

## BRAZILIAN INTEREST IN ARMINIANISM

### Recent developments

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I do not know any paper that has portrayed the interest of Brazilians in Arminian soteriology; therefore, this article aims at presenting a summary of the advancement of such interest in the last decade, that is, from 2005 onwards<sup>1</sup>.

Brazil, at present, has experienced some increase in interest in Arminianism, but that is a very recent development.

Unlike countries like the USA, Brazil, for example, has in its largest protestant denomination, that is, [Brazilian] Assemblies of God, a smashing majority of lay pastors and ecclesiastical leaders. Having a bachelor degree in theology is not a requirement of this denomination for the consecration of pastors, and such requirement is absent in many other denominations. Even when some of the church leaders have a degree in theology, this degree, in most cases, is not a good one or it is a degree obtained in non-Arminian institutions or, in some cases, in Calvinist institutions. It is estimated that Mackenzie Presbyterian University in São Paulo, a Calvinist institution, has among its alumni a high level of Assembly of God members who are Pentecostals, and as such, non-Calvinists, but the theological education of many Pentecostals in Brazil, mainly in São Paulo, is through a Calvinist institution. According to Olson, Pentecostals are (or at least should be) heirs of Arminian theology<sup>2</sup>.

This state of affairs described above is enough to show some of the toughest difficulties faced by Brazilian protestant theology and that helps to explain why the mainstream theology in Brazil is lay theology, and for that reason it has no great concern for historical perspective and doctrine, being these two reasons, among others, as quoted by Stanglin and McCall in *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (Oxford Press, 2012, p. 4) – whose

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<sup>1</sup> I am not aware of a single article or essay that deals, in particular, with the history and development of Arminianism in Brazil, and a study that came to present a more comprehensive view on the topic would face many difficulties, since Arminianism in Brazil é mainly unknown and, as such, the person responsible for this research will certainly have a very hard time to get documents, being the lack of documents, or at least as it seems, an evidence of absence of any substantial or important development in the sense of preservation and dissemination of Arminianism in Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Olson in the Introduction of his book *Arminian Theology – Myths and Realities* (IVP Academic), p. 14, argues that Pentecostals denominations are Arminian, but that is not the case for a particular Pentecostal denomination in Brazil, *Congregação Cristã do Brasil* (Christian Congregation of Brazil).

translation into Portuguese is to be published by Reflexão Publishing House in the beginning of 2016 – as some of the causes of unfamiliarity of Arminius and such observation is also valid for Brazil.

The ignorance of Arminianism in Brazil has as its roots, initially, the difficulties in the theological education in the country and the lack of identity of the denominations who are or should be the heirs of Arminian theology.

The interest in Arminianism has on the internet its origin, since in Brazil, unless someone can prove otherwise, there is not a single school or institution that labels itself Arminian and that has a clear, organized and systematic goal of preservation and propagation of such soteriological system.

For years, Brazil has had no Arminian representative when it comes to a relevant educational institution and the same applies to great or influent church leaders who label themselves Arminian. The website [arminianismo.com](http://www.arminianismo.com)<sup>3</sup>, owned by Paulo Cesar Antunes, is, therefore, one of the first milestones, if not the very first, to make a substantial and lasting difference in the presentation of Arminianism in Brazil. The website created in 2006 has translations, articles, book excerpts, tips regarding writers and books, among other things, and besides all that, a discussion forum on Arminianism that started gathering many people interested in the subject. My first relevant contact with Arminianism came through this website. However, once again, a very organized website which is not sponsored by any church or educational institution, receiving no incentives, but that is a result of personal initiative and visionary act of its founder.

The website started gathering people interested in theology and congregating the “very first convicted and self-proclaimed Arminians” in the country, many of whom started joining forces with the website founder in an effort of preservation and dissemination of Arminian theology in Brazil. From this website, the first blogs to defend Arminianism came out, but all of them, in its majority, had the “mother website” as its source of information and support base. It was also in this point that a few Brazilians started labeling themselves Arminians, since there are many Arminians who are unaware they are such, another problem also dealt with by Roger Olson<sup>4</sup>.

A great development, still concerning the internet, happened right after that, it was the migration of the discussion forum from [arminianismo.com](http://www.arminianismo.com) to a discussion group on Facebook. One of the discussion forum members, Alcino Júnior, suggested creating a discussion group on Facebook, such group nowadays has over seven thousand members<sup>5</sup>, and

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.arminianismo.com/>

<sup>4</sup> Roger Olson says that in his Introduction of the book *Arminian Theology – Myths and Realities*, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/grupo.arminianismo/>

the number is still growing, besides that, other "branch groups" were created from this one.

