

THE DECLARATION OF JACOB ARMINIUS' THEOLOGICAL OPINIONS IN RUSSIAN: A TRIPLE TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION*



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Abstract: Here is the introduction to, and the excerpt from the text of, Jacob Arminius' major work entitled "The Declaration of Sentiments" or, alternatively "The Declaration of an Opinion." This is the first time that this work has been translated from Latin to Russian. The introduction explains the rationale for the translation project, gives an overview of the key sections, features, and ideas found in Arminius' theological treatise, and, finally, explains some basic principles and methods which stand behind the translator's work. The chosen excerpt, in its turn, presents the key theological

statements Arminius made in his *Declaration*. His ideas on the predestination, the divine providence and grace, the human free will, and some aspects of the Christian life are offered in Russian translation with some brief explanatory comments in the footnotes. Thus, the primary source of Arminian theology is now partly available to wide Russian-speaking audience.

Keywords: Jacob Arminius, Declaration of Sentiments, Arminianism, reformed scholasticism, predestination, God, free will

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Introduction to the Jacob Arminius Translation Project

In early 2015 the Slavic Resource and Research Center (SRRC) launched the “Jacob Arminius Translation Project.” It is a joint undertaking of SRRC and the “Reformation-500” Program under the auspices of the Euro-Asian Accrediting Association (EAAA), and its full name should be “Jacob Arminius: Selected Theological Works. An Annotated Translation from Latin to Russian.” Thus, it is clear that what is being done on this project must be a two-fold undertaking: (1) the *translation* itself as a resource-oriented task; and (2) an *informative and partially analytical commentary* as a research-oriented task. Hence, the Russian presentation of Arminius’ key treatises is expected to offer readers and researchers the raw material for further study and, additionally, provide crucial information and historical-theological notes on the translated material.

The rationale for offering such a translation is quite clear and well grounded. The so-called Arminian theological tradition has been more or less familiar to the Russian-speaking audience for about two decades. However, the primary texts written by the champion and founder of this tradition have long been neglected by potential translators. It is only now that an annotated academic translation—that is, a maximally critical edition with scholarly comments and contributions—of Arminius’ writings is being prepared and offered to this audience. To be sure, one must mention that quite recently, since late 2014-early 2015, Russian-speaking readers have been able to get acquainted with some of Arminius’ works in the fragmentary and non-academic translation prepared by Andrey Zolotaryov, Gennadiy Gololob, and their colleagues.¹ Their translation is based on an abridged, rearranged, and definitely adapted English translation of the theologian’s oeuvres, compiled and edited by John Wagner.² Thus, it is a translation of a translation. More precisely, it is a Russian version of an incomplete English version of the classic English translation of Arminius’ works (by William and James Nichols)³ originally published posthumously in Latin⁴ and, in fact, initially written in Latin and/or Dutch during his life and career.⁵

¹ Iakob Arminii, *Izbrannye sochineniia Iakoba Arminiia. O predopredelenii, svobode voli i sushchnosti Boga*, ed., John D. Wagner, trans. Andrey Zolotaryov (Rivne: PP DM, 2014).

² Jacobus Arminius, *Arminius Speaks: Essential Writings on Predestination, Free Will, and the Nature of God*, ed. John D. Wagner (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011).

³ James Arminius (Arminius-Nichols), *The Works of James Arminius, D.D.: Formerly Professor of Divinity in the University of Leyden*, trans. from Latin William Nichols and James Nichols, 3 vols. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1825).

⁴ Jacobus Arminius, *Opera theologica*, ed. Petrus Bertius (Lugduni Batavorum: Apud Godefridum Basson, 1629); Jacobus Arminius, *Opera theologica nunc denuò conjunctim recusa*, ed. Petrus Bertius (Francofurti: Apud VVolfgangum Hoffmannum, 1635).

⁵ E.g. Jacobus Arminius, *Verclarinche Iacobi Arminii. Saliger ghedachten, In zijn leven Professor Theologiae binnen Leyden: Aengaende zijn ghevoelen, so van de Predestinatie, als van eenige andere pointen der Christelicker Religie; daerinne men hem verdacht heeft ghemaect* (Leyden: Thomas Basson, 1610); Franciscus Gomarus en Jacobus Arminius, *Twee disputiën vande goddelicke predestinatie: d’ene by doct. Franciscus Gomarus, d’ander by doct. Iacobus Arminius, beyde professoren inde Theologie tot Leyden. Tot ondersoek der waerheyt, ende oeffeninghe der ieucht, inde hooghe Schole aldaer openbaerlijck voorghestelt int jaer 1604. Vertalt uyt het Latijn* (Leyden: Ian Paets Jacobszoon, 1609).

