

JACOB ARMINIUS AND THE CARE OF THE VULNERABLE

Vinicius Couto, Ph.D

Introduction

In general, theorists treat Dutch theologian Jacob Arminius (1559/60-1609) merely in the field of soteriology (the study of salvation) – with a few exceptions in the scarce academic research – and, quite often, in a biased approach to a militant apologetics, which intends to defend this position to the detriment of Calvinism.¹ This essay expands that vision in Arminius' writing, analyzing the main theological motivations for his caring for the vulnerable, thus expanding the discussions of Arminius's theology and broadening the approach to his thought. The article takes a narrative and analytical look from the history of theology, preferring primary sources, but dialoguing with other scholars of Arminian theology on opportune occasions.

Approaching Arminius requires defining the expression “vulnerable”, given that the term reflects a polysemous word. Etymologically speaking, the word comes from the Latin, *vulnerabilis*, which refers to someone who “can be hurt,” as a derivation from the verb *vulnerare*, “to hurt” and the noun *vulnus*, “wound.” The adjective “vulnerable” indicates the weak side of an issue or the point where someone can be injured or attacked. The vulnerable can describe someone susceptible to something, or malleable to something. In a broad sense, all people are vulnerable, as they may be susceptible to unexpected fatalities or contingency situations. However, in a *strictu sensu*, the vulnerable represent those in a condition of need, support, or help. In this sense, the vulnerable can be someone who needs financial / material support, – due to poverty, misery, unemployment, etc. – and/or emotional, intellectual, and spiritual help. The vulnerable's field of need can be anything that offers the risk of being hurt or injured, etymologically speaking. Who are the vulnerable? They are the poor, the sick, the elderly, needy children, the homeless, the unemployed, people who are discouraged and attacked by diseases of the soul, etc.

Caring for the vulnerable in Jacob Arminius

The discussion of caring for the vulnerable proves more implicit in Arminius, however, this acknowledgement does not mean that the perspective does not exist. The Dutch Reformed Church that ordained Arminius, and in which he served in Amsterdam as a pastor between 1587 and 1603, was founded in 1571 during the Synod of Emden. Delegates present established the Belgic Confession and Catechisms of Geneva (for French-speaking members) and Heidelberg (for Dutch-speaking) as official confessional documents. In Article 44 of the Minutes of that Synod one finds guidance on pastoral care for the most vulnerable. In addition, the writing offers a cautious approach with respect to people who wanted to take advantage of the social actions of the church, “who, under the pretext of poverty and religion, want the necessary and deserved alms to be given to the families of faith.”²

¹ For a discussion of the current state of Arminius research, see Vinicius Couto. “*Não somos daqueles que dominam a fé dos outros*”: *tolerância, irenismo e liberdade de consciência em Jacó Arminio* (São Bernardo do Campo: UMEESP, 2022), 25-33. PhD Thesis.

² “[...] qui praetextu paupertatis et religionis eleemosynas domesticis fidei necessarias et debitas praeripiunt”. In: F. I. Rutgers (ed.). *Acta van de Nederlandsche Synoden der Zestiende Eeuw: Verzameld en Uitgegeven* (Utrecht: Kemink & Zoon, 1889), p. 81.

The Reformed Church held another synod in the city of Dort in 1574 to address denominational consolidation in the Dutch lands (a gathering that should not be confused with a different synod held between 1618 and 1619 during the Remonstrant Controversy). At this official ecclesiastical meeting, participants established that it was the duty of the *Dienaren des Woordts* (i.e., servants of the Word), not only to preach in church services and liturgical ceremonies, but also “to comfort and strengthen the sick, poor, and desolate members.”³ A third Synod was held at Middelburg in 1581. In this case, church officials, namely, Elders and Deacons, affirmed the duty of “carefully collect other alms and riches that are bestowed for the sake of nourishing the poor, and distribute them wisely and faithfully”, as well as “visiting the afflicted.”⁴ This Synod also emphasized the need for accountability of presbyteries to certify that they were carrying out the directives of “care for the poor.”⁵ The Synod at The Hague in 1586 confirmed this accountability.⁶

Prior to Arminius ordination on August 27, 1588, he underwent examinations before the consistory – which evaluated doctrinal aspects. The exam included an analysis of a *propoesitie*, a kind of proposition in the form of a sermon, whose objective was to analyze the oratory and resourcefulness of the candidate. This procedure began as early as October 1587. A rigorous process, candidates for the pastorate had to present letters of recommendation from professors (Arminius had the recommendation of Theodore Beza and Johannes Grynaeus) and subscribe to confessional documents. Already as an ordained minister in the Ancient Church (*Oudekerk*) of Amsterdam, he chose to preach in the *lectio continua* method, following his homilies from the letter of Paul to the Romans and the book of the prophet Malachi, which began on November 6, 1588. In addition, it was highlighted by the Amsterdam consistory, in 1588, on pastoral duties that went beyond preaching, meeting Arminius's ordination phase. The document noted that it was the duty of the pastors of that church to “help carry the burden of the city [...] by visiting the sick and doing other things [of a social nature]”.⁷

Arminius' textual corpus deals with the theme of caring for the vulnerable in an indirect way, especially with regard to good works.⁸ Due to the Protestant emphasis on justification by

³ “[...] is de siecke, arme ende troostloose lidmaten te besoecken troosten ende te stercken” (In: Rutgers, 1889, p. 144).

