CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

This essay has been an attempt to describe and analyze Jacobus Arminius’s doctrine of salvation in general and his doctrine of the assurance of salvation in particular, thus supplementing current scholarship on Arminius and on Reformed soteriology. In view of this goal, Arminius and his theology have been placed in their academic context at the University of Leiden and his views of the ontology of salvation and the epistemology of salvation have been examined. Throughout the essay, I have provided a comparative analysis of Arminius and his closest Reformed contemporaries that demonstrates both the similarities and the differences in their systems, thus further illuminating the roots of the Arminian debate in Leiden and the low countries. This final chapter will recapitulate some of the chief conclusions of the essay and reiterate the position of assurance in the overall thought of Arminius.

I. Ontology and Epistemology of Salvation

The most basic distinction pertinent to this study of Arminius’s soteriology is the difference between the ontology and the epistemology of salvation. The two categories must not be confused. Given the epistemological consequences of the fall, it can be easily imagined that one may be ontologically elect but epistemically unaware of it, or, in contrast, one may be ontologically reprobate but epistemically assured of salvation. In brief, this is the problem of the assurance of salvation. The doubt that plagued the late medieval church was not eliminated in the Reformed church, and, for that matter, this problem of assurance goes back at least to the first epistle of John and extends into the 21st century.

Although these categories are distinct, they are nevertheless intimately related to and mutually influential on one another. A particular conception of how salvation is achieved and applied will directly affect the mode and extent of the assurance of the personal application of salvation. Likewise, one’s assumptions about what constitutes a healthy,
biblical assurance of salvation will affect one’s opinion of any soteriological system that tends to generate what appears to be unhealthy, unbiblical assurance. These theoretical and practical considerations regarding soteriology are at stake in the Arminian controversy.

II. Arminius’s Soteriology in the Context of Reformed Orthodoxy

The tendencies characterizing much of twentieth-century scholarship on Arminius—namely, inattention to the original languages and primary works of Arminius and his colleagues; imposing the thoughts of later Enlightenment Remonstrantism, American revivalism, or Continental existentialism on Arminius; and using Arminius to bolster a modern theological viewpoint before pausing to understand him—must be superseded by more contextual examinations of the man and his thought. This monograph is intended as a step in the right direction. As mentioned in chapter one, theological application is a legitimate and profitable use of the inquiry into the history of theology, but the history must first be understood on its own terms if the application is to be at all accurate or meaningful. In order to understand the Leiden debate and the literature from the pens of its participants in any depth, Arminius must be examined within the context of early Reformed orthodoxy and interpreted in relation to the Protestant scholasticism from which he learned and to which he contributed. Furthermore, specific attention must also be given to his colleagues in the Staten College at Leiden. Kuchlinus and Gomarus in particular, with varying degrees of hostility, resisted Arminius before his arrival and throughout his tenure. At the same time, Arminius himself was increasingly hostile—if not to the persons—at least to the views of his colleagues on some matters relevant to soteriology and predestination. The stage was set for a theological conflict that initially took place by and large in an academic, university context; and in matters regarding soteriology, the debate often gravitated to the causes and order of salvation. The language of the debate was Latin and the means were public disputation, which, as the substantive work of the professors, provided an occasion for publicizing their respective views, with students sometimes getting caught in the crossfire. The academic disputations employed in the present essay are a portion of this large corpus that, despite its importance for contextualizing the theology and controversy at Leiden, has not been examined by previous scholarship.