ARMINIANISM

Prayer
Scripture: Romans 8:28-30
Hymn: 664 "We Gather Together"

After the assassination in 1584, by a Catholic, of the governor of the seven Northern Protestant provinces of the Netherlands, William of Orange, who had led the battle for independence and freedom against Catholic Spain, William's good friend, Oldenbarneveldt, secured the choice of Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange, the second son of William, as governor (stadtholder) of the seven provinces. Under the guidance of the elder statesman, Oldenbarneveldt, Maurice soon proved himself an able military commander. Oldenbarneveldt, as representative of the rich merchant class of Holland, the wealthiest and most powerful of the seven provinces, soon became the leader of the Estates General, the assembly of the representatives of the seven provinces. He became the recognized leader in the civil government and in foreign diplomacy while Maurice commanded both army and navy. Maurice, in 1591, captured from the Spanish Zutphen, Deventer and Nimeguen. He took Gertruydenberg in 1593 and the province of Groningen in 1594. He defeated the Spanish at Turnhout in 1597 and at Nieupoort in 1600. He lost Ostend to the Spanish in 1604. The stalemate in the Netherlands and Spain's occupation on so many fronts led to the twelve year truce in 1609.

As danger from Spain decreased the union of the provinces began to be threatened. Each of the provinces was very jealous of its own rights, privileges and traditions. When the union was formed each province was guaranteed the right of control over the church in that province. Calvinism in the Netherlands differed from that in France or Scotland in organization. It was Presbyterian with the local church organization and the district or province. But with the supremacy of the Province there could be no national assembly with power over all the churches. Oldenbarneveldt favored the provincial control of the church. Maurice came to favor a state controlled church. Foreign governments tended to see Maurice as Prince of the United Provinces because the absolute monarch tended to be the pattern of the day. Oldenbarneveldt feared the idea of an absolute monarch. He suspected that Maurice wanted to become absolute monarch. Maurice's victories had made him a popular hero.

THE SPIRIT OF TOLERANCE IN THE UNITED PROVINCES

Oldenbarneveldt and Maurice continued the policy of toleration urged by William of Orange. Lutherans and Anabaptists were allowed freedom to continue. Catholics were tolerated but could not have public worship nor could they hold office. The Dutch manufacturers and shippers quickly learned that if they persecuted their Anabaptist workers, the Anabaptists migrated. Tolerance made for prosperity.
The plea of Erasmus for peace and tolerance exercised great influence. Renaissance humanism was a strong minority and with the coming of peace enjoyed a revival. The United Provinces became one of the most enlightened and prosperous countries in Europe.

In the late 1500's and early 1600's Calvinism was moving into its scholastic period—a period when it was occupied with trying to put together a perfect creed. There could be tolerance for those outside but no tolerance of variation within Calvinism itself.

One of the opponents of sharp creedal definitions was the Dutch thinker and scholar Dirck Coornhert (1522-1590). Born in Amsterdam, he was the youngest son of a cloth merchant. He received a good education in Amsterdam and travelled and studied in Spain and Portugal. His father disinherited him for marrying beneath his station. He settled in Haarlem where he became a skilled engraver of copper. He published Dutch translations of a number of the Latin classics, including Cicero, Seneca and Boetius. He began a Dutch translation of the New Testament, following the Latin of Erasmus. He threw himself into the struggle against Spanish rule and religious intolerance, supporting liberty both in prose and poetry. He served as secretary to his city (1562) and to the burgomasters (1564). He was an ardent supporter of William of Orange, drawing up for him the manifesto published in 1566. The Spanish imprisoned him at The Hague (1568) but he escaped. He developed a strong aversion to military violence, to religious intolerance, and to the capital punishment of heretics. He rejected the idea of a visible church, whether Catholic or Calvinist, urging interior piety and the inward rule of the Holy Spirit. In 1562 John Calvin published against his plea for tolerance a strong blast entitled Response à un certain Holandais lequel sous Ombre de faire les Chrêtiens tout spirituels, leur permet de polluer leur Corps en toutes Idolatries. Coornheert maintained the sufficiency of the Bible and the Apostles' Creed and advocated tolerance for all. He opposed Calvinist creed making, criticizing the Heidelberg Catechism. He defended humanistic learning against the Calvinists. One of Arminius's early assignments as a young preacher in Amsterdam was to refute Coornheert, only to be won over by his arguments. Arminius became the arch foe of strict credal Calvinism in the Netherlands.