⁴ “Officium autem eorum proprium est, eleemosynas alias que opes, quae pauperum alendorum gratia conferuntur diligenter” e “afflictos visere” (In: Rutgers, 1889, p. 383).

⁵ “an pauperum [...] cura ge ratur” (In: Rutgers, 1889, p. 387).

⁶ Rutgers, 1889, p. 496.

⁷ *Protocollen der Kerkeraad Amsterdam, Algemeen*. In: *Archief Nederlands Hervormde Gemeente Amsterdam, Gemeente Archief Amsterdam*, vol. 1, 1578-1589, p. 409.

⁸ As for Arminius quotes, we will use the following materials: Iacobi Arminii. *Opera Theologica* (Leiden: Goderfridum Basson), 1629, henceforth *Opera*; Jacob Arminius. *The Works of Arminius*, 3 vols (Translated by James Nichols and William Nichols. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 1996, henceforth *Works*; and Iacobi Arminii *et ali. Praestantium ac eruditorum virorum epistolae ecclesiasticae et theologicae*, vol. 1. Editors Philip van Limborch and Christian Hartsoeker (Amsterdam: Franciscus Halma, 1684), henceforth *Ep. Ecc.* With regard to the *Works*, we will point out the pages only as a reference, as we prefer to translate the text from Latin in your *Opera*.

I preferred to translate the text directly from the Latin because the English translation often has additions and imprecisions. For example: the translation he offers for *Declaratio Sententiae* (henceforth *Dec. Sent.*) is very imprecise, putting it as “Declaration of Sentiments”. The correct idea is of a “Declaration of Opinions” or “Declaration of Sentences” (cf. Couto, 2022, p. 243ss). In one of the texts of Arminius of

grace through faith, rather than the Catholic view of justification by works, it was not uncommon to find Reformed people opposed to the practice of good works. In the preface to *De veru & genuino sensu cap. VII Epistolae ad Romanos Dissertatio* (Dissertation on the true and genuine sense of Romans 7), by Arminius, the author comments on this:

Sick men have arrived at the shameful and absurd argument, inferring from those passages which tell us that we are justified by faith without works, that it is not necessary for us to devote ourselves to good works, for as we are already on this side of justification, we are already, therefore saved. They do not realize that what is written in other passages is that true faith, that is, that by which we are justified, must be effected by charity, and that this faith, without works, is as dead as a corpse.⁹

Arminius was aware of this antinomian line. Therefore, he argues in a diatribic way, questioning the relevance of the practice of good works and answering how they should be done: “Should good works be performed? [Yes!] By the Spirit of Christ, they must be commended to their author [i.e., Christ] and must be dipped in his very blood, lest they be rejected by the Father on account of their deficiencies [i.e., works].”¹⁰ This excerpt from Arminius also reflects another

Dec. Sent., the translator added the verb “can” in Arminius' discussion of apostasy which totally changed the meaning of the original phrase. Dr. Keith Stanglin has a very good book on this point involving possibility and reality of apostasy, where he criticizes the english translation of *Dec. Sent.*: Keith D. Stanglin. *Arminius on the Assurance of Salvation. The Context, Roots, and Shape of the Leiden Debate, 1603-1609* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 132-133; compare with *Works*, vol. 1, p. 608 and *Dec. Sent.* In: *Opera*, p. 122-123. More details on the problems, errors and inaccuracies in the translations of James and William Nichols are discussed in Couto, 2022, p. 39-40, 243-252 and Richard A. Muller. *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius: Sources and Directions of Scholastic Protestantism in the Era of Early Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Group, 1991) x-xi and 3, . I have therefore given references to where the reader can find James and William Nichols's translation, this way, the reader can compare with mine.