Consequently, a more critical, accurate, and academic approach is still needed. It requires translation from the original Latin or, when necessary, Dutch, and the extensive use of the key findings of Arminius research done during the last fifty years. It is a task that is hard to achieve but still necessary to undertake.

This is why an effort to provide such a translation to Russian-speaking Christians is being made now as part of the EAAA's "Reformation-500" Program dedicated to preparations for the quincentennial of the European Protestant Reformation. The goal of this translation project is to make and present the select theological works of the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Harmenszoon, known as Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), in Russian in order to make this significant and influential post-Reformation thinker's writings accessible to Russian-speaking theologians in Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and other post-Soviet countries. These texts belong to the post-Reformation Protestant theological tradition that emerged and developed in Western Europe in the late sixteenth to eighteenth centuries (mostly in forms of Reformed scholasticism and Lutheran orthodoxy), and whose textual artifacts have never been translated into Russian before – with just a handful of exceptions. This is why it is critically important to translate some of them and offer them to as large a Slavic or Russian-speaking audience as possible. Such an enterprise can help post-Soviet evangelical Christians *engage* with the Protestant heritage themselves and *appropriate and creatively rework or readapt* some of the ideas of a great Protestant thinker in the mostly non-Protestant context of contemporary Eastern Europe. In the coming paragraphs, I will introduce and briefly comment on the excerpt from the "Declaration" that is going to be presented in this issue of *Theological Reflections*.

Introduction to Declaration of an Opinion by Jacob Arminius

The first—and actually the most famous—of Arminius' essays that have already been translated into Russian is the so-called *Declaration of Sentiments*, which also happens to be his *opus magnum* and late exposition of his theological convictions. It is translated here as "Declaration of an Opinion," since it sounds closer to the original Dutch and Latin formulations⁶ and remains relatively faithful to the Russian (and English) tradition of translation with its "declarations" and "sentiments." The full title of the treatise reads: "A Declaration of J. Arminius' Thought(s) on Predestination, Divine Providence, the freedom of the will, the grace of God, the Divinity of the Son of God, and the justification of man before God" (Latin *Declaratio sententiae I. Arminii de Praedestinatione, Providentia Dei, Libero arbitrio, Gratia Dei, Divinitate Filii Dei, & de Iustificacione hominis coram Deo*).

Initially, it was to be a written text in which Arminius was expected to present his views before the States of Holland at The Hague in 1607-1608. But additionally, he requested to be allowed to explicate and defend his cause orally in the presence of the parliament deputies, which opportunity was granted to him in October 1608. Therefore the text became the speech, and on 30 October 1608, Jacob Arminius delivered his "Declaration" in the city of The Hague before the magistrates of his

⁶ See the commentaries on the treatise's title in the text below.

province.⁷ Hence, the treatise served as both the transcript for an oral presentation and as a written text with its own value. It was prepared and presented in Dutch as *Verclaringhe Iacobi Arminii. Saliger ghedachten* (“Declaration of some thoughts of Jacob Arminius”) and later translated into Latin as *Declaratio sententiae I. Arminii* by an unknown translator. Since it was the clearest, most concise, and definitely a mature exposition of Arminius’ theology, it has ever since been considered the best introduction to, let alone *the* expression of, the controversial and influential thought of the father of Arminianism.

The treatise starts with Arminius’ account of the events and circumstances that led to his being obliged to publicly declare and defend his views on such controversial topics as the doctrines of predestination, justification, salvation, free will, etc. The translator Colin Gunter calls it the “personal history” of the named reformed theologian,⁸ and, as a matter of fact, personal history constitutes the first part of the “Declaration.” The second part, entitled “On Predestination” (Latin: *De Prædestinatione*; Dutch: *Vande Predestinatie*), is more polemical and theological as it discusses and criticizes two supralapsarian and one infralapsarian theories of predestination. It is primarily supralapsarianism that is vehemently attacked by Arminius, although he goes so far as to deny not only rigid determinism in the form of “pure” supralapsarian theology but also its softer versions, as well as infralapsarian speculations.

Then, after a very critical exposition and open critique of the existing interpretations of divine election to salvation and reprobation, he sets out to present his own version of the doctrine. This is the third part, unambiguously entitled “My opinion on predestination” (Latin: *Mea sententia de prædestinatione*; Dutch: *Mijn meeninghe van de Predestinatie*). It is quite precise, concise, and systematic. Here Arminius formulates his understanding of the order of divine decrees that make up the complex divine decision about (not) predestining people to salvation and argues for both the biblical nature and theological coherence of his “opinion.” Finally, he comes to the fourth and last part in which he talks about some other theological and ecclesial topics that he needed to comment on: the need for a new national synod, which could revise and amend the confessional documents (pl.) of the Dutch Reformed Church, and the doctrines of God’s providence, human freedom, Christian perfection, etc.

