

Arminianism is God-centered Theology

Roger E. Olson

www.rogereolson.com

One of the most common criticisms aimed at Arminianism by its opponents is that it is “man-centered theology.” (I will occasionally use the gender-exclusive phrase because it is used so often by Arminianism’s critics. It means, of course, “humanity-centered.”) One Reformed critic of Arminianism who frequently levels this charge is Michael Horton, professor of theology at Westminster Theological Seminary (Escondido campus) and editor of *Modern Reformation* magazine. I have engaged Horton in protracted conversations about classical Arminianism and his and other Reformed critics’ stereotypes of it, but to date he still says it is “man-centered.” Almost every article in the infamous May/June, 1992 special issue of *Modern Reformation* on Arminianism repeats this caricature of it. Horton’s is no exception. In his article “Evangelical Arminians,” where he says “an evangelical cannot be an Arminian any more than an evangelical can be a Roman Catholic” (p. 18) the Westminster theologian and magazine editor also calls Arminianism “a human-centered message of human potential and relative divine impotence.” (p. 16)

Horton is hardly the only critic who has made this accusation against Arminianism. Several authors of articles in the “Arminianism” issue of *Modern Reformation* do the same thing. For example, Kim Riddlebarger, following B. B. Warfield, claims that human freedom is the central premise of Arminianism, its “first principle” that governs everything else. (p. 23) That is simply another way of saying it is “man-centered.” Lutheran theologian Rick Ritchie lays the same charge against Arminianism in the same issue of *Modern Reformation*. (p. 12) In the same issue theologian Alan Maben quotes Charles Spurgeon as saying that “Arminianism [is] a natural, God-rejecting, self-exalting religion and heresy” and man is the principle figure in its landscape. (p. 21)

Another evangelical theologian who accuses Arminianism of being man-centered is the late James Montgomery Boice, one of my own seminary professors. In his book *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* (Crossway, 2001) the late pastor of Tenth Presbyterian

Church of Philadelphia wrote that under the influence of Arminianism, contemporary evangelical Christianity is “focused on ourselves and...in love with their own supposed spiritual abilities.” (p. 168) According to him, Arminians cannot give glory to God alone and must reserve some glory for themselves because they believe the human will plays a role in salvation. He concludes “A person who thinks along these lines does not understand the utterly pervasive and thoroughly enslaving nature of human sin.” (p. 167)

Reformed theologian Sung Wook Chung of Korea, trained in theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, writes that Arminianism “exalts the autonomous power and sovereign will of human beings by denying God’s absolute sovereignty and his free will. Arminianism also regards man as the center of the universe and the purpose of all things.” (“The Arminian Captivity of the Modern Evangelical Church,” *Life Under the Big Top*, Jan/Feb 1995, pp. 2-3) Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president Al Mohler writes in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* about the “human-centered focus of the Arminian tradition.” (p. 34) In the same volume Gary Johnson calls Arminianism a “man-centered faith” and says that “When theology becomes anthropology, it becomes simply a form of worldliness.” (p. 63)

Perhaps the most sophisticated way of saying the same thing is provided by scholar of Protestant orthodoxy Richard Mueller in his volume on Arminius entitled *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Baker, 1991). Mueller writes that “Arminius’ thought evinces...a greater trust in nature and in the natural powers of man...than the theology of his Reformed contemporaries.” (p. 233) He goes on to accuse Arminius of confusing nature and grace and of placing creation at the center of theology to the neglect of redemption. He writes that Arminius tended “to understand creation as manifesting the ultimate purpose of God.” (p. 233) A close reading of Mueller’s interpretation of Arminius’ theology will reveal that he is charging it with being anthropocentric or man-centered rather than God-centered and focused on grace. A close reading of Arminius, on the other hand, will reveal how wrong this assessment is.

What do these and other critics mean when they accuse Arminianism of being “man-centered” or “human-centered?” And what would it mean for a theology to be God-centered as they claim theirs is? Especially in today’s Calvinist resurgence of “young, restless, Reformed” Christians it’s important to clarify these terms as one often hears it said, as a mantra, that non-Calvinist theologies are man-centered whereas Reformed theology is God-centered. Their main

guru John Piper frequently talks about the “God-centeredness of God” and refers everything in creation and redemption to God’s glory as the chief end. His implication, occasionally stated, is that Arminianism falls short of this high view of God. Too often without any consideration of what these appellations mean, today’s new Calvinists toss them around as clichés and shibboleths.