⁹ “Venit eriam in hunc censum turpis παραλογισμος, quo ex illis locis ubi dicimar justificari ex fide sine operibus, malesani homines inferunt, non esse ergo necesse bonis operibus incumbere, utpote citra que justificandi, ac proinde es salvandi simus. Non advertentes alibi scriptum esse, foedem veram, hoc est, eam per quam justificantur, debere esse efficacem per charitatem: stem fidem sine operibus mortuam esse atque inanimi cadaveris instar se habere”. In: *De veru & genuino sensu cap. VII Epistolae ad Romanos Dissertatio*, in: *Opera*, p. 814-815; “Into this enumeration, must come that shameful and false reasoning by which unwise men infer, from those passages in Scripture in which we are said to be justified by faith without works, that it is not, therefore, necessary to attend to good works, they being of such a nature that without them we may be justified, and, therefore, saved. They never advert to the fact that, in other passages, it is recorded—True faith, that is, the faith by which we are justified, must be efficacious through charity; and that faith, without works, is dead, and resembles a lifeless carcass”. In: *Works*, vol. 2, p. 476. The preface is signed by the *liberi orphani novem* (nine orphaned children), i.e. the sons of Arminius. However, due to the time of publication of the text, 1612, we know that there would be no possibility of it being them, since the eldest daughter (Engeltje) was only 19 years old, while the eldest son (Herman), only 17 years. It is possible that the author was Arminius' personal friend, Johannes Wtenbogaert, but it is not possible to say. For more information on the issue of authorship, see Couto, 2022, p. 228.

¹⁰ “Opera bona praestanda? per Spiritum Christi illa oportet, ut hoc authore commendentur, & sanguine ejusdem tingenda, ne propter defectum à Patre repellantur”. In: *Oratio I, De objecto theologiae*, in: *Opera*, p. 37; “Are good works to be performed? We must do them through the Spirit of Christ, that they may

concern: that of not attributing some innate goodness to human beings. Therefore, he is concerned to point out that these good works can only be performed by the Spirit, that is, through grace, after all, due to the effects of the fall of Adam, humanity would be unable to perform such deeds. With this argument, he wants to avoid Pelagianism and/or semi-Pelagianism.

Arminius repeats the Protestant maxim that we are not saved *by* good works, but *for* good works. While doing good works does not provide justification, those who have been justified must demonstrate external evidence of that justification through works, otherwise the individual falls into mere empty talk. Arminius associates such good works with the fruits worthy of repentance, proclaimed by John the Baptist in the desert. “Fruit” is taken as a metaphor for the works. Thus, if someone declares that he has repented of sins and professes to have received a new life in Christ, it is not enough to do so merely through speeches, but through concrete practice. Arminius explains: “For our part, the good works are those worthy of repentance (Matt. 3.8; Lk. 3.8), which God prepared, in Christ, for the faithful and repentant to walk in them (Eph. 2.10).”¹¹ Echoing the Reformation motto, *soli Deo gloria*, he asserts that “the final aim [of good works] is the glory of our Redeeming God, both just and merciful, in Christ our Lord”,¹² eliminating any Pelagian or semi-Pelagian anthropocentrism, once more.

Arminius emphasizes that good works are, therefore, the result of the Spirit's stimulus to the human being, granting grace for such works to be done. To explain this dynamic of divine initiative and human response, he mentions that, “regenerate man not only desires what is good, but also does it, for God works in them what He wants to work (Phil. 2:13)”.¹³ He rightly references Paul's text to the Philippians for such synergism, since in that verse the Apostle uses the verb ἐνεργῶν (*energōn*) to describe the process of sanctification, or development of salvation, as mentioned in the immediately preceding verse (σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε – *sōtērian katergazesthe*). The word ἐνεργῶν comes from ἐνεργέω (*energeō*), whose meaning in the pericope in question assumes the meaning of “encourage”, “energize”, “stimulate.” In this sense, Paul would be teaching the Philippian community that the development of salvation is extremely important and that God himself, interested in this, encourages, stimulates and energizes the believer, enabling him to sanctify, which unequivocally involves the practice of good works. Arminius asserts, “God prepared good works that the regenerate should walk in them, or, created

obtain the recommendation of him as their author; and they must be sprinkled with his blood, that they may not be rejected by the Father on account of their deficiency”. In: *Works*, vol. 1, p. 340.

¹¹ “Et ex parte nostra bona opera quæ resipiscentiam decent quæque Deus in Christo creavit ut fideles & resipiscentes in ijs ambulent”. In: *Disputationes publicae XVII, De Resipiscentia*. In: *Opera*, p. 291; “On our part, the fruits are good works, which are ‘meet for repentance,’ (Matt. iii. 8; Luke iii. 8,) and ‘which God foreordained,’ that believers and penitents, who are ‘created in Christ Jesus unto good works, should walk in them’ (Ephes. ii. 10)”. In: *Works*, vol. 2, p. 241.

¹² “Finis ultimus est gloria Dei Redemptoris iusti simul & misericordis in Iesu Christo Domino nostro”. In: *Disputationes publicae XVII, De Resipiscentia*. In: *Opera*, p. 291; “The ultimate end is the glory of God the Redeemer, who is at once just and merciful in Jesus Christ our Lord”. In: *Works*, vol. 2, p. 241.

