

RECONSIDERING ARMINIUS

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RECONSIDERING ARMINIUS

BEYOND THE REFORMED AND WESLEYAN DIVIDE

EDITED BY

KEITH D. STANGLIN

MARK G. BILBY

MARK H. MANN



KINGSWOOD BOOKS

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BEYOND THE REFORMED AND WESLEYAN DIVIDE
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14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23—10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

In memory of Carl Bangs,

who put the historical Harmenszoon back on the scholarly map

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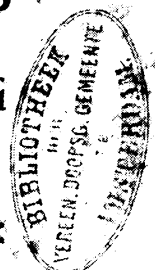
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ABBREVIATIONS

- AM *The Arminian Magazine*, 20 vols. (1778–1797).
- C. Bangs Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, rev. ed. (n.p.: F. Asbury Press, 1985).
- Dec. sent.* Arminius, *Declaratio sententiae* (1610)
- Disp. priv.* Arminius, *Disputationes privatae, de plerisque Christianae religionis capitibus* (1614), in *Opera*, pp. 339–444; *Works*, vol. 2.
- Disp. pub.* Arminius, *Disputationes publicae* (1610; Leiden, 2010), in *Opera*, pp. 197–338; *Works*, vol. 2.
- Exam. Gom.* Arminius, *Examen thesium D. Francisci Gomari de praedestinatione* ([Amsterdam,] 1645), in *Works*, vol. 3.
- Exam. Perk.* Arminius, *Examen modestum libelli, quem D. Guilielmus Perkinsius . . . edidit* (1612), in *Opera*, pp. 621–777; *Works*, vol. 3.
- GCP Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991).
- Gunter W. Stephen Gunter, *Arminius and His Declaration of Sentiments: An Annotated Translation with Introduction and Theological Commentary* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012).
- JETS *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (1969–).
- Opera* Arminius, *Opera theologica* (Leiden: Godefridus Basson, 1629).
- Stanglin and McCall Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- Works* Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius: London edition*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986).
- YE Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 26 vols. (Yale University Press, 1957–2008).

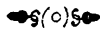
IACOBI
 ARMINII
 VETERA QVINATIS
 BATAVI,
 SS. Theologiæ Doctoris eximii
 OPERA
 THEOLOGICA:



IN QVIBVS

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>I. Orationes: de Sacerdotio Christi: de obiecto, de authore, ac fine, & de certitudine SS. Theologia: ac denique de componendo Religionis inter Christianos dissidio.</p> <p>II. Declaratio sententia Authoris horum operum de Prædestinatione, providentia Dei, libero arbitrio, gratia Dei, Divinitate Filii Dei, & de Iustificazione hominis coram Deo.</p> <p>III. Apologia aduersus articulos XXXI. in vulgus sparsos.</p> <p>IV. Responso ad Questions IX. & ad eas Anterosemata.</p> | <p>V. Disputationes publicæ & privatæ. VI. Authoris cum Franc. Iunio de prædestinatione amica collatio: eiusq. ad Theses Iunii de prædestinat. Nota.</p> <p>VII. Examen modestum prædestinationis Perkinsianæ.</p> <p>VIII. Analysis cap. IX. & Dissertatio in cap. VII. Epistolæ ad Romanos.</p> <p>IX. Epistola ad Hippolytum à Collibus, &c.</p> <p>X. Articuli nonnulli diligenti examine perpendendi, auctoris de præcipuis doctrinæ Christianæ capitibus sententiam plenius declarantes.</p> |
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Nunc denuo coniunctim recusa.



PROSTANT

Apud Guilielmum Fitzerum Anglum, Bibliopolam Francofurtanum.

ANNO M. DC. XXXI.

Title page from the second edition of Arminius's collected works. Courtesy of The Leiden American Pilgrim Museum.