It seems that when critics of Arminianism accuse it of being man-centered they mean primarily three things. First, it focuses too much on human goodness and ability especially in the realm of redemption. That is, it does not take seriously enough the depravity of humanity and it prizes the human contribution to salvation too much. Another way of putting that is that Arminian theology does not give God all the glory for salvation. Second, they mean that Arminianism limits God by suggesting that God’s will can be thwarted by human decisions and actions. In other words, God’s sovereignty and power are not taken sufficiently seriously. Third, they mean that Arminianism places too much emphasis on human fulfillment and happiness to the neglect of God’s purpose which is to glorify himself in all things. Another way of expressing this is that Arminianism allegedly has a sentimental notion of God and humanity in which God’s chief end is to make people happy and fulfilled.

Certainly there is some truth in these criticisms, but their target is wrong when aimed at classical Arminian theology. Unfortunately, all too seldom do the critics name any Arminian theologians or quote from Arminius himself to support these accusations. When they say “Arminianism” they seem to mean popular folk religion which is, admittedly, by-and-large semi-Pelagian. Some, most notably Horton, name 19th century revivalist Charles Finney as the culprit in dragging American Christianity down into human-centered spirituality. Whether Finney is a good example of an Arminian is highly debatable. I agree with Horton and others that too much popular Christianity in America, including much that goes under the label “evangelical,” is human-centered. I disagree with them, however, about classical Arminianism about which I suspect most of them know very little.

What would count as truly God-centered theology to these Reformed critics of Arminianism? First, human depravity must be emphasized as much as possible so that humans are not capable, even with supernatural, divine assistance, of cooperating with God’s grace in salvation. In other words, grace must be irresistible. Another way of saying that is that God

must overwhelm elect sinners and compel them to accept his mercy without any cooperation, even non-resistance, on their parts. This is part and parcel of high Calvinism, otherwise known as five-point Calvinism. According to Boice and others theology is only God-centered if human decision plays no role whatsoever in salvation. The downside of this, of course, is that God's selection of some to salvation must be purely arbitrary and God must be depicted as actually willing the damnation of some significant portion of humanity that he could save because salvation in this scheme is absolutely unconditional. In other words, Calvinism may be God-centered, but the God at the center is morally ambiguous and unworthy of worship.

Second, apparently, for the Reformed critics of Arminianism, God-centered theology must view God as the all-determining reality including the one who ordains, designs, governs and controls sin and evil which are then imported into God's plan, purpose and will. God's perfect will is always being done, even when it paradoxically grieves him to see it (as John Piper likes to affirm). The only view of God's sovereignty that will satisfy these Reformed critics of Arminianism is meticulous providence in which God plans everything and renders it all certain down to the minutest decisions of creatures but most notably including the fall of humanity and all its consequences including the eternal suffering of sinners in hell. The downside of this, of course, is that the God at the center is, once again, morally ambiguous at best and a monster at worst. Theologian David Bentley Hart expresses it thus: One should consider the price of this God-centeredness:

It requires us to believe in and love a God whose good ends will be realized not only in spite of—but entirely by way of—every cruelty, every fortuitous misery, every catastrophe, every betrayal, every sin the world has ever known; it requires us to believe in the eternal spiritual necessity of a child dying an agonizing death from diphtheria, of a young mother ravaged by cancer, of tens of thousands of Asians swallowed in an instant by the sea, of millions murdered in death camps and gulags and forced famines (and so on). It is a strange thing indeed to seek [God-centered theology]...at the cost of a God rendered morally loathsome. (*The Doors of the Sea* [Eerdmans, 2005], p. 99)