¹³ “Non enim tantum vult id quod bonum est homo regeneratus, sed etiam facit. Deus enim in illis efficit velle des perficere.. Phil. 2”. In: *De veru & genuino sensu cap. VII Epistolae ad Romanos Dissertatio*, in: *Opera*, p. 852-853; “[...] a regenerate man not only wills that which is good, but he also performs it; because ‘it is God who worketh in’ the regenerate ‘both to will and to do’ (Phil. ii. 13)”. In: *Works*, vol. 2, p. 538.

them for good works.”¹⁴ He translates ἐνεργῶν by *efficit*, rather than following the Vulgate with *operatur*. The first entry is broader in meaning, and can be used as “to effect”, “to execute”, “to complete”, “to carry out”, “to make”, “to form”, “to compose” etc., while the second one is more limited to the idea of “operating”. In this case, the idea is implied that God “effects” the enablement, the encouragement, and not the good works in the individual's place.

Good works are not fit for “any man to be justified by them, because the wretch is made powerless and useless by the flesh, even if he had committed but one sin.”¹⁵ What are they for then? In Arminius' perspective, so that the human being, “through good works, may pursue the heavenly inheritance and glory (Rom. 2.7), so that he himself glorifies God (1 Cor. 6.20), and provides others with the opportunity and components for them to glorify God (Matt. 5.16).”¹⁶ Practicing good works, therefore, was not up for negotiation in Arminius' thought and practice. When a believer puts such works into action, he lays up treasure in heaven and will be rewarded for it in the *eschathon*. However, while that future moment does not arrive, good works exalt God and serve as an instrument of evangelization, leading people to praise the Creator.

Good works occur through charity. The most commonly used Latin word for this is *caritas*, can mean an attitude of kindness and understanding towards others, consideration, esteem, affection, love, affection. Etymologically speaking, it comes from the Greek χάρις (*charis*), which involves the notions of good will, benevolence, favor, grace and mercy. The polysemy of the Greek and Latin entries can lead us to the notion of divine salvation, operationalized without human merit, to gifts that were won, or even to the practice of good works. Arminius uses it in all these senses. However, we are interested in the last of these, concerning which we can read: “God wills some things, insofar as they are considered absolutely good, according to their nature. Thus, he desires charity and that good be done to men, since they are his creatures”.¹⁷ In other words, “charity”, referred there by Arminius as *eleemosynam* (i.e., almsgiving, mercy, pity, compassion, good works), is a desire of God for humanity and is a reflection of human imitation, through grace, of communicable attributes. God is charitable and therefore his children need to be like that.

¹⁴ “Deum preparavit bona opera ut in iis ambularent regeneriti, seu, condidit eos ad bona opera”. In: De veru & genuino sensu cap. VII Epistolae ad Romanos Dissertatio, in: *Opera*, p. 853; “‘God hath prepared good works,’ that the regenerate ‘might walk in them;’ or, ‘he hath created them in Christ Jesus unto good works’”. In: *Works*, vol. 2, p. 538.

¹⁵ “Non ut per illam iustificetur homo, quia horfum per carnem impotens & inutilis facta est, etiam si tantum unicum ab homine peccatum perpetratum esset”. In: Disputationes publicae XII, Lege Dei. In: *Opera*, p. 267; “Not that man may be justified; because for this purpose it is rendered ‘weak through the flesh’ and useless, even if man had committed only a single sin”. In: *Works*, vol. 2, p. 199.

¹⁶ “[...] per viam bonorum operum ad coelestem hæreditatem & gloriam contendat, Deumque glorificet ipse & alijs glorificandi Deum occasionem & materiam subministret”. In: Disputationes publicae XII, Lege Dei. In: *Opera*, p. 267; “[...] through the path of good works he may march towards the heavenly inheritance and glory, (Rom. ii. 7,) and that he may not only himself glorify God, (1 Cor. vi. 20,) but may also furnish occasion and matter to others for glorifying his Father who is in Heaven. (Matt. v. 16).” In: *Works*, vol. 2, p. 199.

¹⁷ “Vult Deus nonnulla quatenus secundum naturam suam absolute considerata bona sunt. Sic vult eleemosynam: & homini benefacere quatenus creatura ipsius est”. In: Disputationes privatae XIX, De variis voluntaris Dei distinctionibus. In: *Opera*, p. 359-360; “God wills some things, so far as they are good, when absolutely considered according to their nature. Thus he wills alms-giving, and to do good to man so far as he is his creature.” In: *Works*, vol. 2, p. 346.

