

The Standard Bearer

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Canons of Dordt

400th anniversary, 1618/19 - 2018/19

Preface to the Canons

The Synod of Dordt, translated by
Dr. W. Robert Godfrey

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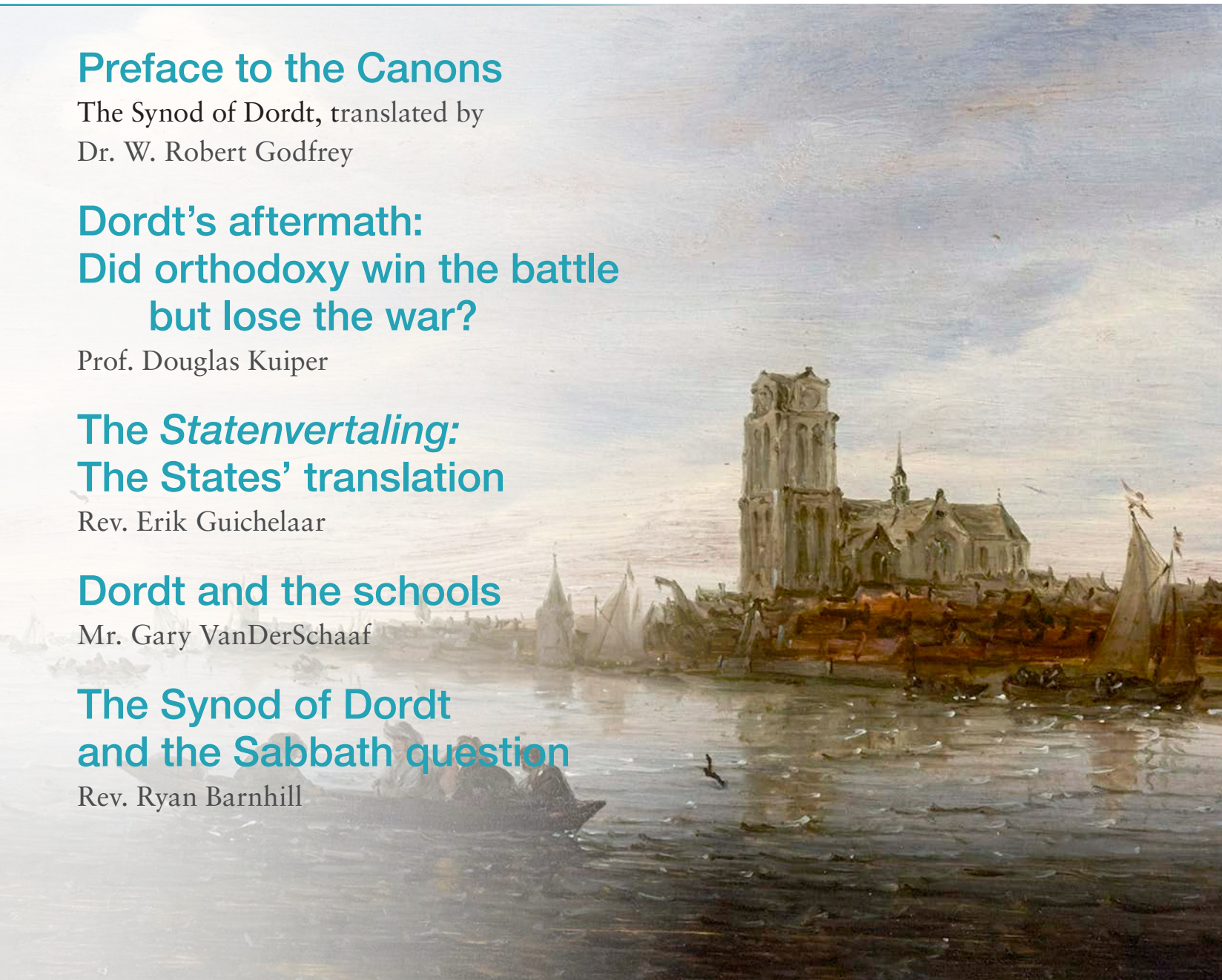
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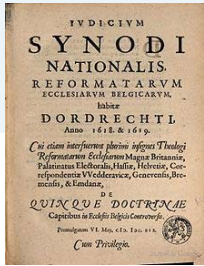
Note from the editor

Welcome to our second commemorative issue on the Synod of Dordt (1618-19). This Synod is best known for its defense and development of the truth of sovereign, particular grace in the Canons. Aspects of this truth were set forth in the November 1, 2018 issue of the *SB*. The current issue focuses on the work of the Synod in five other significant areas. With these two issues, as well as Prof. Kuiper's writings (in his brief *SB* articles on the Synod through the year and in the blog posts at dordt400.org), we hope that you are getting a broad view of the work and significance of the Great Synod.