Third, to satisfy Arminianism's Reformed critics, God-centeredness requires that human beings are mere pawns in God's great scheme to glorify himself; their happiness and fulfillment cannot be mentioned as having any value for God. But this means, then, that one can hardly

mention God's love for all people. One must first say with John Piper and others that God loves people because he loves himself and that Christ died for God more than for sinners. The down side of this is that the Bible talks much about God's love for people—John 3:16 and numerous similar verses—and explicitly says that Christ died *for sinners* (Romans 5:8). While not canonical, early church father Ireneaus's saying that "The glory of God is man fully alive" ought to be considered to have some validity. Surely it is possible to have a God-centered theology without implying that people created in the image and likeness of God and loved by God so much that he sent his Son to die for them are of no value to God. In fact, some Reformed theologians such as John Piper ironically do violate the third principle of God-centeredness as it is required by some critics of Arminianism. His so-called "Christian hedonism" says that human happiness and fulfillment *are* important to theology even if not to God. His mantra is "God is *most* glorified in us when we are *most* satisfied in him." In spite of this saying and his Christian hedonism, overall and in general Piper follows the typical Calvinist line of thinking that human happiness and fulfillment should be of little or no value compared with God's glory. Another down side of this, besides the Bible's emphasis on God's love and care for people, is the picture of God it delivers. In this theology, the God at the center is the ultimate narcissist, the greatest egoist who finds glory in displaying his naked power even to the point of consigning millions to hell just to manifest his attribute of justice.

The point of all this is simply this: It accomplishes very little to construct a God-centered theology if the God at its center is sheer, naked power of ambiguous moral character. "Glory" is an ambiguous term. When divorced from virtue it is unworthy of devotion. Many of the monarchs of history have been "glorious" while at the same time being blood-thirsty and cruel. True glory, the best glory, the right glory worthy of worship and honor and devotion necessarily includes goodness. Power without goodness is not truly glorious even if it is called that. What makes someone or something worthy of veneration is not sheer might but goodness. Who is more worthy of imitation and even veneration, Mother Teresa or Adolf Hitler? The latter conquered most of Europe. The former had little power outside of her example. And yet, most people would say that Mother Teresa was more "glorious" than Adolf Hitler. God is glorious because he is *both* great *and* good and his goodness, like his greatness, must have some resonance with our best and highest notions of goodness or else it is meaningless.

All that is to say that Arminianism's critics are the proverbial people casting stones while living in glass houses. They talk endlessly about God's glory and about God-centeredness while sucking the goodness out of God and thus divesting him of real glory. Their theology may be God-centered but the God at its center is unworthy of being the center. Better a man-centered theology than one that revolves around a being hardly distinguishable from the devil.

In spite of objections to the contrary, I will argue that classical Arminian theology is just as God-centered as Calvinism if not more so. The God at its center, whose glory, to the contrary of critics' claims, is the chief end or purpose of everything is not morally ambiguous which is the main point of Arminianism. Somehow Arminian theology has been stuck with the bad reputation of believing most strongly in human freedom. That has never been true. Real Arminianism has always believed in human freedom for one main reason—to protect the goodness of God and thus God's reputation in a world filled with evil. There is only one reason classical Arminian theology emphasizes free will, but it has two sides. First, to protect and defend God's goodness; second to make clear human responsibility for sin and evil. It has nothing whatever to do with any humanistic desire for creaturely autonomy or credit for salvation. It has never been about boasting except in the goodness of the God who creates, rules and saves.

Why did Arminius reject and why do classical Arminians reject Calvinism? Certainly not because it is God-centered. As I will demonstrate, Arminius' own theology was fully God-centered in every sense. Arminius and his followers rejected Calvinism because, as Arminius himself put it, it is "repugnant to the nature of God." ("Declaration of Sentiments," *Works I*, p. 623) How so? According to Arminius (and all classical Arminians agree) Calvinism implies that "*God really sins*. Because, (according to this doctrine,) he moves to sin by an act that is unavoidable, and according to his own purpose and primary intention, without having received any previous inducement to such an act from any preceding sin or demerit in man." Also, "From the same position we might also infer, *that God is the only sinner*. For man, who is impelled by an irresistible force to commit sin, (that is, to perpetrate some deed that has been prohibited,) cannot be said to sin himself." Finally, "As a legitimate consequence it also follows, *that sin is not sin*, since whatever that be which God does, it neither can be sin, nor ought any of his acts to receive that appellation." ("Sentiments," p. 630)