Charity should be applied especially to the poor, who are the most vulnerable. Arminius understood that failing to help the needy constituted a sin of omission, practiced by those who “do not donate to the poor a part of the abundance of their resources.”¹⁸ Therefore, “he who fails to give alms to the poor sins by omitting a prescribed act.”¹⁹ However, Arminius is also concerned about people who want to help the poor with the wrong motive. In this sense, he points out that, “he who helps the poor so that he may be seen by men, sins by omitting the due cause and the [true] purpose of the donation.”²⁰ Arminius adds that someone can even help the poor and give alms. However, you also need to be sensitive to motivation. In this case, the good deed (*actus bonus*) “is performed improperly, as it gives alms to the poor out of ambition and pomposity, so that it may be seen by men, in order that it may appear generous, friendly to the poor and religious.”²¹ Arminius recognizes the orthodoxy (correct doctrine) of almsgiving to the poor. However, he points out that orthopraxy (correct practice) is not enough, because there must be orthopathy (correct feeling / motivation). Right practice being performed with the wrong motive nullifies the act, for good works are not an end in themselves.

In practice, Arminius seems to have made an effort to live what he taught. Researchers don't have many biographical details that highlight his works, however, some topics narrated by himself can help us to glimpse his pastoral commitment in caring for the vulnerable. Since the end of the 16th century (around 1599), an epidemic of bubonic plague had been sweeping Europe. Spain lost about 10% of its population.²² Amsterdam lost almost ten thousand people in 1602, totaling almost 15% of the inhabitants, the overwhelming majority being from the poorest estates.²³ Israel explains that these “epidemics struck everywhere but tended to be most virulent in the overcrowded, unsanitary conditions prevailing in the poorer neighborhoods of large towns.”²⁴ This high mortality rate led several people to move out of the city. Arminius instructed his flock to be careful with such escapes, as it was easier for them to be left helpless on the roads and away from family and friends. Maronier recounts that, in the meantime, Arminius “did what he could, in public and in secret, to comfort those who mourn. But not only that; without fear of

¹⁸ “[...] pauperi pro facultatibus nihil largiatur”. In: *Disputationes publicae VIII, Peccatis actualibus*. In: *Opera*, p. 242; “[...] bestows on the poor nothing in proportion to the amplitude of his means.” In: *Works*, vol. 2, p. 157.

¹⁹ “Omittit quis subvenire pauperi elemofynas peccat omittendo actum praescriptum”. In: *Examen modestum libelli Perkinsiani*. In: *Opera*, p. 721; “He, who omits to bestow alms on the poor, sins in omitting a prescribed act.” In: *Works*, vol. 3, p. 400.

²⁰ “[...] subvenit quis pauperi, ut appareat hominibus peccat omittendo debitam causam & finem praestationis”. In: *Examen modestum libelli Perkinsiani*. In: *Opera*, p. 721; “He, who bestows alms on the poor that he may be seen of men, sins in omitting the due reason, and purpose of the bestowal.” In: *Works*, vol. 3, p. 400.

²¹ “[...] non recte praestatur, ut, quando eleemosyna datur pauperi ex ambitione, & surperbia, ut videatur hominibus liberalis & pauperum amans, quin & religiosus qui illam largitur”. In: *Examen modestum libelli Perkinsiani*. In: *Opera*, p. 731; “is performed in a manner, which is not right, as when alms are given to a poor man, from ambition and pride, that he, who bestows them, may appear unto men to be liberal and a lover of the poor, and even religious.” In: *Works*, vol. 3, p. 415.

²² Geoffrey Parker. *The Dutch Revolt* (London: Pelican Books, 1985), p. 235.

²³ Jonathan Israel. *The Dutch Republic: It's rise, greatness and fall – 1477-1806* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 329.

²⁴ ISRAEL, 1985, p. 329.

defilement, he visited the sick and the dying, the poor as well as the rich.”²⁵ Arminius was not afraid of being contaminated. He did have his fears. It is possible that Maronier wanted to emphasize more the courageous side of the Dutch shepherd. In practice, Arminius possibly feared that if he were affected by the “plague,” he would leave his family destitute. He pours out his heart to his friend Wtenbogaert:

When this fatal evil began to spread at first, and began to make huge piles of death, the thought of [my] wife and children affected [my] mind no little, for I considered how small was the inheritance I would to leave. However, I have overcome this temptation by the favor of God, and I have no doubt that they will be very well cared for by the Lord God, the Father of widows and orphans.²⁶

Arminius attributed his survival (as well as that of the others) to God's favor: “Divine grace has kept us unharmed from it until now.”²⁷ He also understood that community and fraternal support was essential to stay healthy: “I am absolutely convinced that, until now, and, above all, by your prayers and those of our church, we have remained immune to that terrible plague.”²⁸ He himself specifies that he prayed for the members of his parish and for the nation: “We, in the meantime, have not ceased to pour out our ardent prayers to God for the safety of the republic.”²⁹ And he adds that he preached to support parishioners and the vulnerable, bringing comfort to their souls: “[...] we exhort people to prayers and a serious improvement of their lives, and we refresh the faint of heart with consoling sermons; to terrified consciences we add the remembrance of the divine promises.”³⁰ Arminius gives special attention, in his concerns, to the least favored, who were subject to the greatest condition of vulnerability, and therefore desires “that the salvation of widows and orphans greatly afflicted may be accomplished as soon as possible by the Lord God.”³¹

