated. Beza's position makes it necessary that there be sin in order that God may carry out his prior decree-which is to make God the author of sin.⁸⁰

As theological tensions increased, complicated by political issues, Arminius was asked to state his theological position before the State of Holland. On October 8, 1608, he delivered his understanding of predestination and other theological points of conflict. After a scathing attack on supralapsarianism, Arminius delineated his understanding of predestination. For Arminius," the first decree of God concerning the salvation of sinful men, is that by which he decreed to appoint His Son, Jesus Christ, for a Mediator, Redeemer, Savior, Priest and King, who might destroy sin by his own death, might by his obedience obtain the salvation which has been lost, and might communicate by his own virtue."⁸¹

The second decree extends election to those who repent and believe in Christ, i.e., the church. The third decree is the administration of "sufficient and efficient means" necessary for the repentance and faith by

⁷⁶ Arminius, *Writings*, American ed., 1.565.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.526.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Carl Bangs, "Arminius and the Dutch Reformation," *Church History* 30 (June 1961): 166.

⁸¹ Arminius, *Writings*, American ed., 1.247.

which one is in Christ. The result is that Christ is the elect One that all are elect who are in Christ, and that no one is in Christ except by faith. Election in its primary sense therefore refers to Christ. In its legitimate extension it includes believers. The fourth and final decree specifies particular persons, sinful men whom God elects and saves because of their foreknown repentance and faith.⁸²

Arminius asserted that God's predestination is "in Christ." By affirming a Christological understanding of predestination, Arminius departed in a number of particulars from high Calvinist Reformed theology.⁸³ Here are a few of the major departures. First, predestination does not determine who shall believe, only that those in Christ, believers, are elect. Secondly, salvation being in Christ, it is not dependent on free will, but free will is active in salvation. Thirdly, the will can resist grace. Fourth, the resistibility of grace leads to the possibility of falling from grace. The possibility that a believer may cease believing is at least an open question. Fifth, all this implies a general atonement.⁸⁴ Arminius' view definitely is different from a supralapsarian understanding of predestination. The question arises, why is the predestination issue so important?

Why the rage over predestination? It was not merely a disagreement in the realm of ideas, neither was it just an historical accident. The issue over predestination has its roots in the polarity in Dutch religious and national life going back to the refugee flights in 1566. Polarity existed in Arminius' Amsterdam days. In the seventeenth century the polarity was taking new forms and intensities.⁸⁵ With the Catholic counter-Reformation, Cardinal Bellarmine attacked the Reformed doctrine of predestination. "Here he found the soft underbelly of the Protestant enemy, and his jabs hit home." When someone else, especially a Reformed professor of theology took his own jabs at the underbelly, it was regarded as a defection to the Catholic church. This charge was made of Arminius. All of this served to make predestination a touchy issue, for it seemed to strike at the very foundation of both the Reformed religion and the national struggle for independence. In the socio-economic matrix these ideas stood for political realities which further complicated and polarized the two sides.⁸⁶

⁸² Bangs, "Dutch Reformation," 167-68.

⁸³ Ibid., 169.

⁸⁴ Adopted from Ibid., 169-70.

⁸⁵ Bangs, *Arminius*, 273.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

The Five Articles of the Remonstrants (1610)

In 1618, the Synod of Dort met and condemned the teachings of Remonstrants, the disciples of Arminius. After comparing the writings of Arminius with the “Five Articles,” this writer concludes that they are an accurate reflection and summation of Arminius’ soteriological doctrines. The following are the “Five Articles” of the Remonstrants,” which were published in 1610 and signed by forty-four Remonstrant clergymen:

I. That God, by an eternal and unchangeable purpose in Jesus Christ his Son, before the foundations of the world were laid, determined to save, out of the human race which had fallen into sin, in Christ, for Christ’s sake and through Christ, those who through the grace of the Holy Spirit shall believe on the same his Son and shall through the same grace persevere in this same faith and obedience of faith even to the end; and on the other hand to leave under sin and wrath the contumacious and unbelieving and to condemn them as aliens from Christ, according to the word of the Gospel in John 3:36, and other passages of scripture.

II. That, accordingly, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for all, by his death on the cross, reconciliation and remission of sins; yet so that no one is partaker of this remission except the believers (John 3:16; 1 John 2:2).