Anyone who has read John Wesley's sermons "On Free Grace" and "Predestination Calmly Considered" knows very well that he rejects Calvinism for the same reason given by Arminius before him. In the former sermon he described double predestination (which he rightly argued is necessarily implied by classical Calvinist unconditional election) as "Such a blasphemy...as one would think might make the ears of a Christian tingle." (*The Works of John Wesley 3:III*, p. 555) According to him, that doctrine "destroys all [God's] attributes as once" and "represents the most Holy God as worse than the devil, as both more false, more cruel, and more unjust." (*Ibid.*, p. 555) In "Predestination Calmly Considered" Wesley rejected Calvinism for one reason only: not because it denied the free will of man but because it "overthrows the justice of God." He preached as if to a listening Calvinist "you suppose him [viz., God] to send them [viz., the reprobate] into eternal fire, for not escaping from sin! That is, in plain terms, for not having that grace which God had decreed they should never have! O strange justice! What a picture do you draw of the Judge of all the earth!" (*The Works of John Wesley, Vol. X: Letters, Essays, Dialogs and Addresses* [Zondervan, n.d.], p. 221) Anyone who has read later classical Arminians knows that their main reason for rejecting Calvinism is the same: it impugns the goodness of God and sullies God's reputation. It has nothing at all to do with valuing human free will in and for itself and I challenge critics to demonstrate otherwise.

To explain and defend Arminianism's God-centeredness let's begin with the first issue mentioned above as a reason critics give for claiming that Arminian theology is man-centered: the human condition and participation in salvation. Classical Arminian theology, defined by Arminius's own thought and by the thoughts of his faithful followers, has always emphasized human depravity just as strongly as Calvinism and it has always given all the credit for salvation to God alone. Anyone who has read Arminius for himself or herself cannot dispute this. The editor of *The Works of James Arminius* (Baker, 1996 [originally published in England 1828]) says rightly that "Were any modern Arminian to avow the sentiments which Arminius himself has here maintained, he would be instantly called a Calvinist!" (Editor's notes to "Twenty-five Public Disputations," *Works II*, p. 189) In that context Arminius wrote about the human condition "under the dominion of sin": "In this state, the Free Will of man towards the True Good is not only wounded, maimed, infirm, bent, and...weakened; but it is also...imprisoned, destroyed, and lost: And its powers are not only debilitated and useless unless they be assisted by grace, but it has no powers whatever except such as are excited by Divine grace." (*Ibid.*, p. 192)

Lest anyone misunderstand, he drives home his point saying of man that in the state of nature, due to the fall, he is “altogether dead in sin.” (*Ibid.*, p. 194) This is not the only place in his voluminous writings where Arminius describes the human condition apart from supernatural grace this way. In virtually every essay, oration and declaration he says the same and abundantly! There can be no doubt that Arminius believed in total depravity every bit as much as do Calvinists.

What about free will? What about the human contribution to salvation? Did not Arminius attribute some good to the human person that causes God to save him or her? I’ll allow Arminius to speak for himself on this matter also. Immediately after describing the divine cure for human depravity, which is what is commonly known as “prevenient grace” which awakens the person dead in sin to awareness of God’s mercy, Arminius says that even “the very first commencement of every good thing, so likewise the progress, continuance and confirmation, nay even the perseverance in good, are not from ourselves, but from God through the Holy Spirit.” (*Ibid.*, p. 195) This is not an isolated quote taken out of context. Everywhere Arminius constantly refers all good in man to God as its source and attributes every impulse and capacity for good to grace. I cannot resist offering one more example. In his “A Letter Addressed to Hippolytus A Collibus” Arminius speaks of grace and free will:

I confess that the mind of ... a natural and carnal man is obscure and dark, that his affections are corrupt and inordinate, that his will is stubborn and disobedient, and that the man himself is dead in sins. And I add to this, That teacher obtains my highest approbation who ascribes as much as possible to Divine Grace; provided he so pleads the cause of Grace as not to inflict an injury on the Justice of God, and not to take away *the free will to do that which is evil.* (*Works II*, pp. 700-701)

The context of this statement makes clear that Arminius’ concern for free will is to avoid doing injury to God’s goodness by making him the author of sin and evil. For him, human free will is always the cause of sin and evil and God is never their cause even indirectly. (Although, it should be noted that in his doctrine of providence Arminius affirms that a creature cannot do anything without God’s permission and even concurrence.) This is the only reason he affirms free will.