—Prof. R. Dykstra



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Meditation

The Synod of Dordt, April 25, 1619

Preface to the Canons

The synod approved the canons on April 23, 1619, and two days later adopted a preface to the canons as a brief historical and theological introduction to the work of the synod and the canons. This preface has seldom been reprinted and is not regarded as an official part of the canons. Nevertheless, it is a useful introduction to them and is included here in a new translation.¹

Preface

In the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Among the many comforts which our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ gave to His church militant in its troubled sojourn, one in particular is rightly celebrated. That one He left behind as He departed to His Father in the heavenly sanctuary, saying, “I am with you every day until the end of the age.” The truth of this very delightful promise shines in the church of every time. She was attacked from the beginning not only in the open violence of enemies and the impiety of heretics, but also in the hidden cunning of seducers. Indeed, if ever the Lord had deprived her of the protection of the saving promise of His presence, long ago either the power of tyrants would have oppressed her or the fraud of deceivers would have seduced her to destruction. But the Good Shepherd has most constantly loved His flock for which He gave His life. He has always held back with His right hand at the right time the rage of persecutors, often openly and wonderfully. He has finished off and routed the crooked ways and fraudulent counsel of the seducers. Each time He showed His presence with His church. Clear proof of this truth stands in the histories of the pious emperors, kings, and princes, whom the Son of God so many times has raised up for the protection of His church. Inflamed with a holy zeal for His house, they restrained by their works the fury of the tyrants. They also took care of the church with the remedies of holy synods when contending with false teachers and those who in various ways counterfeit religion. In these synods, faithful servants of Christ joined together

in prayer, counsel, and labor. They stood strong and immovable for the church and truth of God, opposed undaunted the ministers of Satan transformed into angels of light, suppressed the seeds of errors and discord, preserved the church in the harmony of pure religion, and transmitted sound worship to posterity undiminished.

With the same favor, our faithful Savior in this time has shown His gracious presence to the Dutch church, which was for many years very afflicted. This church was set free from the tyranny of the Roman Antichrist and the horrible papal idolatry by the powerful hand of God. It was preserved wondrously many times in the dangers of the long war. It has flourished in the harmony of true doctrine and discipline to the praise of God, the admirable growth of Republic, and the joy of the whole Reformed world.

Then Jacob Arminius and his followers, named Remonstrants, attacked this church with various errors, some old and some new, first privately and then openly. Scandalous dissensions and obstinately disordered schisms led to such division that this most flourishing church would have been consumed in the horrible fire of these dissensions and schisms unless the compassion of our Savior had intervened at the right time. Blessed forever be the Lord, who after He had hidden His face for a moment from us (who had provoked His wrath and indignation in many ways), has shown the whole world that He does not forget His covenant and does not scorn the sighing of His people. When it appeared that there was hardly any human hope of remedy, He inspired the minds of the Most Illustrious and Mighty States General of the Dutch federation, together with the counsel and direction of the Most Illustrious and Mighty Prince of Orange, to use those legitimate means which the Apostles themselves practiced. Those means, followed as examples by those who came after the Apostles, came down to us, sanctioned by long use in the Christian church and practiced before this with great fruit also in the Dutch church. These civil governors decided to face the raging evils before them, declaring by their authority that a synod be convened in Dordrecht from all their provinces. They also requested and pro-

¹ Original published in *Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dordt* by W. Robert Godfrey (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2019), 27-30. Used by permission.

cured for this Synod many most important theologians by the favor of the Most Serene and Powerful King of Great Britain, James, and of various Most Illustrious Princes, Counts, and Republics.

By the common judgment of so many theologians of the Reformed church, the teachings of Arminius and his followers would be judged accurately and by the Word of God alone, true doctrine established and false doctrine rejected, and—by the divine blessing—harmony, peace, and tranquility be restored to the Dutch churches. This is that blessing of God in which the Dutch churches exult. They humbly acknowledge the compassions of their faithful Savior and gratefully preach them.