III. That man has not saving grace of himself, nor the working of his own free-will, inasmuch as in his state of apostasy and sin he can for himself and by himself think nothing that is good—nothing, that is, truly good, such as saving faith is, above all else. But that it is necessary that by God, in Christ and through his Holy Spirit he be born again and renewed in understanding, affections and will and in all his faculties, that he may be able to understand, think, will and perform what is truly good, according to the Word of God (John 15:5).

IV. That this grace of God is the beginning, the progress and the end of all good; so that even the regenerate man can neither think will nor effect any good, nor withstand any temptation to evil, without grace precedent (or prevenient), awakening, following and cooperating. So that all good deeds and all movements towards good that can be conceived in thought must be ascribed to the grace of God in Christ. But with respect to the mode of oper-

ation, grace is not irresistible; for it is written of many that they resisted the Holy Spirit (Acts 7 and elsewhere *passim*).

V. That those who are grafted into Christ by a true faith, and have thereby been made partakers of his life-giving Spirit, are abundantly endowed with power to strive against Satan, sin, the world and their own flesh, and to win the victory; always, be it understood, with the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit, with Jesus Christ assisting them in all temptations, through his Spirit; stretching out his hand to them and (provided only that they are themselves prepared for the fight, that they entreat his aid and do not fail to help themselves) propping and upholding them so that by no guile or violence of Satan can they be led astray or plucked from Christ's hands (John 10:28). But for the question whether they are not able through sloth or negligence to forsake the beginning of their life in Christ, to embrace again this present world, to depart from the holy doctrine once delivered to them, to lose their good conscience and to neglect grace--this must be the subject of more exact inquiry in the Holy Scriptures, before we can teach it with full confidence of our mind.⁸⁷

The final section will consist of a comparison between representative Anabaptist writers and the soteriological writings of Arminius.

V: A COMPARISON OF SOTERIOLOGICAL THOUGHT: ARMINIUS AND THE ANABAPTISTS

This section constitutes the heart of the paper and upon these comparisons the argument will stand or fall. Thus far we have concluded that General Baptists were definitely known as Arminian in their theology which historians have assumed originated with James Arminius. From that assumption the paper digressed surveying the three phases of the Dutch Reformation: the Sacramentist, Anabaptist and Dutch Reformed stages. Following that survey, the paper moved specifically to documented accounts of Arminius' interaction with the Anabaptists and their writings in the Netherlands. The next link in the chain presented Arminius' soteriology as it was manifested in the tensions of the Dutch Reformation. The final section will briefly compare the soteriological thought of representative Anabaptist leaders and Arminius.

Before comparisons can be made, the issue must be resolved, "who

⁸⁷ See, e.g., *Documents of the Christian Church* (2d ed.; Henry Bettenson; London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 268-69.

are the representative Anabaptists who may have influenced Arminius?" It has been established that Arminius had numerous contacts with the Mennonites, but he also read all the available Anabaptist works at hand. Based on the overt similarities, if Arminius were affected by any Anabaptist it would have to have been the group which is referred to as the "Normative Anabaptists" or, in line with Williams' typology, the "Evangelical Anabaptists."

The "Evangelical Anabaptists" consisted of the Swiss Brethren, Hubmaier and the South German Anabaptists represented by Marpeck in the first generation. The second generation produced Hofmann, Menno, Hutter, Riedemann and many others. In order to be selective but also representative, this comparison will examine briefly the soteriology primarily of Hubmaier, Marpeck, Menno and Hans de Ries comparing similarities between them and Arminius.

The methodology of the research for this section was to take the "five points of Arminianism" as a touchstone and examine writings of, and about, the above mentioned Anabaptists in order to establish the existence or absence of doctrinal parallels. The significant components of Arminius' soteriology were a belief in General Atonement, necessity of regeneration (grace?) in order to respond to God, resistible grace and the possibility of losing one's salvation. Note that the five points of Calvinism were not the true antitheses of the "Remonstrance." How were these seen in representative Anabaptists?

Balthasar Hubmaier

"Balthasar Hubmaier," wrote Estep, "provided the guidelines for the sixteenth century Anabaptist view of salvation." The single most important theologian of Anabaptism during its formative stages, Hubmaier "holds the key which unlocks the whole of (normative) Anabaptist soteriology." Although Hubmaier was a sound biblical theologian, he was not a systematic theologian, primarily due to the fact that he was martyred only four years after becoming an Anabaptist.⁸⁸

How did Hubmaier view the atonement? In his "On the Christian Baptism of Believers" Hubmaier wrote, "He (Christ) shed his blood and imparted it from the cross to all who believe on him, for the washing away of their sins."⁸⁹ The revelation of God in Christ contended Hubmaier clearly indicates that God wills that all men be saved. "Christ showed us this very plainly when he said (John 3:16): God so loved the

⁸⁸ William Estep, "The Anabaptist View of Salvation," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 20 (Spring 1978): 32, 34-35, 49.