What about later Arminians such as the Remonstrants? Sometimes critics of Arminianism allege that the true meaning of Arminianism is to be found in the theology of the Remonstrants who were Arminius' followers after his death. Of course, that is like saying the true meaning of Calvinism is to be found in the theology of the Reformed scholastics after Calvin. The truth is that both "Arminianism" and "Calvinism" must be defined by both their namesakes and their most faithful followers. I argue that true, classical Arminian theology was always faithful to and consistent with Arminius' thought and vice versa. I have demonstrated that in *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (InterVarsity Press, 1996).

The normative expression of Remonstrant theology may be found in *The Arminian Confession of 1621* written by Simon Episcopius, founder of the Remonstrant Seminary in Holland. In complete harmony with Arminius, the *Confession* affirms that the fallen human person is completely incapable of saving faith and that he or she is totally dependent on grace for any and every good. In the article on the creation of the world, angels and men it says "whatever good [man] has, he owes all solidly to God and...he is obligated...to render and consecrate the same wholly to him." (*Confession* 5.6 as translated by Mark A. Ellis in *The Arminian Confession of 1621* [Wipf & Stock, 2005], p. 56) As for the human condition, the *Confession* says of grace that "without it we could neither shake off the miserable yoke of sin, nor do anything truly good in all religion, nor finally ever escape eternal death or any true punishment of sin. Much less could we at any time obtain eternal salvation without it or through ourselves." (*Ibid.*, pp. 68-69) There is nothing "man-centered" about this *Confession*. Later Remonstrants such as Philip Limborch, who fits Alan Sell's category of "Arminian of the head" as opposed to "Arminian of the heart," veered off toward a man-centered semi-Pelagianism. But most Arminians followed the path of Arminius and Episcopius and Wesley and the 19th century Methodist theologians such as Richard Watson who averred that even repentance is a gift of God. (*Theological Institutes* [Lane & Scott, 1851], p. 99)

Anyone who reads these classical Arminians with a hermeneutic of charity rather than a hermeneutic of suspicion and hostility cannot help but see their God-centeredness in emphasizing the absolute dependence of human persons on God's grace for everything good. All of them repeat this maxim frequently and attribute all of salvation from its beginning to end to God's supernatural grace. Of course, most Reformed critics will not be satisfied with this. They

will still say, as does Boice, that if the sinner, however enabled by prevenient grace, makes a free choice to accept God's mercy unto salvation that is man-centered rather than God-centered. All I can say to that is that it is ludicrous. The point Boice and other critics continually make is that in the Arminian system the saved person can boast because he or she did not resist God's grace and others did. All Arminian theologians from Arminius to Wesley to Wiley have pointed out that a person who receives a life-saving gift cannot boast if all he or she did was accept it. All the glory for such a gift goes to the giver and none to the receiver.

The second issue raised by critics of Arminianism has to do with God's alleged limitations and lack of sovereignty and power. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary president Al Mohler writes in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis* that "The Arminian God ultimately lacks omniscience, omnipotence, and transcendent sovereignty." (p. 34) I argue that this objection carries no weight at all. Anyone who reads Arminius or his faithful followers, classical Arminians, cannot come away with this impression. All emphasize the sovereignty of God over his creation including specific providence and all underscore God's power limited only by his goodness. What throws off Reformed (and perhaps other) critics is the underlying Arminian assumption of God's voluntary self-limitation in relation to humanity. However, that God limits himself by no means implies that he *is essentially limited*. According to Arminian theology God is sovereign over his sovereignty and his goodness conditions his power. Otherwise, he would be sheer, naked power without character. As I argued earlier, that would make him unworthy of worship.