The founding of SEA<sup>6</sup>, Society of Evangelical Arminians, which has one of the leading Arminian scholars as its board members, Dr. Brian Abasciano, was also another important step for the interest in Arminian theology, for the website started providing the main articles and resources that came to be translated and published in Brazilian blogs and websites. SEA gathers scholars, professors, pastors and laymen of the whole world and it has been an extremely vital force for the dissemination of Arminianism in Brazil and has put many Brazilians in contact with people who, in many cases, act like mentors and sources of reliable information and resource for the study of the soteriology here being discussed.

The second great milestone happened as a result of the publication of Arminian books. Up to 2013, there was not a single Publishing House in Brazil publishing Arminian works. There were a few Arminian books, such as *Chosen, But Free*, by Norman Geisler (Bethany House), a book that, despite defending Arminianism, its author mistakenly labels himself "moderate Calvinist", and *Foundations of Wesleyan-Arminian Theology*, by Mildred Bangs Wynkoop (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City), a confessedly Arminian book, but very little known and publicized in Brazil, thus, there was no clear and organized effort of a single Publishing House to create an Arminian editorial line in the Brazilian publishing market, what, once again, is what Stanglin and McCall describe in their book, "Unlike the case for Luther, Calvin, and Wesley, there is no learned society or seminary that bears the name of Arminius, no study group or center that is devoted to researching his legacy, and no systematic attempt to publish and translate his works"<sup>7</sup>.

The context started changing in 2013 with the release of *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*, by Roger Olson through Editora Reflexão. Olson's volume drew the attention of the audience, having received a positive review by an influent evangelical magazine, *Ultimato*, through a Reformed scholar, Ricardo Quadros Gouveia, a Presbyterian pastor in São Paulo and professor of the Graduate Course of Science of Religion from Mackenzie Presbyterian University, as one of twelve books of 2013 that Christians should read<sup>8</sup>. Olson's book, therefore, becomes a milestone in the publication of Arminian books in Brazil, since this work would be the door through which many others would follow. The publication of Arminian books by Arminian writers became a course correction, for the little knowledge people had on Arminianism was acquired through the lenses of Calvinists, and, as it was expected, many of these books presented (and unfortunately still do) caricatures about Arminianism<sup>9</sup>, but such mistakes were not refuted

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<sup>6</sup> <http://evangelicalarminians.org/>

<sup>7</sup> Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ultimato.com.br/conteudo/os-12-livros-de-2013-que-os-cristaos-devem-ler>

<sup>9</sup> There are many caricatures concerning Arminian theology written by writers that, according to their practice and views, are Arminian, but they do not wear the label. However, in terms of numbers, the publication of caricatures by unaware Arminians

or confronted, therefore, in this sense a book which deals with “myths” was really important.

Still in 2013 Brazil would see the release of a second book by Roger Olson, *Against Calvinism* (Zondervan). In 2014 the book *Why I am not a Calvinist*, by Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell (InterVarsityPress) is also translated into Portuguese. In 2015 there is an overwhelming increase in the publication of Arminian books, if compared to the lack and lethargy of publication of the previous decades. *Young, Restless, No Longer Reformed*, by Austin Fischer (Cascade Books) is published by Editora Sal Cultural and *John Wesley’s Notes on the New Testament* is published by Editora Filhos da Graça, the digital booklet *Arminianism FAQ* by Roger Olson is also published and can be downloaded for free<sup>10</sup>. *Elect in the Son* by Robert Shank, *Man’s Faith and Freedom*, by Gerald McCulloh and the extremely important biography of the systematizer of the Arminian thought, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, by Carl Bangs are all published by Editora Reflexão. Brazilian authors also start writing Arminian books, such as “Introduction to Wesleyan-Arminian Theology” (2014) by Vinicius Couto<sup>11</sup>, “A Classical Arminian Introduction” (2015) by Zwínglio Rodrigues<sup>12</sup>, and What is Arminian Theology? by Wellington Mariano<sup>13</sup>, a booklet that is the first one of a collection of booklets on Arminianism whose goal is to reach the most ordinary readers and to serve as a bridge for reading, discussing and deepening the understanding of the subject. All of these just mentioned books also published by Editora Reflexão which, although is not a confessedly Arminian Publishing House, it becomes the main and most important channel for the publication of Arminian books in the country, creating an Arminian editorial line<sup>14</sup>. Still in 2015 Editora Reflexão expects to publish the following works: *What Love is This?* By Dave Hunt, *God’s Strategy in History*, by Paul Marston and Roger Forster and *Grace for All*, whose editors are Clark H. Pinnock and John D. Wagner. For 2016 the so-awaited book *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace*, by Keith Stanglin and Thomas McCall and also *Arminius and His Declaration of Sentiments* by W. Stephen Gunter<sup>15</sup>.

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is much lower than the caricatures produced by Calvinists, since Calvinists write and publish much more books than Arminians do.