Before the meeting of this venerable Synod, the authority of the highest magistrates called for and held gatherings of prayer and fasting in all the Dutch churches to avert the wrath of God and to implore His gracious help. The Synod then gathered in the name of the Lord at Dordrecht, inflamed by love of the divine majesty and of the well-being of the church. After calling on the name of God, it bound itself by a holy oath to have for its judgment only the standard of Holy Scripture, and in its proceedings to understand and to act in judgment with good and honest conscience, and to do this diligently. It bound itself with great patience to per-

suade the leading advocates of that teaching cited before them to present their conviction about the Five Heads of Doctrine and to expound fully the reasons for that conviction. But when they repudiated the judgment of the synod and refused to respond to its questions, neither the warnings of the Synod nor the commands of the delegates of the Most Generous and Powerful States General could make progress with them. The Synod was forced to pursue another way by the order of their Lords and from the custom received from ancient synods. So the Synod examined their teachings on the five points from their writings, confessions, and declarations, some previously issued, others prepared for this Synod.

Through the singular grace of God, with the greatest diligence, faith, and conscience, this Synod achieved the absolute consensus of all and each member, to the glory of God. So, for the integrity of the truth of salvation, the tranquility of consciences, and the peace and well-being of the Dutch church, the Synod decided to promulgate the following judgment. By this judgment it both expounded the true conviction, which agreed to the Word of God about the previously mentioned Five Heads of Doctrine, and rejected the false conviction which differed from the Word of God.



Prof. Douglas Kuiper, newly appointed professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

Dordt's aftermath: Did orthodoxy win the battle but lose the war?

Sometimes an army has won a major battle during a war, but lost the war in the end. The Synod of Dordt marked a decisive victory for Reformed orthodoxy and a blow to Arminianism. But Dordt's victory appears to have been short-lived. Did Reformed orthodoxy win the battle at Dordt, only to lose the war? In answering that question, this article surveys the history of the Remonstrants and of Arminianism after the Synod of Dordt.

Synod's outcome: The battle won

Dordt's victory was doctrinal: the Synod expressed its condemnation of Arminian theology in the Canons of

Dordt. This victory was also church political: on April 24, 1619 (session 138) the Dutch delegates declared that the Remonstrants whom it had cited were deposed from their church offices.

After the national synod was over, provincial synods enforced Dordt's decision by deposing almost two hundred Remonstrant ministers. The provincial synods of Utrecht and South Holland deposed thirty and sixty ministers, respectively; other provincial synods deposed smaller numbers.

Changes also took place at the university level. Remonstrant curators (trustees) and professors were removed and replaced with orthodox men. Notably, Si-

mon Episcopius, the Remonstrant leader at Dordt, was succeeded by Festus Hommius, one of the clerks at the great Synod.

Synod could not enforce civil punishments for the Remonstrants; the States General (the national government) had authority to do that. In July, 1619 the States-General permitted those Remonstrants who submitted to their deposition to remain in the country and collect their salary for six months. Most Remonstrant ministers would not submit and were banished from the United Provinces. The government also forbade any defense or promotion of Remonstrant doctrine.

Other nations recognized and appreciated Dordt's victory, particularly its doctrinal aspect. Outside the Netherlands, the French Reformed churches and the Reformed church in Geneva officially adopted the Canons. The Reformed church in Zurich, though not officially adopting the Canons, considered it to be in complete agreement with their Helvetic confession. In England, influential people suggested that the British adopt the Canons, but this never happened, due in part to some Arminian sympathy there.

The victory was monumental. But the enemy regrouped.

The Remonstrant resurgence: The war lost?

Recognizing that the Synod was not going to exonerate them, the Remonstrants plotted strategy. On March 5, 1619 several of them met at Rotterdam to express their grievances against Dordt, their rejection of whatever Dordt might say (Dordt had not yet drawn up the Canons), and their willingness to establish their own churches if they were put out of the Reformed (state) church. A few weeks later, on March 31 (Easter Sunday) the Remonstrants in Dordt met in a separate worship service, an event that some consider the official beginning of the Remonstrant Church in the Netherlands.

When the Remonstrants were formally expelled in July of that year, some went into hiding in the Netherlands. Others left the provinces for Antwerp (in Belgium) or Waalwijk (in North Brabant, which was not part of the Dutch Provinces until 1648). At a conference in Antwerp during the Fall of 1619, the Remonstrants decided to prepare a response to the Synod of Dordt, to train students for the ministry according to their own convictions, and to fund and promote the underground Remonstrants in the Netherlands.