The fragment below has been taken from the third and partially from the fourth parts of the treatise. Here Arminius’ personal theology—specifically his doctrines of God, salvation, and the Christian life—shines through. There is no need to comment or “dismantle” this theology before the reader gets acquainted with the text. Therefore I will add a couple of words on the principles and nuances of the Russian translation of the “Declaration” and then invite readers to delve into Jacob Arminius’ almost unaccommodated but definitely translated thought.

⁷ Jacobus Arminius, and W. Stephen Gunter (Arminius-Gunter), *Arminius and His Declaration of Sentiments: An Annotated Translation with Introduction and Theological Commentary* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 85-86; Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 39-39.

⁸ Arminius-Gunter, *Arminius and His Declaration of Sentiments*, 90.

Introduction to the Russian translation of the “Declaration”

Any translation represents an attempt to understand something that is not understood. In other words, any translation is a (non)understanding.⁹ The translation of another’s works is an attempt to make the author—or rather the author’s world of ideas, which were thought through in another language, against a different background, and at a different time—understandable to people of our world and time. This is why each translation project seeks to find a balance between the need to transmit the “taste,” “color,” and “flavor” of a thinker’s ideas and the necessity of expressing all that in the clear and easily understood language of the intended future readers. It is of great importance to convey the meaning of the text and at the same time to stay faithful to and keep the historically determined cultural peculiarities of the mode of thinking and parlance of both the translated author and the readers who will use the translation. This is the only way to build a bridge between the conceptual world of someone from the past and the conceptual world of contemporary readers. The translation offered here tries to bring together Jacob Arminius’ theological thought and the modern Christian’s thinking.

Style. It goes without saying that translating an early sixteenth-century text poses some very specific challenges to both the translator and the reader. This is why one cannot escape considering the crucial factors and taking some not always simple decisions. In particular the question of style arises: should the translator imitate the author’s language and thus emphasize the form, or is it better to focus on a maximally idiomatic Russian rendering of the text and thus concentrate on transmitting the meaning? Moreover, it is necessary to take into account the scholastic vocabulary and quite old-fashioned rhetoric which Arminius uses. For example, he prefers to construct very long, complex sentences, regularly utilizes impersonal constructions, employs technical theological terminology, embellishes his speech by means of beautiful and pathetic allocutions, etc.

These were the reasons why I regularly divided the long sentences of the “Declaration” into simpler ones and, when it was necessary, changed the impersonal constructions with an implied or directly indicated personal agent into personal ones. Furthermore, I decided to maximally—as far as it was logical and possible—follow the author’s style. The translated text contains the Russian equivalents of Arminius’ polite address, complex grammatical structure and, of course, technical theological language — the typical feature of the Protestant scholasticism of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

Besides this, I have tried to adequately reflect the accents and emphases that Arminius himself made with the help of such tools as italics or capital letters. His practice of using small or capital letters is completely replicated in the Russian text.

⁹ Andriy Bohachov et al., “Pereklad yak neporozuminnya. Terminologichna dyskusiya,” *Filosofs’ka dumka*, no. 5 (Terminolohiya / Terminology) (2015): 68.

The only exception is the noun “God,” its cognates, and other words associated with it (both nouns and pronouns): that is, the translation systematically follows the tradition of spelling this term with a capital first letter.

As for italics, I had to constantly take individual decisions and answer the question: what is Arminius doing here? Is he using a word in a non-literal, figurative meaning or simply stressing a word or phrase that bears some importance for him? In fact, Arminius applies italics to meet both of these goals. But in Russian the former use is primarily associated with inverted commas or quotation marks (for example, “discussion”) whereas the latter implies the use of italics (for example, “it is *really* important”). Thus, I had to choose one of the possible renderings of the original emphasis every time I encountered italics in the great Dutch theologian’s treatise. It must be admitted that the final decisions cannot be considered easy and unambiguous. Therefore the reader has to take into consideration the existing variability of meaningful accents.

Multilinguality and Untranslatables. It is well known that initially Jacob Arminius wrote and orally presented his “Declaration” in Dutch. The manuscript of the treatise has been preserved and is now kept in an archive in the Netherlands. In 1610, soon after Arminius’ death, the printed version of the work was also published in Dutch. However, after a while, a friend and colleague of the deceased theologian, P. Bertius, prepared a printed Latin edition of the whole body of his theological oeuvres. Quite logically, it was entitled “Opera theologica,” and later became the textual foundation of the major part of translations of Arminius’ legacy, including the classic “Declaration of Sentiments.”