⁸⁹ Balthasar Hubmaier, "On the Christian Baptism of Believers" (1525) in *Anabaptist Beginnings* (ed. W. R. Estep; Nieuwkoop: B. DeGraff, 1976), 97.

world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have eternal life.”⁹⁰

Estep translated a passage from the Hubmaier *Schriften* edited by Westin and Bergsten. In it Hubmaier wrote:

Only a foolish king could place a goal before his subjects and then say, “Now run that you may get there” when he already knows beforehand that they are bound in iron and that they cannot run. It was certainly a cunning God who invites all men to the supper, and really offers his mercy to everyone, if he after all did not wish the invited to come. It was a false God who should say in words, “Come here” and yet in secret in his heart should think, “Sit yonder.” It would be an unfaithful God who should publicly offer grace to man, and should clothe him in new raiment, yet in secret take it away from him and prepare hell for him.⁹¹

Although Hubmaier believed in a general atonement he also believed that a man must be regenerated before he could respond to God. In essence, God had to make the first move. Hubmaier wrote, “Only when He gives us grace can we do His will so that we, in as much as he gives us grace, might fulfill his will.” He continued, “For if he does not give us grace we are already lost.” Again Hubmaier wrote, “To unbelievers, these promises (in the Word) are the letter that kills but to believers, spirit and life that God alone gives to whom He will.”⁹² This regeneration, wherein God makes the first move, is kin to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit for Hubmaier. Hubmaier stated that the “Baptism of the Spirit makes possible the New Birth.”⁹³ For Hubmaier, regeneration is grace extended, but the New Birth comes as a result of the sinner placing faith in the finished work of Christ.

The New Birth is the heart of Hubmaier’s doctrine of salvation. It comes to man through the Word and the Holy Spirit. Through the Gospel, said Hubmaier, God has taken the initiative toward man’s salvation.

Although Hubmaier stressed that God makes the first move to quicken man, he did not believe in “irresistible grace.” He contended that man had a measure of free-will. Hubmaier believed that man had the capacity to desire and will the good, but not to practice it without grace.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Estep, “Salvation,” 45.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹² Hubmaier, “Baptism,” 98, 69.

⁹³ Estep, “Salvation,” 45.

⁹⁴ Torsten Bergsten, *Balthasar Hubmaier Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr*, (trans. W. R. Estep; Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1978), 354.

Hubmaier wrote,

God gives power and capacity to all men in so far as they themselves desire it (Jn. 1:12, Deut. 30:19). Free choice is restored to them to come, and a new birth, a new beginning of the creaturely, as man had been originally in paradise, save for the flesh. But whatever man will not... these he (God) will leave outside.⁹⁵

Again, Hubmaier wrote, "If I will I can be saved, by the grace of God. If I will not, I shall be damned and that by my own fault, from obstinacy and self-will." In essence, wrote Hubmaier, God desires to save all men except for those "who by their own choice refuse to be saved."⁹⁶ Hubmaier believed that without freedom it would be pointless to make a moral demand upon man.⁹⁷

In these contentions Hubmaier was similar to Hans Denck who is considered more of a "spiritualist." Denck wrote with respect to the extent of the atonement that, "the suffering of Christ has done enough for sins of all men, even if no one were saved."⁹⁸

Although Hubmaier did not write on the possibility of losing one's salvation, Denck did. He wrote, "Indeed for whom God has received in faith, he can and wills to reject again in case the person does not remain in faith."⁹⁹

Keep in mind that the fifth article of the Remonstrants does not fully affirm that man can be saved and lost; it only maintains that the concept of the perseverance of the saints is not sufficiently and clearly delineated in Scripture.

As the reader can readily see, there is a similarity broadly between concepts of soteriology in Hubmaier and Arminius. What of other Anabaptists?

Pilgrim Marpeck

Pilgrim Marpeck, the prolific South German Anabaptist, too, held similar concepts of soteriology. Concerning the extent of the atonement he wrote,

⁹⁵ Balthasar Hubmaier, "On Free Will," in *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers* (ed. G. H. Williams; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1957), 129.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 127, 132-33.