Their efforts bore fruit. By 1630, Remonstrant churches were worshiping openly in Amsterdam and Rotterdam, and Leiden University could admit Remonstrant students. In 1634 a Remonstrant seminary

opened in Amsterdam, with Simon Episcopius as professor. All of this happened within fifteen years of Dordt. So soon Dordt's victory appeared to be lost! What explains this sudden turn of events?

In 1617, politics had explained the sudden turn of events in favor of the Contra-Remonstrants. Prince Maurice had come to power and had opposed the Remonstrants. Politics also explains why the pendulum later swung in the Remonstrants' favor. After Maurice died in 1625, his brother Frederick Henry became the stadtholder (the highest official of the United Provinces). Frederick showed more leniency to the Remonstrants. Perhaps another explanation was that, in time, the children lost interest in the war that their fathers had fought so valiantly.

The Remonstrants also spread to other European nations. By the late 1600s the churches and orthodox theologians in Berne and Geneva, Switzerland, were combating Arminianism as a present threat. Likewise, it had made inroads into England, Scotland, and Ireland by the turn of the century. Doctrinal errors such as Amyrauldism in France and the Marrow controversy in England were developments of specific aspects of Arminianism. Amyrauldism attacked Dordt's doctrine of predestination. The Marrow men taught that the gospel was to be freely offered to everyone because Christ is dead for all.

About this time, another strand of Arminianism was developing in England and in colonial America—that promoted by John Wesley and others. The Wesleys taught what Arminianism had always promoted: that God loves each and every person, but requires one to choose for Him. However, the Wesleyan strand of Arminianism was different from the Remonstrant strand in two ways. Doctrinally, the Wesleys did not develop their idea into an entire system of teaching, as the Remonstrants in the Netherlands had done. And the Wesleys were originally Anglicans; they had no allegiance to the Canons of Dordt. Nevertheless, they popularized the essence of Arminianism, ensuring that it would be tightly woven into American religious thought.

Arminianism today: The war lost?

Today, much—virtually all—of American Evangelicalism is affected by Arminian theology. Some Dutch Reformed denominations that count the Synod of Dordt as part of their historical heritage no longer defend Dordt's doctrine in every respect. The doctrine of the well-meant offer, which compromises Dordt's stand on total depravity and irresistible grace, plagues many Reformed churches. The idea of common grace that Abraham Kuyper promoted in Dutch Reformed

circles, and its further development by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924, undermined the doctrines of total depravity, irresistible grace, and particular atonement. Teach that Christ died only for some humans, not each and every one, and many members of Reformed denominations will believe that *you* are mistaken. Ask them to explain God's decree of election, and be saddened but not surprised when many say that it is God's will to save all who will believe and obey in their own power, not His determination to save certain specific persons whom He ordained to eternal life.

If the battle appears to be lost on those battlefields, what of the closest battlefield? By God's grace, the Protestant Reformed Churches in America and her three sister churches not only hold the Canons of Dordt as an official confession, but also teach and defend the doctrines taught in it.¹ But does each and every member understand those doctrines, and see their importance? Would each and every member readily defend and promote them?

And how goes the battle *in our own lives*? We confess that God, from eternity, ordained some to eternal life in Christ; but in our hearts do we question His justice in sovereignly reprobating others—especially if those others are our close friends or family members? We confess that the human race is totally depraved, and find abundant evidence of this in current events around us. But do we deny or excuse our own sins—a practical denial of total depravity? We praise God for His irresistible grace—but are we quick to boast of some work of our own?

The battle against Arminianism is unceasing both on the church front and in our own lives. Each of us is susceptible to losing a particular battle against Arminianism in our own hearts. If we have not lost the battle against Arminianism in our own hearts, and if we will not, what is the explanation? Only this: God has preserved us whom He has called in Christ to be saints.

Our sure hope: Certain victory

In history, the cause of orthodoxy seems to have suffered defeat after defeat. But truth will be victorious. Orthodoxy will at last prevail. This will become evident when our ascended Lord brings His glorified church to heaven. No, the church in heaven will not subscribe to the Canons of Dordt; it is an earthly document, and

with all other earthly documents will be destroyed with fire. However, the church in heaven will confess and praise the sovereign grace of Jehovah in salvation; we will confess then the same central truths that are expressed in the Canons. The glorified church will sing a new song of praise to Jehovah for His irresistible grace shown to sinners, based solely on the shed blood of the Lamb and its saving effect (Rev. 5:9-10, 14:3). Those singing this song will realize that they, though sinners, have been appointed to everlasting life, and preserved with a view to it.