JACOBUS ARMINIUS (1559/60-1609)

Jacobus Arminius was born in Oudewater, a town on the river IJssel about twelve miles toward Rotterdam from Utrecht. His father was Harmen Jacobsz, an armor maker. The family name was Harmenszoon, or Herman's son. Jacobus Latinized his name to Jacobus Arminius, Armenius being the name of a first-century German chieftain who resisted the Romans.

Arminius' father died when he was a small child. The widowed mother had a hard time providing for Arminius and
several brothers and sisters. A clergyman, Aemilius, who conducted a Latin school in Utrecht admitted Arminius to his school. He received a good foundation in Latin and Greek. After the death of Aemilius in 1574/75, Arminius attracted the attention of Rudolphus Snellius, a linguist and mathematician from the University of Marburg, who visited his old home in the Netherlands. In 1775 he took Arminius back with him to enroll him in the University of Marburg. When he learned before the year was out that the Spanish had taken Oudewater and massacred the citizens he hurried home to find that his mother, sisters and brothers had all been killed. Arminius found refuge in the home of Peter Bertius, a minister of the Reformed Church in Rotterdam. Bertius enrolled Arminius and his own son in the new Reformed University in Leyden in 1576. Arminius was a student of divinity. He studied Latin, Greek, Hebrew and theology. One of his most controversial teachers was Petrus Ramus in logic. Arminius so distinguished himself in his studies that he attracted the attention of the Merchant Guild of Amsterdam. Recognizing him as a potential minister and leader of the Reformed Church, the Guild sent him to Geneva in 1581, when he was twenty-one or twenty-two years old, to study in the Academy under Beza, the successor of Calvin. Arminius was greatly attracted to Beza but he soon clashed with some of the professors and fellow students over the logic Ramus. He transferred to the University of Basel in 1583 where he spent a year. He made such a good impression that the university offered to confer on him the doctor's degree but he refused, saying he was too young. He returned to Geneva in 1584 and stayed until 1586. He formed a lasting friendship with a fellow student, Johan Wtenbogaert. At the time of Arminius' stay in Geneva Beza had moved beyond Calvin to a rigid Calvinism that made Predestination the center of the system. Beza considered he was following the logic of Calvin to its logical conclusion. Beza taught that the Divine decree to salvation was antecedent to the Fall. Sin was ordained as a means to an end. "What is first in the Divine intention is last in the Divine execution." The primal purpose was the decree to save. The Fall was decreed as a consequence of a decreed salvation. Rigorous Calvinist divines followed Beza and spread his doctrine of Predestination throughout the Reformed Church. It became popular in the Dutch church where it was known as Superlapsarianism. It was widespread in Amsterdam when Arminius returned.

After completing his studies in Geneva Arminius and a law student, Adrian Junius, made a trip to Italy. They listened to the lectures of Giacomo Zabarella on philosophy at Padua. They went on to Rome where they saw the pope at a distance. Later his enemies would charge that the trip to Rome was apostasy from the church to worship the Antichrist by kissing his toe.

Arminius returned to Amsterdam in the fall of 1587. On October 5 he appeared before the Classis of Amsterdam to be examined as a candidate for the ministry. The Classis had received letters of recommendation from Beza and other professors and gave him a favorable report. He appeared before the
Consistory of Amsterdam on November 12. On February 7, 1588, he preached a trial sermon in the Old Church and was well received. On Saturday evening, August 27, 1588, he was ordained in the Old Church. Both church and state had given approval. Arminius threw himself into the work of the ministry with great zeal and devotion and quickly gained the reputation of being a good pastor. He became famous for his sermons and the originality of his expositions of Scripture. He found time to court the daughter, Lijsbet, of Laurens Jacobsz, one of the leading merchants of Amsterdam, and a member of a family of wealth and prestige. They were married in September 1590.

Dirck Coornhert had become the strong critic of the Superlapsarian doctrine of Predestination. He was the leader of an Infralapsarian party. Both parties were Calvinist and believed in Predestination. The Debate was over the order of divine decrees. The Superlapsarians believed God decreed election and reprobation, and then permitted the fall as a means of carrying out his decrees. The Infralapsarians held that God by his foreknowledge foresaw and permitted the fall, and then decreed election as the method of saving some.