⁹⁷ Bergsten, 358

⁹⁸ Hans Denck, "Rechenschaft," in Estep, *Beginnings*, 134.

⁹⁹ Hans Denck, "Whether God is the Cause of Evil," in Williams, *Spiritual*,

For it is the will of God that recollection, testimony, and proclamation should always be made to the followers, apostate, erring and ignorant, ever to those who know, in order that no one may be lost, that everyone may improve, and that all men may become well, be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Christ is not the atonement for the sins of a part or a half but of the whole world.¹⁰⁰

Again, he wrote, “this Christ and Son of God demands neither time, place, or person, but whosoever will may come and drink” (Jn 7:37).¹⁰¹

In “A Clear Refutation,” Marpeck addressed those who insisted on a limited atonement suggesting that they have rejected God’s revelation in Christ:

I would very much like to know where such prophets place Christ’s words, ‘whoso wills,’ He does not say ‘whoever waits until I will.’ I would like to know whether they have the power to confine this revealed will of Christ, and whether this word of Christ has ever been revoked, or is it still valid...?

Marpeck continued, “those who accuse the gracious Christ (as if he were an angry Christ, as if one had to hope and wait until He again conciliated the Father) accuses Him of not having done enough for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).¹⁰² Marpeck, like Hubmaier insists that God’s offer of “whosoever will” be taken at face value as representative of God’s offer of general atonement.

This is not to say that all men will respond to God’s offer. Marpeck wrote concerning the fact that God must make the initial move toward man. He wrote, “Down with the spirits who say that one is able to believe in the Son of God, His human voice and speech, teaching and works without being drawn by the Father” (1 John 6:44). He continued, “I defy those false teachers who teach that a really good work of faith can occur apart from the working of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰³ For Marpeck, the extent of the atonement is to all men; however, man must first be approached by God in the person of the Holy Spirit in order to be reconciled to God.

Now with respect to this, Marpeck asserts that grace is not irresistible. He wrote, “Just so, today, the world does not want it (salvation

¹⁰⁰ Pilgrim Marpeck, *The Writings of Pilgrim Marpeck* (trans. & ed. W. Klassen & W. Klassen; Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1967), 58.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 105-06.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

through the Holy Spirit) choosing to follow instead the wisdom of the serpent.” Concerning them he said, “Neither God nor Christ can be blamed for this action, only men themselves are to blame.” Speaking about all mankind, Marpeck said, “God desires that they would all know Him (Heb. 8, Joel 2) and desires that all be healed (1 Tim.2). His will and desires are clear. But where man is not willing, God cannot and will not.”¹⁰⁴

The most succinct statement on resistible grace is in article twenty-eight of his “Confession of Faith.” There is no coercion, but a free (freewilliger) spirit, in Christ Jesus our Lord. He who does not want, may remain outside. He who is willing, may come and drink freely.¹⁰⁵

Only a few references in Marpeck’s writings intimate the idea of losing one’s salvation. In “A Clear Refutation” he wrote, “the true believers will not leave Christ and all his teachings for Christ does not lose anyone except the children of perdition, and that is only one out of twelve” (John 17:12). He exhorted fellow Christians, “may the Lord give grace that we may remain with our Christ until the end.” Again he wrote, “whoever does not hold Him will not be held by Him.”¹⁰⁶ In Marpeck, too, we find the possibility of losing one’s salvation. But what do the Anabaptists in the Netherlands and more specifically Menno Simons, and later Hans de Ries teach with respect to soteriology?

Menno Simons

Menno, like Hubmaier and Marpeck, held to the concept of general atonement. In his “Mediation on the Twenty-fifth Psalm” he wrote, “yea, through His blood on the cross He reconciled all upon earth and heaven above.” Menno continued, “He (Jesus) proclaimed salvation to all who are heavy laden and with faithful hearts come to Him. He invites all the thirsty to the waters of life; all our sins He bore upon the cross in His own body, and our guilt He blotted out with his blood.”¹⁰⁷

In conjunction with Menno’s concept of general atonement is his rejection of the doctrine of reprobation (that God elects some to eternal damnation). Concerning reprobation, Menno wrote,

Zwingli formerly taught that when a thief stole, or a murderer killed, God’s will compelled them to it, and that their punishment was also brought about by the will of God; a position

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 61-62.

¹⁰⁵ Estep, *Beginnings*, 168.