Even in time, the war will be won. No, Arminianism will not be vanquished before our Lord returns. Arminianism manifests the pride of the human heart that conceives of a God whose justice accords with a human, fallen sense of justice. This error will remain, in whatever form. The church must always know that this threat is ever present and constantly fight it, without letting down her guard. This error's continued presence leads us always to rely on the grace and mercies of Jesus Christ, and gives occasion for many prayers for defense and safety from our enemies.

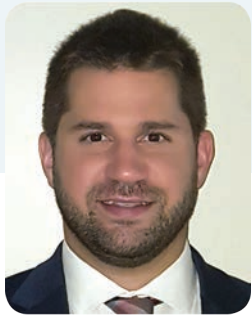
Yet, there is a sense in which the battle that Dordt won is won again and again. It is won in the hearts of faithful believers who love the truth. It is won every time an unbeliever is brought to true, saving faith, and every time an ungodly person is turned to godliness. It is won by faithful churches who refute and oppose Arminianism and preach sovereign grace. It will be won as the faithful church preaches the gospel, for (as the Canons remind us) this gospel must be preached indiscriminately throughout the world. The preaching of this gospel is the running of the white horse of Revelation 6:2, and the cause of the gospel will be victorious.

Until Christ returns to defeat the enemy decisively and deliver the church from such error, may the prayer with which the Canons conclude be on our lips:

May Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who, seated at the Father's right hand, gives gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth, bring to the truth those who err, shut the mouths of the calumniators of sound doctrine, and endue the faithful minister of His Word with the spirit of wisdom and discretion, that all their discourses may tend to the glory of God and the edification of those who hear them. Amen.

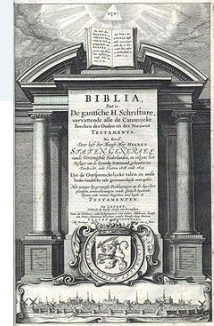
Note: Due to space limitations, the bibliography for this article could not be included. If you desire a copy, please contact Prof. D. Kuiper.

¹ The PRC and her sister churches are not the only churches that strive faithfully to maintain the doctrines of sovereign grace. However, I mention these specifically because 1) they are the "closest battlefield" for most readers of the *Standard Bearer*, and 2) they officially hold the Canons of Dordt as their confession.



Rev. Erik Guichelaar, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin

The *Statenvertaling*: The States' translation



Among all the items that needed to be treated at the great Synod of Dordt, the matter of Bible translation was first on the agenda. After the Synod began, it spent nine days discussing the need for and the execution of a new translation of the Bible into the Dutch language. The final result would be a new authorized Bible version known as the *Statenvertaling* (States' Translation). This Bible would have the same significance and prestige in the Dutch language as the Authorized Version (King James Version) would have in the English language. In fact, the *Statenvertaling* and the *King James Version* are sister translations based upon the same original manuscripts.

The need

It might seem odd that the Synod of Dordt had to deal with the issue of Bible translation. After all, were there not already other Dutch translations of the Bible? Yes, there were, but these translations were not up to the standard of what a good translation ought to be.

What were these other translations? For example, one of the most widely used Dutch Bibles was the so-called *Liesveldt* Bible, originally published in 1526. The Lord would use this Bible in a powerful way, but the problem was that it was not a translation out of the original languages but a translation of Luther's German Bible (which itself was not a strict, literal translation from the original languages). The weaknesses of the *Liesveldt* Bible would become especially clear with the publication in 1562 of another Bible translation known as the *Deux Aes Bible*. However, this newer translation also had much to be desired, as it was stiff and wooden. From 1562 to the time of the Synod of Dordt, various Reformed synods would discuss the need for a better translation, but no long-term satisfactory solutions ever came from these discussions.

The problem of creating a good Bible translation was not unique to the Dutch-speaking people. The English, for example, had faced the same problem. To solve their problem, in 1604 King James of England commissioned

the translation that would become known as the *King James Version*, which was finally completed and published just seven years before the Synod of Dordt. In fact, at the Synod of Dordt, the president, Johannes Bogerman (who was himself a highly trained linguist), gave a special word of praise for what the English had accomplished with the Authorized Version, and commended it as a model for what the Dutch needed to do.

