Is Jacobus Arminius a theologian of free will? Theologian of creation? Theologian of freedom? Theologian of the assurance of faith? What is Arminius’s main concern in his theology? This question has been answered in different ways, and the characterizations suggested each focus on aspects of differing degrees of importance. I myself would like to add yet another characterization: theologian of the justice of God, or—to add some nuance—theologian of the twofold love of God. In the present article, I will illustrate why these two characterizations are valid at one and the same time. They also do not exclude, but include, all other characterizations by placing them in their proper perspective.

1. The Context of Arminius’s Theology

The key to a proper understanding of Arminius’s theology is the interplay between different positions and developments in Reformed, Lutheran and Catholic theology in Arminius’s time, and the way he processed
Two closely-related themes show themselves to be of fundamental importance: the knowability of God’s justice, and the question as to the cause of sin.

The theology of John Calvin forms the starting point of this section. This is an obvious choice given his influence at that time, and because it is precisely against certain points of his theology that Arminius turns. Calvin emphasized God’s omni-causality and sovereignty particularly with a view to defending God’s glory and safeguarding the comfort and assurance of believers. His doctrine of a double predestination is a logical consequence thereof. However, his view aroused opposition particularly because of the implications it had for the relationship between God and sin, as it was charged that Calvin and others made God the cause or author of sin. Calvin defended himself against such criticism primarily in two ways: 1. above all he emphasized God’s essential justice and its dependability; 2. in the second place, Calvin emphasized the essential distinction between creature and Creator. The latter means that a person cannot see and comprehend the justice of all of God’s will and ways. In the present life, people will continue to be confronted with many apparent injustices in God, but may nevertheless—in humility—trust that God is essentially just and good.

For Calvin God’s will is the highest norm of all justice. This apparently fully voluntaristic viewpoint is placed within the context of God’s all-encompassing oneness (simplicitas). God’s simplicity makes it impossible to make a distinction between God’s justice, power and will. If God’s infinite power is called the rule of all justice, it is therefore not Calvin’s intention to do away with the justice of God’s power. On the contrary, God’s power is so closely united to God’s justice, that it can be called the rule of God’s power. The incomprehensibility and invisibility of God’s justice do not take anything away from its justice, but teaches one to be humble and dependent and to trust in God.

---

3 Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia. Ad fidem editionum principum et authenticarum ex parte etiam codicum manu scriptorum, additis prolegomenis literariis, annotationibus criticis, annalibus Calvinianis indicibusque novis et copiosissimis, 59 volumes, Wilhelm Baum e.a. (eds.) (Braunschweig, 1863–1900), 9, 713–714: “Even if the reprobate are instruments of God’s just wrath and the elect instruments of his mercy, the cause of this distinction must still be sought nowhere in God but his pure will [mera voluntas] which is the highest norm [summa regula] of justice.” Cf. Inst. III.23.5: God’s will is the “suprema iustitiae regula.”

4 Ioannis Calvini opera, 35, 479: “Quoav donc? Ce sont choses inseparables, que la puissance de Dieu et sa volonté. Dieu est tout-puissant: est-ce pour faire ce que l’homme aura basti en son cerveau? Fy: mais c’est pour accomplir ce qu’il a ordonné en son conseil.”