The Superlapsarian leaders in 1589 requested Arminius as a distinguished pupil of Beza to examine and refute the arguments of Coornhert and the Infralapsarians. In the course of preparing his refutation Arminius became convinced that the Infralapsarians were right. Further study convinced him that both parties were wrong. He found the whole doctrine of absolute Predestination unacceptable. The doctrine of absolute decrees made God the author of sin. Neither Supralapsarianism nor Infralapsarianism could be harmonized with the justice of God. Both limited the grace of God in a manner unworthy of His nature. Both destroyed the free will of man. The doctrine of Predestination gave those who believed themselves elect a false security that had no basis in ethics. It left multitudes with no hope believing there was no salvation intended or provided for them in Christ.

At a time when there was mounting pressure in the United Provinces for a sound and unshakable creed that would enable the Reformed Church to present a solid front, Arminius began to question the place of Confessions and Catechisms. He began to preach that all formal statements should be checked against the Scriptures since the Bible was the only ground upon which Christian faith could be based. He wanted a free church based on the Scriptures. The state was obligated to maintain an opportunity for freedom of Conscience. Controversy over the authority of creeds and the relation of church and state mounted. Arminius gave a series of expositions of the Epistle of Romans. When he asserted that when Paul said he was carnal and under sin he was not a believer and that the believer is enabled to resist sin by the power of the Spirit, charges began to circulate that he was Pelagian. He defended himself quoting the Fathers and more recent theologians. Called before an official body of the church he was finally cleared of the charges against him but hard liners
were still suspicious of him.

In 1602 plague struck the Netherlands. Arminius as a faithful pastor ignored personal danger, ministering to the sick. Franciscus Junius, the senior professor of theology in the University of Leyden died in the plague. Arminius was proposed as his successor. He had corresponded with Junius on predestination. One of Junius' students had secretly copied some of the letters and circulated them. Arminius was accused of heresy. One of the bitterest foes of his appointment was Franciscus Gomarus, professor of exegesis and dogmatics at the University. He was a rigid Calvinist and champion of Supralapsarianism, teaching that before God created the world he had decreed who should be saved and who should be damned. He powerfully attacked the Infralapsarian idea that the decree of election came after the fall of Adam. In a long discussion with Gomarus, Arminius finally persuaded him he was a good Calvinist and that they agreed on the main points, one of which was the absolute necessity of the grace of God. In 1603 the University of Leyden conferred a doctor's degree on Arminius and appointed him to a chair of theology. In his inaugural address he praised Gomarus for his learning and scholarship.

When he came to lecture on Predestination he defined it as the decree of the good pleasure of God in Christ, by which he resolved to justify believers on whom he had decreed to bestow faith. He made the believers the elect but put faith before election. He denied that grace was irresistible. He rejected Supralapsarianism. He denied predestination saying that Christ, not predestination, was the meritorious cause of salvation. God's love was twofold—a love of man and a love of righteousness. Man must avoid both Supralapsarianism and Pelagianism.

Gomarus replied with a series on Predestination strongly opposing Arminius, declaring that God saves some and damns others without any regard to righteousness or sin. He does it out of his own good pleasure to demonstrate the glory of his justice and his mercy.

Students and faculty lined up in the debate between the two professors. Soon the whole Dutch Reformed Church was involved in a bitter controversy. Families split over it. Arminius was often insulted as a heretic. The States General appointed a commission to arrange a National Synod to consider the question. In 1606 Arminius expressed a hope that the National Synod would be an opportunity for free and open discussion and not a court for a heresy trial. The controversy became so bitter that many expected civil war to break out.

Arminius was invited to appear before the States of Holland at The Hague on October 8, 1608. Arminius prepared and delivered his "Declaration of Sentiments." Gomarus wanted to appear to convict him of heresy. Arminius became ill before he could make his second appearance. He went to The Hague but was forced to return to Leyden, where he died on October 19, 1609.
THE REMONSTRANCE (1610)

Before his death Arminius had attracted very able supporters and defenders who continued to develop and systematize his views. They even went beyond Arminius in an attempt to carry his ideas to their logical conclusion. They strongly opposed the emphasis on minutaie of doctrine and made Christianity primarily a force for moral transformation. The leadership of the party was taken by Johan Wtenbogaert, the court preacher. Konrad Forstius, was proposed to succeed Arminius in the chair at Leyden. Gomarus resigned his professorship in 1611 rather than serve with Forstius. Episcopius (the assumed name of Simon Bischop) succeeded Gomarus as professor of theology and became the systematizer of Arminianism. Another defender and elaborator of the system was Limborch.