I will begin as before with Arminius himself. What did he believe about God's sovereignty and power? First, he rightly pointed out that, although he did affirm God's absolute dominion over creation, "The declaration of *dominion* has no glory by itself, unless it has been justly used." ("Examination of the Theses of Dr. Franciscus Gomarus Respecting Predestination," *Works III*, p. 632) In his "Private Disputations" and "Public Disputations," Arminius went to great lengths to affirm and endorse what is called classical Christian theism with all the traditional attributes attached to it including omnipotence and sovereignty. A stronger statement of God's incommunicable attributes could not be found anywhere. As for sovereignty, Arminius confessed that "Satan and wicked men not only cannot accomplish, but,

indeed, cannot even commence anything except by God's permission." ("Examination of Dr. Perkins's Pamphlet on Predestination," *Works III*, p. 369)

Even some Arminians might find some of Arminius's statements about God's sovereignty perplexing if not troubling. He attributed every power to God and denied that any creature has the ability to accomplish anything, including evil, independently of God. To critics who accused him of limiting God and exalting human autonomy Arminians wrote:

I openly allow that God is the cause of all actions which are perpetrated by the creatures. But I merely require this, that that efficiency of God be so explained as that nothing whatever be derogated from the liberty of the creature, and that the guilt of sin itself be not transferred to God: that is, that it may be shown that God is indeed the *effector of the act*, but only the *permitter of the sin* itself; nay, that God is at the same time the effector and permitter of one and the same act. (*Ibid.*, p. 415)

This is an expression of Arminius's doctrine of divine concurrence in which the creature cannot act without God's permission and aid. God wills creaturely free will and therefore must reluctantly concur with creatures in their sinful acts because they cannot act independently of him. He does not, however, plan or propose or render certain any sin or evil.

To drive the point home further: In his "A Letter Addressed to Hippolytus A Collibus" Arminius went to great lengths to affirm divine sovereignty, power and providential control over creation. He speculates that he was accused of holding "corrupt opinions respecting the Providence of God" because he denied that "with respect to the decree of God, Adam necessarily sinned." (*Works II*, p. 698) In other words, he rejected the typical Calvinist view that God foreordained and rendered certain Adam's sin. However, he averred that, in spite of his rejection of the necessity of Adam's fall, he did teach a strong and high view of God's providence:

I most solicitously avoid two causes of offence, -- that God be not proposed as the author of sin, -- and that its liberty be not taken away from the human will: These are two points which if anyone knows how to avoid, he will think upon no act which I will not in that case most gladly allow to be ascribed to the Providence of God, provided a just regard be had to the divine pre-eminence. (*Ibid.*, pp. 697-698)

What is absolutely clear from the context is that his insistence that liberty be not taken away from the human will has only one motive—that God not be proposed as the author of sin. He had no vested interest in human autonomy or free will for its own sake. His God-centeredness revolved around two foci: God’s untarnished goodness and absolute creaturely dependence on God for everything good. These cannot be missed as they appear on almost every page of his writings.

What about the *Arminian Confession of 1621*, the normative statement of Remonstrant belief after Arminius? Did it fall into human-centeredness as critics claim? In its chapter “On the providence of God, or his preservation and government of things,” the *Confession* avers that “nothing happens anywhere in the entire world rashly or by chance, that is, God either not knowing, or ignoring, or idly observing it, much less looking on, still less altogether reluctantly even unwillingly and not even willing to permit it.” (p. 63) The practical conclusion of the doctrine of providence, the *Confession* affirms, is that the true believer “will always give thanks to God in prosperity, and in addition, in the future...freely and continuously place their greatest hope in God, their most faithful Father.” (*Ibid.*)

As for God’s omnipotence, the *Confession* says that God “is omnipotent, or of invincible and insuperable power, because he can do whatever he wills, even though all creatures be unwilling. Indeed he can always do more than he really wills, and therefore he can simply do whatever does not involve contradiction, that is, which are not necessarily and of themselves repugnant to the truth of certain things, nor to his own divine nature.” (*Ibid.*, p. 48) What more can anyone ask of a doctrine of omnipotence? Oh, yes...certain Reformed critics can and so seem to ask for *divine omnicausality*. The problem with that, of course, is that it entangles God in evil. Again, the God at the center of that system is not worthy of being central to a belief system that values virtue and goodness. The fact is, that Arminius’s and the Remonstrants’ doctrines of God’s sovereignty and power are as high and strong as possible short of making God the author of sin and evil.