Still, there is no answer to the question about the author of its Latin translation. Consequently, the ambiguity remains: most often the “Declaration” used to be translated from Latin; yet, it is the hard-to-find Dutch and not the Latin variant that must be deemed primary. Thus, here we see the emergence of the phenomenon of multi- or, better, bilingualism: the text is available in two languages simultaneously. It is no secret that Arminius knew and extensively used both of them, since early modern Dutch was his mother tongue and Latin – his professional “dialect,” traditionally used in the university education of that time. This is why, on the advice of such experts in Arminius studies as Keith Stanglin and Richard Muller, I base the Russian translation on the main Latin edition but also consult the Dutch text.

But it is also necessary to mention another feature of the translated “Declaration”: I regularly indicate and periodically comment (in the footnotes) on Latin and/or Dutch formulations of some phrases and terms. The reasons for doing this include the already mentioned bilingualism of the treatise; some ordinary challenges of any translation, such as grammatical and syntactical obscurities; and, finally, my conviction that there exist-both in philosophy and theology in general and in Arminius’ theology in particular-the *untranslatables* (French *les intraduisibles*). According to B. Cassin and her French and Ukrainian colleagues, to “speak of untranslatables in no way implies that the terms in question, or the expressions, the

syntactical or grammatical turns, are not and cannot be translated: the untranslatable is rather what one keeps on (not) translating.”¹⁰

One cannot deny that (Christian) metaphysics operates with a whole range of specific terms that call for a specific approach. They can—and should—be translated *correctly*, but it must be kept in mind that they cannot be translated *exhaustively and comprehensibly*. Moreover, one might admit that every single language with its world of words and concepts cannot be transposed and converted into another language. But then the translation as such will be reduced to the conversation of two people from two different countries without a translator. Yet this is not the case. A better approach would rather imply that the translation from one language to the other must be done as well as possible, but meanwhile the original terms deserve to be indicated. In our case it means that what the reader gets is a Russian translation accompanied from time to time by the terms and phrases in the original language(s). This is the decision I have taken for this project. From the average reader’s perspective it might seem excessive and awkward, but for the professional reader it offers some gain. Such an approach can—and should—let the reader feel the lexical nuances of the text and better understand the translator’s decisions. Additionally, it can become indispensable material for a deeper and more meticulous analysis of Jacob Arminius’ legacy. Finally, I hope that the original words and phrases which I normally put in brackets might inspire some readers to get acquainted “in person” with the multilingual and multifaceted tradition of European theology in general and Netherlandish theology in particular.

Explanatory Comments. The additional feature of the offered Russian translation is the presence of supplementary explanatory comments in footnotes. The notes in square brackets (for example, [possible]) signify an interpolation that either clarifies the meaning of the text or just adds words or expressions necessitated by Russian grammatical or stylistic rules. In addition, the square brackets serve as references to biblical passages that Arminius quotes or paraphrases such as [Heb. 11, 2].

Finally, the translation is supplemented with intra-textual references which mark the corresponding footnote commentaries. Generally, they are supposed to explain a specific term, point out an alternate reading, or provide useful information about the man or the event mentioned. All these tools are used in order to make the text of “Declaration of an Opinion” readable and understandable in the light of its historical-theological context and lexical-conceptual apparatus.

¹⁰ “Parler d’intraduisibles n’implique nullement que les termes en question, ou les expressions, les tours syntaxiques et grammaticaux, ne soient pas traduits et ne puissent pas l’être — l’intraduisible, c’est plutôt ce qu’on ne cesse pas de (ne pas) traduire.” Barbara Cassin, “Présentation,” *Vocabulaire Européen Des Philosophies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil / Dictionnaires Le Robert, 2004), XVII. Also see Barbara Cassin, “Vstupne slovo,” *Yevropeys’kyy slovnyk filosofiy. Leksykon neperekladnostey* (Kyiv: Dukh i litera, 2011), 13. The English phrasing is quoted from the American version of this dictionary: Barbara Cassin (ed.), *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, transl. Steven Rendall, Christian Hubert, Jeffrey Mehlman, Nathanael Stein, and Michael Syrotinski, ed. Emily Apter, Jacques Lezra, and Michael Wood (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

I sincerely hope that readers will find this translation—at the moment, its fragment—readable, useful, and suitable for acquaintance with and research on Jacob Arminius’ original thought. But let him speak for himself—in Russian.

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