<sup>10</sup> <http://store.seedbed.com/products/arminianismo-perguntas-frequentes>

<sup>11</sup> <https://ssl5921.websitesequero.com/editorareflexao1/Site.aspx/Produto/175-INTRODUCAO-A-TEOLOGIA-ARMINIO-WESLEYANA?store=1>

<sup>12</sup> <https://ssl5921.websitesequero.com/editorareflexao1/Site.aspx/Produto/499-UMA-INTRODUCAO-AO-ARMINIANISMO-CLASSICO-HISTORIAS-E-DOCTRINAS?store=1>

<sup>13</sup> <https://ssl5921.websitesequero.com/editorareflexao1/Site.aspx/Produto/483-O-QUE-E-TEOLOGIA-ARMINIANA?store=1>

<sup>14</sup> Arminian books published by Editora Reflexão can be seen on the following link: <https://ssl5921.websitesequero.com/editorareflexao1/Site.aspx/Categoria/132-TEOLOGIA-ARMINIANA?store=1>

<sup>15</sup> <https://vimeo.com/94197255>

However, the greatest surprise of 2015 was the publication of the Three Volumes of Arminius's Works<sup>16</sup> by CPAD (Assemblies of God Publishing House) in the middle of August, since no work from the hand of Arminius had been officially translated into Portuguese. From the publication of Arminius' Works, as well as other Arminian books, Brazil is expected to experience a revival in the academic and ecclesiastic interest concerning Arminian theology studies, since the country now has the minimum necessary to advance in this sense.

In 2014, after the release of *Arminian Theology* by Roger Olson, a third great development took place, that is, Arminian conferences throughout the country, that being the third milestone. The first Arminian conference, which brought national attention and repercussion, took place in the city of Caruaru in the State of Pernambuco. Carlos Gomes, at the time an Assembly of God deacon, was the person in charge of the organization. The event had the following lecturers: Ildo Melo, bishop and world president of the Free Methodist Church Council of Bishops, Kleber de Maia, Assembly of God pastor, Rubens Rodrigues, Church of the Nazarene pastor, Zwínglio Rodrigues, Baptist pastor and Wellington Mariano, Assembly of God pastor. As a result of this meeting, besides several photos<sup>17</sup>, we also have the video of the lecture entitled Life and Work of Jacob Arminius<sup>18</sup>.

The first Arminian conference gave birth to a series of other conferences about Arminian theology all over the country still in the year of 2014. On July 19 the church Assembly of God in the city of Indaiatuba, São Paulo, would host a lecture on Arminianism to all of its Sunday school teachers, gathering around 200 attendees. On August 30-31, another Assembly of God, now in the city of Limeira, São Paulo, would also host a full-day meeting to promote Arminian theology to its leaders and members<sup>19</sup>. On November 8, 2014, the church of the Nazarene in Recife, Pernambuco, organizes a holiness seminary whose theme was to rediscover the Arminian roots of the denomination. On November 10-13, 2014, the church Assembly of God in the city of Fortaleza, Ceará, through its seminary, STADDEC, was responsible for a Theological Week, which would discuss Jacob Arminius' thought and importance to theological studies.

The following year, 2015, the Arminian conferences would keep on taking place throughout the country. On January 24, the church of the Nazarene in the city of Barroso, Minas Gerais, hosts the First Arminian

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.editoracpad.com.br/hotsites/obrasdearminio/>

<sup>17</sup> Some of the pictures taken at the event can be seen through this link: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.1452580478306148.1073741829.1421281681436028&type=3>

<sup>18</sup> The lecture in Portuguese can be watched on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EctdhMDNos>

<sup>19</sup> The lecture "Arminianism and Total Depravity" can be watched on the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aywve4zFbk>

Theology Meeting<sup>20</sup>. On the days 20 and 21 of March, Editora Sal Cultural puts together in the city of Maceió, Alagoas, the First Wesleyan-Arminian Conference. From April 12 to 17, 2014, the church Assembly of God in the city of Mossoró, Rio Grande do Norte, organizes the First Theological Week and use it to present Arminianism<sup>21</sup>. On May 1-2, in the city of João Pessoa, Paraíba, Free-Grace Conference would take place<sup>22</sup>. On May 21-23, 2015, the church of the Nazarene in the city of Lagoa Azul, Rio Grande do Norte, hosts an Arminian Conference. Initially, when it comes to Arminian speakers in Brazil, bishop Ildo Mello, pastor Kleber Maia and pastor Zwínglio Rodrigues stand out. Out of the 10 conferences just mentioned, I have had the pleasure and privilege of participating in eight of them as a speaker.