What about later Arminians? Did they remain true to this high doctrine of God’s supremacy in and over all things? While affirming everything Arminius and the early Remonstrants taught about this doctrine, including God’s control over all things in creation, Richard Watson rightly cautioned that “the sovereignty of God is a Scriptural doctrine no one can

deny; but it does not follow that the notions which men please to form of it should be received as scriptural.” (Watson, p. 442) For example, he avers that God could have prevented the fall of Adam and all its evil consequences but regarded it as better to allow it. (p. 435) That God merely allowed it and did not foreordain or cause it is where Watson’s doctrine of providence parts ways with the typical Reformed view. However, he rejects any notion that God is in any way the author of sin as incompatible with God’s goodness. (p. 429) The very fact that he affirms that God *could have prevented* the fall points to his strong view of God’s omnipotence and sovereignty. Again, in Watson, we see a subtle but definite assumption of God’s voluntary self-limitation in order to keep the God who stands at the center of theology good and worthy of worship.

The upshot of all this so far is that classical Arminian theology *does not* have a man-centered emphasis. Arminius’s main concern was not to elevate humanity alongside or over God; no one can read him fairly and get that impression. His main concern was to elevate God’s goodness alongside or even over God’s power without in any way diminishing God’s power. The way he accomplished that was by means of the idea of voluntary divine self-limitation—something he everywhere assumes and hints at without explicitly expounding. Reformed theologian Richard Mueller has rightly discovered and brought this element of Arminius’s thought to light. He acknowledges the two equally important impulses in Arminius’s thought: God’s absolute right to exercise power and control and God’s free limitation of his power for the sake of the integrity of creation:

Both in the act of creation and in the establishment of covenant, God freely commits himself to the creature. God is not, in the first instance, in any way constrained to create, but does so only because of his own free inclination to communicate his goodness; nor is God in the second instance, constrained to offer man anything in return for obedience inasmuch as the act of creation implies a right and a power over the creature. Nonetheless, in both cases, the unconstrained performance of the act results in *the establishment of limits to the exercise of divine power*: granting the act of creation, God cannot reprobate absolutely and without a cause in the creature; granting the initiation of covenant, God cannot remove or obviate his promises. (Mueller, p. 243)

The point is that any and all limitations of God's power and sovereign control to dispose of his creatures as he wills is self-imposed either by his nature or by his covenant promises. This hardly amounts to a man-centered theology! In fact, one could rightly argue that certain Reformed doctrines of the necessity of creation, including redemption and damnation, for the full manifestation of God's attributes and the full display of God's glory amount to a creation-centered theology that robs God of his freedom and makes the world necessary for God.

The third charge laid against Arminianism that allegedly demonstrates its man-centeredness is its focus on human happiness and fulfillment to the detriment of God's glory. Some Reformed theologians claim that Arminianism's God is a weak, sentimental God who exists to serve human needs and wants and that in Arminian theology man is made glorious at the expense of God's glory. This is nothing more than vicious calumny that needs to be exposed as such. It may be true of a great deal of American folk religion, but it has nothing whatever to do with classical Arminian theology in which the chief end of all things is God's glory.

As always I will begin with Arminius himself. Anyone who reads his "Private Disputations," his "Public Disputations" or his "Orations" cannot deny that he makes God's glory the ultimate purpose of everything including creation, providence, salvation, the church and the consummation. In his "Private Disputations" Arminius stated clearly that God is the cause of all blessedness *and* that the "end" of this blessedness is twofold: "(1.) a demonstration of the glorious wisdom, goodness, justice, power, and likewise the universal perfection of God; and (2.) his glorification by the beatified." (*Works II*, p. 321) Lest anyone think that he makes God dependent on creation or creation necessary to God Arminius declares in his "Apology or Defence" that everything God does *ad extra* is absolutely free—even his self-glorification through creation and redemption: "God *freely* decreed to form the world, and did *freely* form it: And, in this sense, *all things are done contingently in respect to the Divine decree*; because no necessity exists why the decree of God should be appointed, since it proceeds from his own pure and free...Will." (*Works I*, p. 758) In other words, *only* Arminius' belief in libertarian freedom both in God and creatures, protects the absolute contingency and therefore gratuitousness of creation. Which is more glorious? A God who creates to glorify himself absolutely freely or one who, like Jonathan Edwards' God, cannot do otherwise than he does?