RECONSIDERING ARMINIUS: RECASTING THE LEGACY

Mark H. Mann and Mark G. Bilby

Revivalist and theologian Aaron Merritt Hills was one of the most ardent and articulate defenders of Arminianism in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America. Hills was raised a Congregationalist and received his theological education first at the feet of revivalist greats such as Charles Finney and Asa Mahan at Oberlin College. He then soaked in the New Light theology while completing his divinity studies at Yale. He would go on to become a successful pastor, evangelist, author, and college president before finally landing among Wesleyan-Holiness folk and becoming one of their chief theological voices of the era.¹ He would conclude his career by serving as a professor of theology at Point Loma Nazarene University (then Pasadena College), where the conference “Rethinking Arminius” was conducted in March of 2012. Several chapters in this volume draw from its presentations. But it is not simply this coincidental institutional connection that makes Hills an interestingly appropriate place to start this book. It is especially what he had to say about Arminius in his magnum opus, the two-volume *Fundamental Christian Theology*, and the way in which his work provides a window into the legacy of Arminianism—a legacy that this collection of essays seeks to recast—that leads us to start with Hills.²

At the conclusion to the second volume, Hills includes a brief, two-page outline of the authors of important Christian doctrines for, as he puts it, “the quick use of students.”³ Oddly, of the fourteen persons that he lists, most are heretics, including Sabellius, Arius,

Nestorius, Eutyches, and Socinus. He also mentions Pelagius, and with some sympathy, which makes some sense in light of the little bit he has to say about St. Augustine. He concludes his thoughts about St. Augustine by saying he: "laid the foundation of Calvinism," and thus Hills then has few words to say about Calvin: "developed Calvinism; burned Servetus." In other words, he hardly considers Augustine and Calvin—without question two of the greatest doctors of the Christian church—worth mentioning, still less their ideas.

Hills's sharp condescension toward Calvinism is even more evident elsewhere in his work. In a discussion of the doctrine of unconditional election, he has plenty to say about Calvinism, and not a word of it positive. "Those lovely Calvinists," as he rather sarcastically calls them at times, affirm a doctrine that is "absurd," "insults reason and blasphemes God," "has evil influences," and runs completely "counter to Scripture."⁴ In his discussion of the Calvinist penal satisfaction view of the atonement, he has equally dismissive things to say: "the wonder is that any thoughtful, reflective mind can accept it."⁵ He is especially aghast that someone as astute as the great Charles Hodge—who serves as Hills's chief Calvinist whipping boy—could affirm that this doctrine is both orthodox and catholic. A bit later, this time in discussing foreordination, Hills provides a rather lengthy quote about what he considers the Calvinist view of God:

That God unchangeably decreed a universe necessarily so full of wickedness, and involving the unavoidable, eternal, helpless, hopeless doom of so many immortals, that the very thought of it fills any right-thinking soul with horror! The whole idea is a wicked calumny on God.... How that great and good man failed to perceive the *unreasonableness* and *monstrosity* of such theory we cannot understand.⁶

Hills will then go on to conclude,

Such is Calvinism, the most unreasonable, incongruous, self-contradictory, man-belittling and God-dishonoring scheme of theology that ever appeared in Christian thought. No one can accept its contradictory, mutually exclusive propositions without intellectual self-debasement. For a theologian to flounder about in the morass of its opposing doctrines and assumptions, in a vain attempt to make them harmonize, and then admit that "these are the only

feeble attempts to extricate ourselves from the profundities of theology," is nothing but self-stultification. It holds up a self-centered, selfish, heartless, remorseless tyrant for God, and bids us worship Him. . . . Thank God [Calvinism] is dying! May its death be hastened. The sooner it breathes its last, the better it will be for the kingdom of God on earth and in heaven.⁷

Hills was clearly not one given to mince words, nor to have any patience with the subtleties in the thought of those at whom he aimed his vitriol.