¹⁰⁶ Marpeck, 62, 85, 106.

¹⁰⁷ Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (trans. Leonard Verduin; ed. J. C. Wenger; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 79.

God, and man created with sufficient freedom to remain morally and ethically responsible for his behavior, and therefore of his destiny. They recognize some election, but very clearly asserted that it was not 'irresistible,' to use a term that came into common use at a later period in Dutch history. The proffered grace is conditional because it depends upon the belief and obedience of the individual.¹¹³

With respect to the perseverance of the saints, Menno echoes a warning similar to passages found in Hebrews: "The Scriptures admonish the truly regenerated and resurrected ones that they should take heed to their calling and continue perfect in a new, godly walk." For Menno, it is the Christian's responsibility to maintain the saving relationship he has with God. He continued, "For if they have been made partakers of Christ, they should hold to this beginning unto the end, lest they once more depart from the living God through the deceitfulness of sin and an evil heart of unbelief."¹¹⁴

Although having some disagreements in details with Anabaptist theologians previously mentioned, i.e., the Person of Christ and celestial flesh, on major tenets of soteriology Menno is in harmony with them.

Thus far, the Anabaptist theologians have been surveyed. Evidence to support the existence of major common categories of soteriology has been presented. In turning attention to the final representative Anabaptist, the methodology will be altered from macroscopic to microscopic. The final selection will compare Arminius' teachings and Hans de Ries' "Confessions" of 1577, 1578 and 1580.

Hans de Ries & Waterlandian Confessions of Faith 1577, 1578, 1580

Hans de Ries, a leader among the Waterland Mennonites penned several "Confessions of Faith." The first major confession which will be compared with Arminius' thoughts, was prepared in 1577; a second was penned in 1580; also a brief confessional statement, known as the "Middleburg Confession" was prepared in 1578 while de Ries was in prison. Cornelius Dyck, a Mennonite historian wrote that the Waterlanders believed that no statements of faith should be binding upon others, since they are the words of men, not the Word of God. Their function lay in clarifying issues, in facilitating understanding, and thus promoting uni-

¹¹³ William E. Keeney, *The Development of Dutch Anabaptist Thought and Practice From 1539-1564* (Nieuwkoop: B. DeGraaf, 1968), 72.

¹¹⁴ Menno Simons, 59.

which, in my opinion is an abomination of abominations.¹⁰⁸

In his “Meditations” Menno asked, “Shall I say that thou has ordained the wicked to wickedness, as some have said?” He responded with Paul’s declarative, “God forbid.” Rather, he contended, “I know, O Lord, that thou art the eternally Good, and that nothing wicked can be found in thee.” Menno here inferred that for God to destine a man to reprobation is to make God the author of sin. Menno concluded, “Thou desirest not that any should remain lost, but that they might repent, come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved.”¹⁰⁹

Menno made it abundantly clear that for anyone to come to Christ, God through his grace must first draw the sinner to himself. Menno views saving faith as a gift from God. Menno wrote:

There is none that can glory in himself touching this faith, for it is the gift of God. Happy is he to whom God gives this gift, for it is more precious than gold, silver or precious stones. Nothing can be compared with it. He that receives it receives Christ Jesus, forgiveness of sins, a new mind, and eternal life.¹¹⁰

In several passages Menno emphasizes God’s Sovereignty based upon His Word. He wrote, “all that He wills comes to pass, and what he promises must be fulfilled, and not otherwise than he has promised.”¹¹¹ Menno said this in respect to the “whosoever” passages of Scripture. Note the similarity among Hubmaier, Marpeck and Menno in their understanding that God’s revealed will is an open invitation to sinners. Menno wrote in his “Meditations,” “although I resisted in former times thy precious Word and thy holy will with all my powers...; nevertheless thy fatherly grace did not forsake me.” He evidently felt that in his own life that he had previously resisted God’s grace. Resisting God’s grace for Menno was basically synonymous with unbelief.

Concerning resistible grace, Menno wrote, “I have read recently that . . . there is one good work which saves us; namely faith, and but one sin that will damn us, namely unbelief.” He concluded, “I will let this pass without finding fault.”¹¹² Keeney wrote:

Menno and Dirk (Philips) were somewhat contradictory when they attempted to recognize the paradox of a fully sovereign

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 760.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 325.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 69, 399.

ty.”¹¹⁵ As one reads de Ries’ Confessions it is interesting to note the theological conservatism contained therein. Waterlanders, known as “liberals,” were labeled such because of their policy of toleration to “offending” members.