The decisions

It took only two sessions at the Synod of Dordt before the delegates unanimously voted to proceed with the production of a new translation of the Bible. After further discussion on how the translators should go about their work, the following decisions were made:

1. That they always carefully adhere to the original text, and that the manner of writing of the original languages be preserved, as much as the clarity and properties of Dutch speech permit. But in cases where the Hebrew or Greek manner of speech was harder than could remain in the text, that they note this in the margin.
2. That they add as few words as possible to complete the meaning of a sentence if it is not expressed fully, and that these words be distinguished from the text with a different font and placed between brackets.
3. That they formulate a short and clear summary for each book and chapter and write this in the margin at the respective locations in the Holy Scriptures.
4. That they add a brief explanation providing insight to the translation of unclear passages; but the addition of lessons learnt is neither necessary nor advisable.¹

The ultimate objective would be an entirely new translation of the Bible and not a revision of an existing version. However, where possible, the translators were

¹ From the *Acts of Synod* (taken from "Statenvertaling." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 28 Dec. 2018, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statenvertaling).

to use what was familiar to the people from already existing versions.

Part of Synod's discussion revolved around what to do with the Apocrypha:

A lively debate developed around the question whether the apocrypha were to be included in the new translation or whether they would be omitted altogether. Both Gomarus and the Geneva delegate Diodati...argued strongly against inclusion of the apocrypha. The advocates of inclusion based their arguments on practical grounds. They pointed to the usefulness of these books, to the example of other Reformed churches, and to the possibility of creating offense among the unlearned if suddenly an established practice were to be discontinued. Especially the last two considerations swayed the opinion in favor of inclusion of the apocrypha. However, the points of principle adduced by Gomarus and Diodati were not as such denied. Gomarus had argued that these books consisted of fanciful fables and were full of dogmatic errors. Inclusion in the new Bible would be an attack upon God's honor. Already the Jews had kept these writings separate from the canonical books. There was now absolutely no reason to retain them, especially since the church of Rome had placed them on one line with the canonical books. Diodati likewise declared that most of these books belonged to the realm of Jewish fable, with the exception of First Maccabees, Baruch, Wisdom, and Jesus Sirach. They conflicted with the truth and majesty of Holy Scripture, and hence they were harmful and dangerous to the reader.

Synod decided that less effort would be made in the translation of the apocrypha than in that of the canonical books, and that separate type and pagination would be used in printing them. It also decided that a preface would be prepared in which attention would be called to the errors that the apocrypha contained.²

The execution

Synod appointed six men to translate the Bible, three men for the Old Testament and three men for the New Testament and Apocrypha. Besides the translators, there would be revisers, two for each provincial synod. It was hoped that the work could begin soon after the Synod adjourned, but the State government did not grant funding for the project until 1624, and the first actual meeting to carry out the work did not take place until 1626. The Old Testament was completely translated by 1632 and the New Testament by 1634, and after revision work was done, the final product was published in 1637.

2 Marten H. Woudstra. "The Synod and Bible Translation," in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, P. Y. DeJong, Ed. (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship), 127-28.

In His inscrutable wisdom and providence, God had raised up eminently qualified and thoroughly Reformed scholars for the work.

During the period in which the translators of the *Staten-Bijbel* did their work, the first half of the seventeenth century, the Netherlands was an internationally renowned center of biblical learning. The scholarship of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands was significantly ahead of that in Lutheran countries both in linguistic ability and in the knowledge of antiquity.³

The men who were chosen for the work were renowned both for their learning in the original languages, and their Reformed judgment. They were Reformed to the highest degree.

The annotations (marginal notes)

As noted above, the Synod of Dordt made the decision that marginal notes would be added to give insight into the translation and meaning of unclear or difficult passages. As a result, the new Bible would not only be a new translation but an actual study Bible with exegetical notes. These annotations (*kantekeningen*) are significant because they give a biblical, Reformed understanding of the Scriptures that would guide an entire nation in its understanding of the Bible. In fact, so highly esteemed were these annotations, so thoroughly Reformed and helpful, that in 1645 the Westminster Assembly commissioned the translation of the *Statenvertaling met Kantekeningen* ("The Dordt Authorized Version with Commentary") into English, so that the notes could be used in the English language.