The pastor of *Oudekerk* knew that many people lived in conditions of dubious morality. His sermons, as we have seen, called for repair. There were people who feared divine judgment in the eschatological future. It tormented them. Arminius reports this condition “both to friends and those nearest to him” and asserts the “great obstacle [...] to fortifying their minds against the fear of death, and to the sick, who, weighed down with the burden of sins, scarcely dare to lay

²⁵ “[...] deed, wat hij kon, in het openbaar en in het verborgen, om de treurenden te troosten. Maar dat niet alleen; zonder eenige vrees voor besmetting, bezocht hij de zieken en stervenden, armen zoowel als rijken”. In: Hendrik Jan Maronier. *Jacobus Arminius: een biografie* (Amsterdam: Y. Rogge, 1905), p. 118.

²⁶ “Quum primum exitiabile malum grassari circum circa, & ingentes funerum acervos facere inciperet, non parum afficiebat animum cogitatio de uxore & liberis; considerabam enim quam exiguam hæreditatem essem relicturus. At superavi Dei beneficio istam tentationem, & Domino Deo Patri viduarum & pupillorum llos quam commendatissimos fore non dubito”. In: *Ep. Ecc.* 56, datada de 1 de outubro de 1602.

²⁷ “[...] hactenus indemnes nos præstitit gratia divina”. In: *Ep. Ecc.* 55, datada de 17 de agosto de 1602.

²⁸ “Nam omnino mihi persuadeo, me hucusque tuis potissimum & Ecclesiæ nostræ precibus immunem ab ista dira & graviter grassante lue perstittisse”. In: *Ep. Ecc.* 56

²⁹ “Nos interea non negligimus pro salute reipublicæ ardentibus ad Deum preces fundere”. In: *Ep. Ecc.* 55.

³⁰ “[...] populum ad preces & vitæ seriam emendationem adhortamur, pusillanimes concionibus consolatoriis reficimus, perterrefactis conscientiis animos addimus commemoratione promissionum divinarum”. In: *Ep. Ecc.* 55.

³¹ “[...] patriæ nostræ Domino Deo Patri viduarum & pupillorum vehementer afflictæ salutem quam citissime debellari queat”. In: *Ep. Ecc.* 55.

down hope in God through Christ.”³² Maronier recounts that, “Once, he [Arminius] passed through a slum and heard the screams of the sufferers from a densely populated house. He was told that a whole family had been affected by the terrible disease.” Although no one entered that home to help that family, “he did it himself and refreshed the sufferers in body and soul.”³³ Arminius reports two cases in which he could be useful in caring for vulnerable people who were very sick:

I must tell you what happened to me twice in the last few days: first with a woman who was suffering from plague fever, then with a man who was suffering from a very serious illness; both are members of our Church, people of good life and reputation, and who I consider [in my opinion] to be true Christians. She was very courteous and well acquainted - above the [ordinary for her] sex - in matters of sacred things; and he was so skilled in these matters, that he was considered fit even to comfort others. They were strangers to each other, which I therefore add, lest you think that the one was led into these temptations by the example of the other. Both began to be very distressed in their minds, because they did not perceive in their hearts the certainty of the forgiveness of sins and the speaking of the Holy Spirit - especially at that moment, when they considered it as necessary as possible. They had really endeavored to raise up [these feelings] in their hearts, if they were buried, by earnest meditations on the word of God, and by their prayers; but these were but vain works and unsuccessful efforts. She was bursting with tears and he was seething with pain inside; none of them, however, despaired, but grieved the more vehemently on account of the matters already mentioned. I, in my mind, to confess the truth, listened both with sadness and serious compassion; [also] I endeavored to apply some remedy for this temptation, and in both I succeeded.³⁴

Around the same time as the epidemic, Arminius' wife faced some difficulty with her health. It is uncertain what she had. What we do know is that she had pain in her breasts. Through some skill (perhaps popular, cultural or private), Wtenbogaert's wife knew some medicine/treatment. Arminius and his wife are grateful for the medicine, which seems to be homemade, and regret that such skill is restricted to Wtenbogaert's wife. We do not know the reason for this restriction.

³² “[...] tum amicis & propinquis [...] gravia officia [...] ad animos illorum contra metum mortis confirmandos, tum ægrotis qui peccatorum onere prægravati in Deum per Christum spem ponere vix audent”. In: *Ep. Ecc.* 56.