But the great achievement of 2015, when it comes to conferences, was the coming of Christian philosopher and Houston Baptist University professor Jerry Walls, co-writer of *Why I am not a Calvinist*. Walls arrived in Brazil on Saturday, August 8, and on the very same day, at night, he was lecturing to around 800 Assembly of God pastors and leaders in the city of Barueri, São Paulo. On the following day, August 9, he would be lecturing in the city of Jundiaí, São Paulo, at an Assembly of God church. Monday, August 10, Walls was speaking at FAECAD (Assembly of God Evangelical College) in Rio de Janeiro, where Walls' lecture was also used as a great opportunity to release Jacob Arminius' Works into Portuguese. On Tuesday and Wednesday, August 11 and 12, the philosopher would speak at FEICS (Song of Solomon Evangelical College) in the city of Cuiabá, Mato Grosso do Sul. On Thursday, August 12, Walls would lecture at a Church of the Nazarene in the city of Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, and on Friday morning he would lecture at Livraria Luz e Vida ("Light and Life Evangelical Bookstore") in the city of Recife, Pernambuco. Walls' topic in these places were, *What is wrong with Calvinism? And if God is love, why is there hell?* On Saturday, Walls would spend an entire day in São Paulo, where he was the keynote and only speaker of the day. His two new lectures presented there were, *The heart and soul of Arminian Theology* and *Why does it matter? Calvinism and Christian Life*<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Three of the lectures presented in the city of Barroso, Minas Gerais, can be watched through the following links: 1) Arminian Theology Foundations <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YWcOoHwK7k8> ; 2) Classical and Wesleyan Arminianism <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DYUFeOJ0TyI> 3) Divine Sovereignty: Wesleyan-Arminian Perspectives <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZcy9S74px4> .

<sup>21</sup> The lecture Total Depravity and Free Will can be watched in this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDilk6YmSYc&feature=youtu.be> and Election and Predestination can be accessed <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-3S-hF40Cnk&feature=youtu.be> .

<sup>22</sup> Two of the main lectures can be watched by clicking in the following links: 1) Wesleyan-Arminian Tradition <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UnCkeq2FCDS> ; 2) The theology of Jacob Arminius <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v9iEFz0gpm0> ; the videos of the FACTS of salvation can be watched through the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpgU5v8VFbc> .

<sup>23</sup> Editora Reflexão expects to upload the videos of the lectures on Youtube soon.

Walls' coming to Brazil was an initiative and accomplishment by Editora Reflexão, which used Walls' lectures in many cities as a way of promoting and strengthening Arminianism, making the author known in Brazil and also using the opportunity to release Arminius biography by Carl Bangs and McCulloh's work, *Man's Faith and Freedom*.

Brazil, therefore, from 2014 to present time, has had Arminian conferences in 8 out of the 27 states of the nation, and some of the states, such as São Paulo, Pernambuco e Rio Grande do Norte have received at least two conferences, and the interest and search for lectures is still on the rise. The consequence of these conferences is that in all the churches and institutions that hosted Arminian conferences, its respective pastors, deans, professors, teachers and laymen have taken a stand in favor of Arminianism and started labeling themselves as Arminians. Thus, they are seeking to get material and information about Arminian heritage, what creates a huge potential when it comes to publishing of books and other educational material aimed at teaching and shaping of Arminianism in Brazil, what creates an enormous potential when it comes to the publication of books and other Arminian-related material.

Concisely, the history of the interest in Arminianism in Brazil can be summed up in the following stages, 1) creation of the website *arminianismo.com* with its first developments and ramifications; 2) beginning of some systematization in publication of Arminian books, having *Arminian Theology – Myths and Realities* by Roger Olson as its starting point and 3) Arminian conferences throughout the country since 2014 and Jerry Walls' visit as the first great Arminian scholar to speak in Brazil, being the forerunner of many other Arminian scholars that the country expects to receive.

The interest of Brazilians in Arminianism is great, but it is still in its first stages, for the field is fertile and needs and lacks many resources. In Brazil, up to now, there is no theological school, seminary, college or institution devoted exclusively to the preservation and dissemination of Arminius' thought and the thought of other later Arminians (Remonstrants). It is hoped that Brazil might be able to bring other foreign scholars who might help in the promulgation and strengthening of this recent revival in the interest in Arminian theology. It is also hoped that this interchange might help in the establishment of a confessedly Arminian protestant college, as well as a graduation course aimed at promoting Wesleyan-Arminian studies. Besides all that, there is also a growing expectation that the Assembly of God leaders will soon write a document or confession of faith in which the church will clearly affirm its positioning as an Arminian denomination. Many Brazilian Arminians expect that schools, institutions, seminaries, colleges and universities start partnerships with foreign organizations that have more time and experience in the preservation and promotion of Arminianism so that Brazil might benefit and grow in this sense.

## **Wellington Mariano**

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