One of the most distinguished of the followers of Arminius was the great jurist, scholar, historian, statesman, poet, and theologian, Hugo Grotius. He was one of the most learned men of his time—"A man of all-embracing learning." His father had been burgomaster of Delft and curator of Leyden University. Hugo Grotius had been trained in theology by Junius and in science by Joseph Scaliger. At the age of fifteen he edited Martianus Capella's encyclopedia. He accompanied Oldenbarnevelt on his embassy to Henry IV of France. The king welcomed him as the "miracle of Holland." He took a law degree at Orléans. He became a distinguished advocate at The Hague. He was appointed historiographer of the States of Holland. He became a poet of repute and published two dramas. In 1604 he published his On the Law of Prize and Booty (De jure praedae), a defense of the seizing of a Portuguese vessel by the Dutch East India Company, for which he has been called "The Father of International Law." The Portuguese had tried to keep the Dutch out of the East Indies. Grotius maintained that the ocean was free to all nations.

Gomarus became preacher of the Reformed Church at Middelburg. He taught theology and Hebrew in the Illustre Schule. He became a professor at Saumur and then at Groningen. As leader of the Supralapsarians he urged the government to remove all Arminians from teaching positions.

Forty-six of the Arminian ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church drew up and presented to the States General of Holland a statement of their faith and a plea for moderation and peace in the church, called "The Remonstrance." From this the Arminian party gained the name "Remonstrants." They listed the five Calvinist articles and rejected them. The doctrines rejected were:

1. That God, before the fall and even before creation, by an unchangeable decree, predestined and foreordained some to eternal life and some to eternal damnation, without regard to righteousness or sin to show the glory of his righteousness and his mercy.

2. That God elected to save some from the consequences of the fall by his free grace without regard to their moral condition.
3. That Christ died only for the elect.

4. That the Holy Spirit works in the elect by irresistible grace.

5. That those who have received irresistible grace can never totally and finally lose it but are guided by grace to the end.

The Remonstrants then stated the five points of the Arminian position:

1. Conditional Predestination: Election and condemnation are based on God's foreknowledge.

2. Universal Atonement: Christ died for all men.

3. Saving Faith: Man in his fallen state is unable to attain saving faith unless he is regenerated and renewed by God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

4. Resistible Grace: Grace is not irresistible.

5. The Uncertainty of Perseverance: Grace is sufficient to preserve the faithful through all trials and temptations for life everlasting, but it has not yet been proved from the Scriptures that grace, once given, can never be lost.

As Arminianism continued to develop, the Arminians came to openly and clearly declare the possibility of apostasy.

Gomar and the Supralapsarians replied with a Counter-Remonstrance drawn up in less moderate terms. Bitter controversy followed that became involved in political intrigue.

THE SYNOD OF DORT (1618-1619)

The merchant classes, led by Oldenbarneveldt and Hugo Grotius, supported the Arminians and insisted that each province should decide the controversy within that province, championing "states rights." Maurice, supported by a majority of the clergy and the lower classes, supported Gomar and the strict Calvinists—they constituted the majority. Maurice and Gomar wanted a National Synod to settle the controversy. They were known as the national party.

Maurice and Oldenbarneveldt had become bitter enemies. Oldenbarneveldt had engineered the Twelve Year Truce of 1609 which was bitterly opposed by Maurice. He wanted to continue the war and crush the Spanish. Oldenbarneveldt felt that Maurice was selfishly seeking his own glory and putting it ahead of the good of the country. Maurice felt that Oldenbarneveldt was soft and compromising toward the Spanish. Oldenbarneveldt championed provincial sovereignty while Maurice urged the national sovereignty of the States General.
Maurice was intent on becoming an absolute sovereign.

Maurice accused Oldenbarnevelt and his states-rights party of planning to bring back the Spanish. By a coup d'état in July, 1618, Maurice used the army to seize power. All Remonstrants were removed from public office. Oldenbarnevelt, Hugo Grotius, and leading Remonstrants were arrested and imprisoned. The States General called a national synod.

The national synod met at Dort on November 13, 1618 and the sessions continued until May 29, 1619. The delegates from the United Provinces were all Gomarists. Remonstrants were excluded. The synod was composed of thirty-seven ministers, 19 lay elders and five university professors, including Gomarus; there were eighteen commissioners for the States-General. Invitations were sent to the Reformed Churches throughout Europe so that the synod was actually an international Calvinist synod. Twenty-six theologians came from Germany, Switzerland, and England—King James I sent representatives. Brandenburg declined to send delegates and Louis XIII prevented the French from attending. Arminianism was condemned and Calvinistic canons adopted. Episcopius and twelve Remonstrant leaders were summoned before the synod. They refused to recognize that their consciences were bound by the authority of the synod. They were refused an opportunity to criticize the Belgic Confession. Remonstrant theology was declared contrary to Scripture. They were declared heretical in theology and to be disturbers of their country and were banished from the United Provinces. The Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism were accepted as the doctrinal basis of Calvinism along with the canons adopted by the Synod. These canons were:

1. Predestination: Since all have sinned in Adam they lie under the curse and merit punishment. God in his infinite mercy has provided salvation through the gospel of Christ to those who believe. The gift of faith proceeds from God's eternal decree of election and reprobation. Election is unchangeable, absolute and unconditional.