³³ “Eens ging hij door een achterbuurt en hoorde uit een dichtbevolkte woning de jammerkreten der lijdenden. Men zeide hem, dat een geheel gezin door de vreeselijke ziekte was aangetast. [...] Toen deed hij het zelf en verkwikte de lijdens naar lichaam en ziel”. In: Maronier, 1905, p. 118-119.

³⁴ “Necesse habeo tibi narrare quid hisce diebus bis mihi acciderit, primo apud foeminam pestilentiali febre, inde apud virum gravissima peste laborantem, ambos Ecclesiæ nostræ membra, probæ vitæ & integræ famæ homines, & ut ego existimo verè Christianos. Illa judiciousa admodum & rerum sacrarum supra sexum gnara, ille earumdem eousque peritus ut aliis etiam solandis idoneus judicatus fuerit, neuter alteri notus; quod ideo addo, ne alterum alterius exemplo traductum putes in istas tentationes. Ambo vehementer angi coeperunt animo, quod certitudinem remissionis peccatorum, & alloquium Spiritus Sancti in cordibus suis non persentiscerent, isto præsertim tempore, quo quam maxime id necessarium arbitrabantur. Conatos quidem fuisse meditatione seria verbi Dei & precibus illa, si fors sepulta laterent in cordibus, exsuscitare, at inani opera & successu casso. Illa in lachrymas ubertim erupit, hic intus dolorem coquebat; neuter tamen desperabat, sed vehementissime astligeantur ista quam dixi de causa. Ego animo, ut verum fatear, tristi, & seria commiseratione tactus utrumque audivi, & remedium isti tentationi adhibere conatus sum tale, & utrunque successit”. In: *Ep. Ecc.* 56.

However, the motivation of Arminius's lament is interesting. According to him, “this skill could feed the poor, whose value of their work and effort could lift the needy.”³⁵ Bearing in mind the usefulness of this medicine for women in general, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, Arminius still insists with his friend: “Encourage, therefore, your wife, so that she does not let this much-needed skill die with herself. If she doesn't want to share while she's alive, let her at least leave a document when she leaves this life.”³⁶

Finally, Arminius outlines his concern for the vulnerable with regard to guidelines such as freedom of conscience, concord and peace. These themes were widely discussed by him in his textual corpus, in a context of confessionalization of Protestant churches, in which it was not possible to have freedom of choice regarding doctrinal issues in many places. The Peace of Augsburg (1555) had established the principle “*cuius regio, eius religio*” (whose kingdom, your religion), giving limited freedom to the kingdoms of the Holy Roman Empire to choose an official religion, which in this case could be the Catholic or Lutheran. In that sense, when a king decided his religion, his subjects should follow the same. In the Netherlands of Arminius, religious officialization took place in the synod of Emden (1571), with the self-proclamation of the Dutch Reformed Church. An official religion implied an official confession of faith and this disrespected people's freedom of conscience, coercing them to greater belief. William of Orange even tried to assuage this issue in the early Dutch Republic when he instituted the Pacification of Ghent on November 8, 1576, granting tolerance for Catholic coexistence.³⁷ However, reformed people did not always respect this law and religious controversies and quarrels lasted for a long time.³⁸

The Netherlands sometimes displayed an austere mood due to confessionalization. Arminius himself experienced this tension when he was taken before the ecclesiastical tribunal a few times, in order to clarify doctrinal points that were questioned by interlocutors. Pulpits and classrooms experienced this hostility on numerous occasions. However, Arminius followed the ideas of some humanists (e.g., Erasmus of Rotterdam, Sébastien Castellio and Dirck Coornhert) in favor of freedom of conscience, concord and irenicism (peace). In a text addressed to the States General, he vehemently criticized coercion of conscience and stated: “I am not one of those who have dominion over another man's faith.”³⁹ Instead of pulpits being used for religious persecution – it is worth remembering that this was the case with Catholics, Mennonites, Anabaptists and other minority groups – Arminius said: “Let sermons be directed towards the affection of truth, charity, mercy, longsuffering, concord, and proper study; may they inflame the

³⁵ “[...] illa ars pauperulam alere posset, quæ pretium suæ industriæ & operæ statuere vellet indigentibus”. In: *Ep. Ecc. 53*, dated May 26, 1600.

³⁶ “Quare hortare uxorem, ut ne patiatu secum intermori artem tam necessariam: si nolet communicare dum vivit, saltem scriptum relinquat ex hac vita discedens”. In: *Ep. Ecc. 53*.

³⁷ “Tolerance” here is not used in the eighteenth-century modern sense, but rather to mean self-restraint or indulgence, as in canon law from the twelfth century onwards. More information in Couto, 2022, p. 258-276.

³⁸ For William of Orange's ideas surrounding freedom of conscience, the pacification of Ghent, and the intolerant actions of the Reformed, see Couto, 2022, p. 158-169, 318-326.

