

## Eternal Security ~ Part 14

### Brief Bio-Sketch of Jacobus Arminius <sup>1</sup> (1559 ~ 1609)

In my last post, we concluded our initial exploration of Calvinistic Theology. In this post, we now turn to explore Arminius' influence on the Reformation and society in the sixteenth century and beyond.

As was true with Calvin, Arminius was a product of the Protestant Reformation albeit born fifty years after Calvin. He was a Dutch theologian and founder of an anti-Calvinist Reformed theology.

Arminius was born in 1559 in the Netherlands during the Spanish occupation. His father, an armorer or smith, died around the time of the boy's birth, so Arminius was educated under the direction and at the expense of family friends who recognized his abilities as a student. He had just entered Marburg University (Germany) when news came of the infamous Oudewater massacre by the Spanish. Arminius returned home to learn that his mother and several of his brothers and sisters had been among the victims.

When the new University of Leiden opened nearby in 1576, Arminius was the twelfth student enrolled. That seems to have been the first public recording of his Latinized name (Jacobus Arminius; he had been born Jacob Harmenszoon). At Leiden he adopted the controversial theology of the French scholar Peter Ramus (1515-1572), and later went on to study at the Geneva Academy (1582), which was then headed by Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor. Because Arminius's defense of Ramus angered the Genevan authorities, he left briefly for Basel (1583). There he was offered a doctorate but declined, convinced he would not bring honor to the title.

After returning to Geneva, Arminius must have been more prudent, for in 1585 Beza wrote to the Amsterdam city rulers (who were sponsoring the young man's education), commending his ability and diligence highly and encouraging a continuance of their "*kindness and liberality.*" Perhaps significantly, Beza made no mention of Arminius's theology. After a short visit to Italy, Arminius returned home, was ordained, and in 1588 became one of the ministers of Amsterdam. His 1590 marriage to a merchant's daughter gave him influential links.

From the outset Arminius's sermons on Romans 7 drew the fire of "*high*" Calvinists who disliked his views on grace and predestination. High Calvinists held that although God's saving grace is completely unmerited, he extends it only to those whom he predestines to salvation. Arminius disagreed. In 1592 a colleague formally accused him of Pelagianism (an emphasis on free will, among other things, that took form in the fifth century), over-dependence on the early church fathers, deviation from the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism (two early Calvinist standards), and erroneous views on predestination. When challenged, however, his critics proved reluctant to substantiate the charges ~ and the city authorities were on his side. The question of predestination was not systematically raised until Arminius became professor of theology at Leiden (1603-1609), where he spent the last six years of his life in controversy.

In a 1606 address "*On Reconciling Religious Dissensions among Christians,*" Arminius argued that such dissension damages people intellectually and emotionally and creates doubt about religion that leads to despair, atheism, and Epicureanism (hedonistic withdrawal from responsibility). He proposed as remedy the calling of a national synod, "*an orderly and free convention of the parties that differ from each other.*" Further, Arminius believed that the natural arbiter between feuding churchmen was the "*godly magistrate,*" a view called Erastianism. The dispute with Arminius, led by Franciscus Gomarus at Leiden, centered around the

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<sup>1</sup> As was the case with John Calvin, these excerpts are from "*Who's Who in Christian History*" edited by J. D. Douglas and Philip W. Comfort.

Calvinist interpretation of the divine decree about election and reprobation. When a synod finally met at Dort (1618) to resolve the dispute, Arminius had been dead nine years.

In his attempt to give the human will a more active role in salvation than orthodox Calvinism conceded, Arminius came to teach a "*conditional election*" in which a person's free will might or might not affect the divine offer of salvation. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish between Arminius's teaching and what later became known as Arminianism, which was more liberal in its view of free will and of related doctrines than was its founder. Arminius's views were never systematically worked out until the year after his death, when his followers issued a declaration called the Remonstrance (1610), which dissented in several points from orthodox Calvinism. It held, among other things, that God's predestination was conditioned by human choice, that the Gospel could be freely accepted or rejected, and that a person who had become a Christian could "*fall from grace*" or lose salvation.

A mild-tempered man, Arminius nonetheless spoke his mind in controversy and characteristically defended his position from Scripture. His friend Peter Bertius paid tribute to the oft-misunderstood scholar when he declared at his funeral that those who truly knew Arminius could not sufficiently esteem him.

In my next post, we will tackle the actual tenets of **Arminian Theology**.