It's difficult to know from which context to quote Arminius' numerous affirmations of the glory of God as the chief end of all his works. Here, however, is a typical example from his "Private Disputations" where he covers all the loci of theology and almost always concludes that everything in heaven and earth is for the glory of God. This one has to do with sanctification although his words are nearly identical with regard to justification and everything else God does. Sanctification, Arminius declares, "is a gracious act of God...[that] man may live the life of God, to the praise of the righteousness and of the glorious grace of God...." (*Works II*, p. 408) Then, also, "The End [purpose] is, that a believing man, being consecrated to God as a Priest and King, should serve Him in newness of life, to the glory of his divine name...." (*Ibid.*, p. 409) Similarly, the "end" of the church is "the glory of God" (*Ibid.*, p. 412) and the "end" of the sacraments is "the glory of God" (*Ibid.*, p. 436) and "The principle End [of worship] is, the glory of God and Christ...." (*Ibid.*, p. 447) In his "Public Disputations" Arminius repeats the pattern of describing everything blessed and good as God's work and its end or purpose as the glory of God.

Earlier I said that Arminius *almost* always concludes that everything in heaven and earth is for the glory of God. There is *one* and *only one* exception. In his discussion of sin he concludes, specifically here with respect to the first sin, that "There was no End for this sin." (*Ibid.*, p. 373) Man who sinned and the devil both proposed an end or purpose for it, but ultimately it could not have a purpose which would be to import it into God's will which would make it not sin. Rather, the first sin, like all sin, was a surd, something inexplicable—except by appeal to man's misuse of free will. However, God had an end in allowing it: "acts glorious to God, which might arise from it." (*Ibid.*,) In other words, while sin does not glorify God, God's redemption of sinners does.

Time and space prohibit a lengthier and more detailed account of Arminius' emphasis on the glory of God as the chief end or purpose of every good in creation. All I can do is urge skeptics to read his "Orations" in *Works I* where he constantly repeats the refrain for "the glory of God and the salvation of men." Lest anyone think he puts these two ends on the same level of importance he says in *Oration II* that all salvation has the single purpose that "we might sing God's praises to him forever." (*Works I*, p. 372)

One finds no hint anywhere in Arminius of any concern for human autonomy for its own sake. Arminius's only reason for affirming libertarian free will is to disconnect sin from God and make the sinner solely responsible for it. His one overriding concern is for God's glory in all things. There can be no doubt that he would agree whole heartedly with the answer to the first question of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* "What is the chief end of man?" "The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

Time prohibits me from rehearsing a litany of Arminian affirmations of the glory of God after Arminius. Suffice it to say that all classical Arminians have always agreed with Arminius about this matter. I challenge critics of Arminianism to display one example of a classical Arminian theologian who has elevated humanity to an end in itself or in any way made God's chief end the glory of man. It doesn't exist.

I conclude with this observation. The difference between Arminian and Calvinist theologies does not lie in man-centeredness versus God-centeredness. True Arminianism is as thoroughly God-centered as Calvinism. A fair reading of classical Arminian theologians from Arminius to Thomas Oden cannot avoid finding in them a ringing endorsement of the God-centeredness of all creation and redemption. The difference, rather, lies in the nature and character of the God who stands at the centers of these two systems. The God who stands at the center of classical, high Calvinism of the TULIP variety is a morally ambiguous being of power and control who is hardly distinguishable from the devil. The devil wants all people to go to hell whereas the God of Calvinism wants some, perhaps most, people to go to hell. The devil is God's instrument in wreaking havoc and horror in the world—for God's glory. The God who stands at the center of classical Arminianism is the God of Jesus Christ, full of love and compassion as well as justice and wrath who voluntarily limits his power to allow creaturely rebellion but is nevertheless the source of all good for whose glory and honor everything except sin exists.