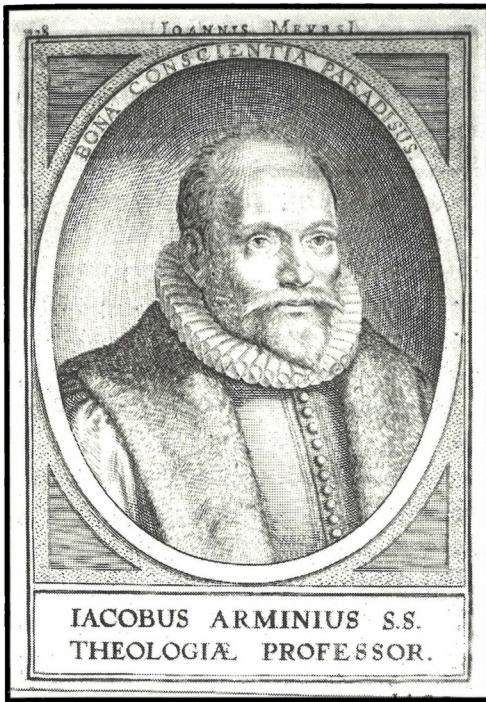
If the kind of polemic we find in Hills's description of Calvinism seems to us overly harsh, we perhaps might forgive him, for Calvinists were making similar claims about Arminianism. Take, for instance, the great Charles Hodge himself, arguably the most significant Reformed theologian in America since Jonathan Edwards and the primary voice of the so-called "Princeton theology" that would come to define orthodox Calvinism in America. In his most sustained treatment of Arminianism, *Arminianism and Grace*, his core thesis is that Arminianism "in its essential and avowed principles, is subversive of grace."⁸ Hodge begins his discussion in a genteel fashion, claiming only to be responding to official and unfair assertions of The Methodist Episcopal Church (which he identifies as the "palladium" of Arminianism in America) that are both unscriptural and immoderate, in hopes of helping them become "more modest in their assaults of Calvinism."⁹ While noting certain aspects of Methodist Arminianism that he finds laudable—especially their work among the poor and ability to take the gospel to otherwise unreachable regions through itineracy—Hodge's central focus is demonstrating the extent that Arminians both misunderstand and misrepresent Calvinist theology and themselves profess a theology unworthy of the gospel. Arminianism is couched in "bold" and "dangerous" error, filled with "monstrous absurdities" and "the vilest outrages on truth, decency and honesty."¹⁰ Perhaps even worse, Arminian theology has led Methodism into "practical evils" related to revivalism: sheep stealing and false conversions by which persons are "deluded by mere emotional excitement."¹¹ Hodge goes on: "It cannot be otherwise. What is false in their system of doctrine and theory of religion, must produce the bitter fruits of evil, just in proportion as it is prominently presented and acted out."¹²

The great irony of the polemical discussions of Arminianism and Calvinism in the work of both Hodge and Hills is the glaring absence of the very figure who stands at the heart of the controversy—Jacob Arminius. Hodge provides extensive treatment of the work of several prominent Arminians—including John Wesley, Wilbur Fisk, and Richard Watson—but not once does he even mention, much less quote or address, the ideas of Arminius himself, despite the fact that the word *Arminianism* shows up multiple times on most pages. As bad as that may be, Hills is not much better. In fact, while mentioning and addressing and citing a number of figures in his several chapters-long defense of Arminianism against Calvinism (most notably Augustine and Calvin) not once is Arminius mentioned or quoted. Of course, he does have something to say about Arminius in his appendix: He was a “martyr to truth” and “founder of Arminianism, the winning theology of the world.”¹³ Note the depth of the irony here. Hills clearly holds Arminius in high regard, as both the fount of his own dearest theological convictions, and a kind of Christlike martyr-saint. But the actual thought and life of the man are almost completely absent from Hills’s work. His words here might be rhetorical, but it is not even apparent that Hills was aware that Arminius was in fact not a martyr, but instead died of tuberculosis a full decade before his condemnation at the Synod of Dort. In fact, in the entirety of the two volumes, Hills only mentions Arminius three times and only quotes him once!¹⁴

We should be careful not to be too critical of either Hills or Hodge in their failure to note Arminius and his theology in their alternative defenses of or attacks upon Arminianism. In truth, Hills and Hodge merely represent the norm when it comes to such polemics, going all the way back to the seventeenth century and continuing well into the twentieth. Arminius the man was either an orthodox saint or a heretical villain, depending on whether one’s perspective was that of the Arminian or the Calvinist. Arminius’s theology was essentially that rejected at Dort and that affirmed by Arminians ever since.

But contemporary scholarship has begun to paint a very different picture of Arminius’s life and thought from that perpetrated in the stereotypes and caricatures that emerged from Dort.

As coeditor Keith Stanglin and contributor Tom McCall have



Earliest portrait of Arminius, 1609 (reprint, 1625). Courtesy of The Leiden American Pilgrim Museum.

quipped in their 2012 *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace*, we are beginning to gain a much deeper understanding of just how different the “Arminius of faith” is from the “Harmenszoon of history.” The decisive shift toward the reconsideration of Arminius began within Arminian circles with Carl Bangs’s seminal *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (1971). Bangs’s work opened up new horizons for Arminius studies by exploring closely the setting and life of Arminius and detailing the subtleties of Arminius’s thought all but ignored in the polemics between

Calvinists and Arminians. He thereby demonstrated that much of the so-called Arminian legacy was not as explicitly rooted in the theology of Arminius as previously thought.