The decree said nothing of Supralapsarianism or Infralapsarianism but the wording allowed a Supralapsarian interpretation.

2. Limited atonement: Christ died for the elect only.

3. Total depravity.

4. Irresistible grace.

5. Final perseverance of the saints.

Later English students created a mnemonic device "Tulip", to remember the five points: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the saints.
The synod called for a new translation of the Scriptures into Dutch, the formation of a Dutch catechism, and the establishment of a censorship of books. The Synod of Dort was the high-water mark of Calvinistic creed-making. It became the doctrinal basis of the Dutch Church. It was not as extreme as some individual Calvinists.

Immediately after the synod the Remonstrants were banished from the United Provinces. Hugo Grotius was condemned to life imprisonment. While the synod was in session a long drawn out trial of Oldenbarneveldt was conducted. He was denied legal council, access to any books, or the use of any written notes. He was condemned and was beheaded on May 13, 1619.

AFTER DORT

Maurice died in 1625 and his younger brother, Frederick Henry, was chosen governor of the Dutch Republic (1625-1647). The new governor continued the resistance to Spanish efforts to retake the United Provinces. Finally in 1648 Spain recognized the independence of the Netherlands. Under Frederick Henry the laws against the Remonstrants became dead letters and they were allowed to return. A measure of tolerance was granted them in 1630, but they were not given full recognition until 1795. In exile in 1619 they formed a "Remonstrance-Reformed Brotherhood" and Episcopius prepared a confession of faith. On their return to Holland they formed small and scattered Arminian churches and established a seminary in Amsterdam. Arminian exiles had settled in Germany, France, England and America. Wherever there was Calvinism Arminianism grew as an anti-Calvinistic protest, sometimes quite different from the original Arminianism. Always it stood for tolerance and free will, for scholarly Biblical exegesis, the supremacy of the conscience in moral and religious matters, for humanistic culture and rational philosophy, and universal grace.

As a measure of tolerance returned to the Netherlands Arminian refugees returned. As Holland prospered and became one of the richest and most prosperous countries in Europe, it also became the most tolerant of all the countries, and other persecuted groups found refuge—among them Socinians from Poland, Separatist Puritans from England, and Huguenots from France. Because both Socinianism and Arminianism were revolts against Calvinism, Calvinists tended to lump Socinians and Arminians together as hated heretics. Arminians had no use for the anti-trinitarianism of the Socinians. Both groups put great emphasis on the free will of man, both attacked predestination, election, and limited atonement. Both emphasized right reason and reasonable ethics both on the part of God and man. Calvinists accused both of rationalism in their exegesis of Scripture and in their theology.

HUGO GROTIIUS' THEORY OF THE ATONEMENT

With the help of his wife, Hugo Grotius escaped from prison
in a chest in 1621. He made his way through Belgium to Paris. Louis XIII granted him a pension. He refused to join the Roman Catholic Church. In 1623 he published a great work on Christian evidences, "On the Truth of the Christian Religion." In 1625 he published his "On the Law of War and Peace (De jure belli ac pacis) that added to his fame as the father of international law. Later he published an Apology for the states of Holland, An Introduction to the Jurisprudence of Holland, and a widely used commentary on Old and New Testaments, Annotations on the New and the Old Testament.

His greatest contribution to Arminian theology was his Governmental Theory of the Atonement that was published in 1617 before the Synod of Dort. He challenged the Satisfaction Theory of Anselm and the Moral Influence Theory of Peter Abelard that had been revived by the Socinians. Christ did not die to pay a debt. God is a great moral ruler. Sin is an offense to his Law. God can pardon as he chooses but must not bring his law into contempt. Christ's death was a tribute to the sanctity of the divine government. It is a tribute to offended law. It has been described as the most theatrical of all the theories of the atonement. Nineteenth century revivalists found it too impersonal. Christ did not die to show the sanctity of the law, he died for "me."