Judging by the correspondence and official proceedings at the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, one would think that Arminianism was a dangerous gangrene infecting the body of the church in a number of Swiss cities. This assessment, not nearly shared by all, was made by ecclesiastical figures and authorities whose orthodoxy was beyond dispute.

An Inquest in Bern (1698)

Thus the church at Bern, which never passed up an opportunity to warn against the threats of divergent philosophies and theologies, had not ceased to denounce the rise of a heterodoxy that was either implicitly or explicitly Arminian in its orientation. In 1698, Bern turned on a handful of students from the Academy of Lausanne\(^1\) accused by the pastor of the German church in the city of propagating Arminian errors, and of openly holding to teachings that conflicted with the *Consensus helveticus*, which had been adopted in 1675 by the evangelical cantons to counter the teachings of the Saumur theologians Moïse Amyraut, Louis Cappel and Josué de La Place.\(^2\) An official investigation followed with hearings in both Bern and Lausanne, and the Bern deputies also paid a visit to the Lausanne Academy.

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\(^1\) The Pays de Vaud, that is: Lausanne and surrounding territories, had been under the control of Bern since 1536. The Academy of Lausanne therefore enjoyed only a limited autonomy, since Bern had the right of oversight on the teaching and recruitment of the professors. On the affair of 1698, cf. Henri Vuilleumier, *Histoire de l’Église réformée du Pays de Vaud sous le régime bernois* (Lausanne, 1930), vol. III, 571–585.

\(^2\) *Formula Consensus Ecclesiarum Helvetiarum Reformatarum circa doctrinam de gratia universal et connexa aliaque nonnulla capita* (s.l.n.d.). The *Consensus* addressed specifically the doctrines of hypothetical universalism, the non-imputation of Adam’s sin, and the late date for the Masoretic vowels in the Hebrew text of the Bible. For its adoption in Switzerland and Geneva, cf. H. Vuilleumier, *op. cit.*, especially vol. II.
The different sources from which we can reconstruct the affair that would agitate the capital of Vaud for a number of months give evidence of a climate where any sign of intellectual autonomy was taken as proof of Arminian error. Yet these sources also allow us to identify more clearly the contested theological points, and the targets at which the authorities were aiming. Not surprisingly, the touchstone on which the thought of each and every theologian was sounded concerned predestination, free will, original sin, grace, the satisfaction of Christ and good works. When questioned, or rather denounced, by their colleagues, the defendants adopted similar strategies, either denying the charge of heterodoxy altogether, or else admitting certain doctrinal deviations from which they claimed—obviously—to have come back and now forcefully denied:

It is true that I had made liberty consist in indifference as understood by the Arminians, but it is also true that after having carefully thought through the consequences that follow necessarily from this view for the issue of grace, and having recognized that it made man an animal in order to make him free, not only did I renounce this, but I did all I could to persuade those of my friends who had adopted this to renounce it as I had.3

Even if the students appear to have expressed doubts on predestination rather easily, whether by beginning with the caveat that they were only novices in theology4 or else appealing to writers whose orthodoxy was beyond question (e.g. Jacques Abbadie),5 for the rest they were careful not

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3 “Il est vrai que j’ai eu fait consister la liberté dans l’indifférence au sens des Arminiens, mais il est vrai aussi qu’après avoir bien pensé sur les conséquences qu’entraine nécessairement après soi ce sentiment sur la matière de la grace et reconnu qu’il rendoit l’homme beste pour le faire libre, non seulement j’y ai renoncé, mais j’ai fait tout mon possible pour persuader celui de mes amis qui l’adoptoit à y renoncer aussi bien que moi” (‘Réponses aux dépositions qui ont été faites contre Arthaud, proposant’ in ‘Enquête au sujet de Daniel Crespin et des Etudiants accusés d’arminianisme lors de la (2e) Visitation académique en juillet 1698,’ ms. held at the Bibliothèque Cantonale Universitaire de Lausanne, Fonds Samson and Henri Vuilleumier IS 1930/4/3/5, 109. This manuscript is a copy made by Henri Vuilleumier of the original, ‘Kirchen-und-Akademie Geschichte,’ vol. V, no pagination, held at the Archives cantonales vaudoises. Citations have been taken from Vuilleumier’s copy).

4 “Le sentiment de la grâce universelle ou particulière ayant une grande liaison avec la doctrine de la prédestination, j’avoue que je ne suis pas sans difficulté sur ce dogme; mais je laisse au progrès de mes études à m’en tirer et aux leçons de Mess. les professeurs” (Ibidem, 109).

5 “[...] je n’ai jamais puisé le sentiment où j’ai pu être que la prédestination n’était pas contenue au 9me des Romains dans aucun Arminien, mais dans Mr Abbadie, De la Vérité de la religion chrétienne, t. II, sect. 4, art. 9” (‘Déclaration sur les dépositions contre moi faites, par P.F. Bergier, ppt’ in ‘Enquête,’ ms cit., 105).