Since the 1990s this refrain has begun to be heard within Reformed circles as well, especially through the work of historical theologian Richard Muller. Muller does not hedge on the fact that certain features of Arminius’s theology move away from Calvin and the mainstream Reformed theology of the day. Yet, by comparing their respective treatments of various theological topics, Muller has also shown some deep affinities between Arminius and his Reformed contemporaries.¹⁵ He also warns against the tendency to equate the theology of Arminius with the Arminianism roundly condemned by Reformed theologians since Dort. In the past few years, the reconsideration of Arminius’s theology and legacy has continued in the work of a new generation of scholars, including

several of the contributors to this book, such as Keith Stanglin, Thomas McCall, and W. Stephen Gunter. Their recent work has given us new insight into Arminius's life and thought. This includes access to previously unpublished works of Arminius and new translations of his writings.

It was to contribute further to such reconsiderations of Arminius's theology and legacy that the editors organized the 2012 conference, "Rethinking Arminius: Wesleyan and Reformed Theology for the Church Today," and assembled this current volume. Indeed, several chapters of this book seek to elucidate further the theology of the historical Harmenszoon and to clarify the ways in which Arminius had essentially been pushed into the background by the time of the Synod of Dort. In chapter one, Richard Muller shows us an Arminius whose theology of the threefold office of Christ was firmly within the mainstream Reformed theology of the day and even anticipated some future developments within Reformed theology on those topics. In a similar vein, in chapter two, Thomas McCall dives into a fairly recent controversy as to whether Arminius might have been an "unwitting determinist." McCall concludes that he was not but reveals to us an Arminius far more the logician and scholastic than many of his theological heirs have realized. In chapter three, Jeremy Bangs shows that the Pilgrim preacher John Robinson, who sojourned in Leiden during the tumultuous decade of the 1610s, in spite of his friendship with leading anti-Arminians, shared Arminian views about the provisionality of human dogmatic statements (such as the Heidelberg Catechism and Belgic Confession. From their defeat, he may have learned the perils of state-controlled religion and of narrowing theology to an alliance with a particular figure (such as Calvin). In chapter four, W. Stephen Gunter traces the disappearance of Arminius's soteriology from among a variety of movements and groups that claimed his mantle: the Remonstrants, the English Arminians, and even the Wesleyan-Arminians.

The second part of the conference title, "Wesleyan and Reformed Theology for the Church Today," sets the stage for the second half of our book. For the past four centuries, Arminius's legacy has been a divisive one. In many respects the name Arminius itself marks a fissure in the Protestant theological tradition that continues to divide the church today. As we planned for the conference, we found ourselves asking, if Arminius has been misunderstood

by both Wesleyan-Arminian and Calvinist-Reformed traditions, and his theology might properly be understood as a development *within* rather than *away from* Reformed orthodoxy, might we think of Arminius as a potential bridge, rather than a dividing line, between these two traditions today?

The final three chapters all explore this possibility in different ways. In chapter five, Oliver Crisp compares Arminius to Jonathan Edwards—in many ways the poster boy of resurgent five-point Calvinism—on the doctrine of creation. Crisp surprisingly finds that Arminius’s view is far more in line with classical Reformed orthodoxy than Edwards’s. In a similar fashion, in chapter six E. Jerome Van Kuiken compares the soteriology of Arminius and that of T. F. Torrance—without question one of the leading Reformed theologians of the twentieth century—and uncovers some striking “convergences” between the two. The analyses of Crisp and Van Kuiken raise the question: If Edwards and Torrance are in some sense the standard bearers for Reformed theology today, is there not also warrant for seeing Arminius as one who has something to offer to contemporary Reformed theology? Finally, in chapter seven, John Mark Hicks explores the question of Arminius’s relationship to the contemporary open theism movement. As he notes, this has been a movement especially popular among self-described Arminians who see their work in some sense as a logical outcome of Arminius’s. However, Hicks argues, Arminius very clearly was *not* an open theist and embraced a very different understanding of divine providence than do the main proponents of open theism. These forays into historical theology also help show why Classical (Reformed) Arminianism continues to be a live option among those who take Arminius seriously for constructive and confessional theology today.