³⁹ “[...] cum non sim qui alterius fidei dominer”. In: *Dec. Sent. In: Opera*, p. 133; “For I am not of the congregation of those who wish to have dominion over the faith of another man.” In: *Works*, vol. 1, p. 732.

desire for peace in the souls of the Prince and the people.”⁴⁰ In his opinion, this is the “remedy [...] best suited to remove dissensions.”⁴¹

Final Considerations

This article proposed to reflect and analyze Arminius's ideas about caring for the vulnerable. Although he did not write a specific treatise on this subject, the theme permeates his textual corpus on several occasions, especially when he talks about good works, when he questions the motivation for practicing charity and when he expresses his concern with freedom of conscience. In the first case, Arminius criticizes Antinomianism with its excessive denial of works and presents a soteriological model that prioritizes salvation without merit and human effort, but which is not static to the point of denying good works. Good works, in Arminius' understanding, are linked to the practice of charity, almsgiving, helping the needy. In this sense, Arminius repeats the Protestant maxim that salvation is not *by* works, but *for* good works, following a teleological bias. Rather than denying good works, as the Antinomians did, he understands that the redeemed are saved to do such works, and he also argues that such practice serves as external evidence of salvation and mystical union with Christ. In this way, Arminius maintains a position that avoids the extremes of Antinomianism and Pelagianism, not deviating from the Dutch Reformed tradition, in a first moment.

The second point of his approach to the subject involves praxis itself. Arminius realizes the need not to separate correct practice (orthopraxy) from correct motivation (orthopathy). It is not enough just to do good, to help those in need, to give assistance to the vulnerable. After all, good works are not an end in themselves. Although not addressed in the text, major biographers assumed Arminius possibly studied at the famous *Hieronymusschool* (Saint Jerome School) during the period when he was under the tutelage of Theodore Emilius between 1569 and 1574. The school emphasized humanist education. Further, the institution maintained the religious principles of *devotio moderna*, an intra-Catholic movement that advocated a simpler and more devotional form of religious life, centered on the imitation of Christ, through prayer, meditation, and service to others. In addition, *devotio moderna* emphasized the importance of performing good works as an expression of faith; however, the movement was also concerned with the right motivation for doing these works. Practitioners believed good works should not be done for selfish reasons or to gain merit before God, but rather as an expression of love and gratitude towards Him. Arminius's concern with the right motive for doing good works seems to dovetail well with this tradition.

The third point within Arminius' care for the vulnerable surfaced from his perspective of freedom of conscience, a theme so central to his theology and which, in a way, is a kind of guiding thread of his thought. Arminius wanted peace and ecclesiastical harmony and this would

⁴⁰ “[...] conciones habeantur ad veritatis, caritatis, misericordie, longanimitatis, concordia affectum & stucium accommodatæ, quibus Principum & Populorum animi desiderio pacificandi incensi”. In: Oratio V, De componendo dissidio religionis inter Christianos. In: *Opera*, p. 87; “Let such sermons be preached as are calculated to excite the minds of the people to the love and study of truth, charity, mercy, long-suffering, and concord; which may inflame the minds both of Governors and people.” In: *Works*, vol. 1, p. 473.

⁴¹ “[...] remedium illudquod, tollendis diſidibus est opportunissimum”. In: Oratio V, De componendo dissidio religionis inter Christianos. In: *Opera*, p. 87; “remedy [...] best accommodated to remove dissensions.” In: *Works*, vol. 1, p. 473.

certainly lead to care for the vulnerable, especially people persecuted in religious disputes, such as Mennonites and other religious minorities. Arminius wanted this procedure reviewed in the Dutch Reformed Church and suggested discussions around this topic at a National Synod. Furthermore, the article highlights some ministerial examples from the period in which he served as pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church in Amsterdam, at *Oudekerk*. His ministerial practice was probably overshadowed by the many works that analyze his theological point of view in an apologetic bias of the doctrine of salvation, leaving his pastoral aside. Apparently, his pastoral service was coherent with his speech and seemed to be in accordance with the directives of his denomination, which in some synods defined how pastors should deal with social functions, which directly involved working with people in vulnerability.

Arminius' perspective on caring for the vulnerable points to a non-Pelagian, non-Antinomian path, aligned with Reformed Theology and with *devotio moderna*, in a kind of *via media*. This study still deserves more comprehensive research in both historiographical and theological fields of soteriology and ecclesiology. A comparative study of Arminius' perspectives with his own tradition, the Reformed, the Lutheran (which was concurrently growing across Europe), and the various relevant Catholic approaches of his day (e.g., Jesuits, Tridentines, Carmelites, Molinists etc.) should prove helpful as further research. Regardless, the research contributes a perspective of Arminius's theology yet to be explored by scholars who have dedicated themselves to researching the life and works of this Dutch theologian.