The 1577 Confession stated in Article VI, that “God had known from all eternity all things that happen, have happened, and will happen good and bad. Nevertheless this foreknowledge compels no one to sin.”¹¹⁶ In this Article, Arminius’ teaching on “Foreknowledge” is anticipated. Both refused to acknowledge the validity of reprobation.

In the fifth article, de Ries wrote, “it is His (God’s) desire that no one should be lost, but much more that all should be saved and live.”¹¹⁷ This is a plain statement of general atonement.

A short “Confession” prepared at Middleburg sheds light on de Ries’ understanding of the Fall. He contended that although the image of God in man was marred in the fall, that “virtue” still remained in man by the grace of God. Therefore, wrote de Ries, “all men by grace (have) sufficient godliness remaining in them (so) that they are without excuse.” The consequence of this stated, “even more, man can thereby accept or reject the goodness of God offered by through diverse means as the way of life—he can open or close his heart—but not by himself, for of ourselves we can do nothing good without the help of God.”¹¹⁸ Note here that man is responsible for accepting or rejecting the gospel, while the ones responding affirmatively have done so only by God’s grace.

In the Waterland Confession, 1580, de Ries was explicit in his teaching on decrees which were emerging as major tenets in the hyper-Calvinist doctrine of election. De Ries wrote, “He (God) did not, therefore, predestinate, ordain or create anyone of them that he should be condemned: nor did he wish nor decree that they should sin or live in sins that he subject them to condemnation.” He continued, “Perdition has its rise out of man but not at all out of the good Creator.”¹¹⁹

In viewing the similarity between Arminius and De Ries with respect to specifics in soteriology it is little wonder that Arminius was reluctant to make a blanket condemnation of the whole Anabaptist movement. The plain fact is that Arminius’ soteriology reflects the major tenets of the

¹¹⁵ Cornelius J. Dyck “The First Waterlandian Confession of Faith,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36 (1962): 6.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Cornelius J. Dyck, “The Middleburg Confession of Hans de Ries, 1587,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 36 (1962): 151.

¹¹⁹ Hans de Ries, “The Waterland Confession,” in William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (rev. ed.; Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, revised ed. 1974), 47.

normative Anabaptists. Being sympathetic to the Anabaptist point of view it is little wonder that Anabaptists were commonly in attendance on his preaching.¹²⁰ Why not? With respect to the major doctrines as expressed in the Remonstrance of 1610, the Anabaptists in soteriology believed essentially the same as Arminius.

CONCLUSION

But what does all this mean? The argument of the paper is simple. First, the General Baptists held to and espoused Arminian soteriology. They were even called Arminian Baptists. Next, in an effort to understand the workings of the Dutch Reformation, we overviewed the three principal phases: Sacramentist, Anabaptist and Dutch Reformed. Emphasis was given to the relation of the latter movements to the former.

Moving from general to specific, the paper next documented Arminius' extensive interaction with the Anabaptists. That he was familiar with their doctrines, particularly their soteriology, is pretty well substantiated because of his assignment to "refute" the Anabaptists and avowed to have read all the Anabaptist literature available.

Following an examination of his relation with the Anabaptists, Arminius' soteriological doctrines were viewed as they were hammered out on the anvil of the Dutch Reformation. The paper concluded by presenting the parallels between Arminius' soteriology and that of Normative Anabaptists.

The conclusion of this writer is that the soteriological doctrines are roughly equivalent. I agree, with one exception, with Harold S. Bender's observation that, "Mennonites (and their precursors) have been historically Arminian in their theology whether they distinctly espoused the Arminian viewpoint or not."¹²¹ The exception is Bender's logic. He might as well have stated that Augustine espoused Calvinistic doctrine. His order is reversed. The Mennonites and the Normative Anabaptists did not espouse Arminian soteriology, Arminius espoused Anabaptist soteriology. After all, the last Anabaptist document referred to was penned in 1580, when Arminius was at the ripe old age of nineteen and still in school.

Therefore, if Arminius held to Anabaptist soteriology, and the General Baptists advocated Arminian soteriology, logic has it that the General Baptists advocated Anabaptist soteriology through an Arminian filter, so that English General Baptists after all have true Anabaptist roots.

¹²⁰ Bangs, *Arminius*, 170.

¹²¹ *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Arminianism," by Harold S. Bender.