As that may be, even readers who self-identify with open theism or process theology will find a fascinating precedent in the particular sort of “Arminianism” championed by Conrad Vorstius (as Jeremy Bangs describes in his chapter). On the one hand, this collection represents a dedicated effort to retrieve “the Harmszoon of history” and discover the contemporary ecumenical potential of rigorous historical theology focused on Arminius. On the other hand, it also helps to trace out the different kinds of Arminianisms that have developed and are still developing, whether Dutch Remonstrant Arminianism or Latitudinarian

Anglican Arminianism, Restorationist Arminianism or Methodist/Wesleyan Arminianism, Classical Arminianism or Open Theist Arminianism. Whether open theism is an authentic expression of Arminianism is debatable, but this volume helps explain *why* it is debatable.

The enigma of multiple Arminianisms can even be seen in the life of Carl Bangs, the father of contemporary Arminius scholarship. As Jeremy Bangs indicated in his conference presentation, his father entered a doctoral program at the University of Chicago with the plan to study process theology. When he got there, his newly arrived advisor, Jaroslav Pelikan, encouraged his (slightly older!) student to continue with the research on Arminius that Bangs had done for his B.D. thesis at Nazarene Theological Seminary. During and after completing his 1958 dissertation ("Arminius and Reformed Theology"), Bangs's affinities for process theology never diminished, although for the rest of his life his scholarly work centered on historical theology and historical biographies.

In many ways, this book is an outgrowth of the life and work of Carl Bangs. Carl inspired his son Jeremy's own affinities for process theology, as well as Jeremy's work on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch history and thus the history of the American Pilgrims in Leiden. Coeditor Mark Bilby was a teaching assistant for Carl Bangs. Bangs's influence reached many other students and colleagues during his years teaching at Saint Paul School of Theology, Nazarene Theological Seminary, Olivet Nazarene University, and the University of Leiden. Among our editors and contributors, those from the Anglican, Methodist, and Wesleyan-Holiness traditions have certainly felt his influence. Yet, this influence has gone well beyond the denominational settings in which Carl Bangs spent most of his life working. His work has made an impact on persons within the Reformed tradition (including Richard Muller and Oliver Crisp) and Restorationist tradition (including Keith Stanglin and John Mark Hicks), not to mention scholars of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century historical theology more broadly.

This influence does not stem so much from an overt effort on the part of Bangs to do ecumenical theology. Rather, it represents the good fruit of careful historical scholarship. Bangs immersed himself in the study of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch language, culture, and history. He sought out unused and previously unknown primary source texts, crawling under houses (!)

and pillaging bookstores across Europe for academic treasures related to Arminius. Out of respect for his subject matter, he weighed the evidence carefully and refused to be swayed by the sorts of caricatures of Arminius—whether positive or negative—that burdened later polemics. He was rightly annoyed by the casual use of the name of Arminius—whether to lionize or to vilify him—by persons who had never bothered to read him. On the one hand, he practiced scholarship in the service of the church. On the other hand, he did not allow his scholarly conclusions to be predetermined by any particular church or fixed statement of beliefs.

Simply put, Carl Bangs was a gifted church historian. The “Rethinking Arminius” conference, which took place nearly ten years after Carl’s death (July 7, 2002), was dedicated to his memory, as is this volume. The editors hope that it honors him well.

NOTES

1. For a recent exploration of Hills’s life and thought, see C. J. Branstetter, *Purity, Power, and Pentecostal Light: The Revivalist Doctrine and Means of Aaron Merritt Hills* (Eugene, Oreg.: Pickwick, 2012).
2. A. M. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology: A Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Pasadena, Calif.: C. J. Kinne, 1931).
3. *Ibid.*, 2:433–34.
4. *Ibid.*, 2:152–64.
5. *Ibid.*, 2:76.
6. *Ibid.*, 2:139, italics original.
7. *Ibid.*, 2:148, 151.
8. Charles Hodge, *Arminianism and Grace* (Toronto: James Bain, 1861).
6. This pamphlet originally appeared as an article, “Arminianism and Grace,” *Princeton Review* 28, no. 1 (1856): 38–59.
9. Hodge, *Arminianism and Grace*, 5–6.
10. *Ibid.*, 8–10.
11. *Ibid.*, 31.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Hills, *Fundamental Christian Theology*, 1:310.
14. *Ibid.*, 1:298.
15. See, for instance, *GCP*.