To illustrate what these annotations are like, consider the note given with II Samuel 7:11. In II Samuel 7, Nathan gives King David the well-known prophecy that David's kingdom will be established forever. At II Samuel 7:11, commenting on the words "He will make thee an house," the *Statenvertaling* has the following comment:

[I.e., establish and continue thy kingdom in thy posterity, and (that which is far more) raise up out of thy seed (according to the flesh) the Messiah who shall be an everlasting king over his people. This prophecy is to be understand, that it partly looketh at Solomon, as a type of the Lord Christ, partly at Christ himself, whose type he was, and that some things suit or agree to Solomon only, some only and properly to Christ, some to them both.

Such notes are highly significant, not only because they give thoroughly Reformed explanations of passages that might otherwise be difficult, but also because such explanations stand antithetical to higher-critical

3 Woudstra, 131.

approaches to interpreting Scripture which, with the rise of Arminianism, were becoming more prevalent and popular during the mid-seventeenth century. What we should not lose sight of is that the battle at the Synod of Dordt was not just a battle over the doctrines of grace (TULIP); it was ultimately a battle over how the Bible should be treated. The issue was this: Should the Bible be treated as the mere words of men, so that Old Testament prophecies such as II Samuel 7 have no reference to Jesus Christ at all? Or, should the Bible be treated as the very inspired Word of God, so that prophecies such as II Samuel 7 are interpreted as clearly referring not just to Solomon but also (and even especially) to Jesus Christ? The Arminian camp would more and more go in the direction of the former, treating the Bible (like salvation itself!) as the work of man, to be treated and interpreted just as any other human work is treated. The Reformed camp would insist on the latter, treating the Bible as the Word of God, to be treated and interpreted accordingly. This is part of the great significance of the marginal notes (annotations) in the *Statenvertaling*.

Significance

The *Statenvertaling* is significant, then, for especially

two things. First, it gave a faithful, word-for-word, God-honoring translation of the Scriptures that emphasizes the truth of the *verbal* inspiration of the Bible. When the Bible is translated from the original languages into another, that translation must be faithful to and bind itself to the written *words* of the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures. The *Statenvertaling* provided that.

Second, the *Statenvertaling* is significant because the annotations (marginal notes) maintained a Reformed view of interpreting the Bible, and rejected an Arminian, higher-critical approach to interpreting the Bible, which throughout the years has destroyed many churches. No Bible translation is neutral. Certainly, no study Bible is neutral either. In God's providence, the Dutch Reformed people would have in the *Statenvertaling* a study Bible that was preeminently Reformed and biblical. In this regard, only God Himself knows how important the *Statenvertaling* and its marginal notes were for the preservation of His church in the Netherlands during the rise of higher-critical approaches to Scripture.

It is our hope that this article shows you one more way in which the Synod of Dordt was indeed “the *Great Synod*.”



Rev. Steven Key, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado

The Great Synod and the church order

One of the lesser known yet very important labors of the great Synod of Dordt was to adopt a Church Order to unite all the Dutch Reformed churches. This was done at one of the later sessions of the synod.

It was not until the 137th sitting of the Synod, in early May 1619, that the Remonstrants were finally condemned as heretics and *perturbateurs* of the state and church. A list of preachers from the Remonstrant camp was drawn up, together with the Formula of Subscription to which every faithful officebearer would have to subscribe.¹

On May 13, 1619, at the 155th sitting of the Synod, the delegates took up the matter of the Church Order.

The minutes of the Synod record that the articles of the Church Order, set forth at the last national synod, held in 1586 in 's-Gravenhage, were read. Then, in the afternoon session the same day, the articles of the Church Order were *in substantie* adopted by all the deputies, ministers, and elders of every province.²

The great Synod adopted for all the churches the work that was previously done at the national synod held in 's-Gravenhage more than 32 years before. In

¹ Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall (1477-1806)*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 462.

² Isaack J. Canin, *Acta Nationale Synode Van Dordrecht in 1618 en 1619*. (Dordrecht: Den Hertog, B.V. - Houten, 1987), 935.

addition, the Church Order adopted at 's-Gravenhage had its roots in work done even earlier, during the very unsettled early history of the Reformed churches in the Lowlands.

On November 3, 1568, a meeting was held in Wesel with some 40 ministers and elders present. Because there is no indication that these men were delegated by their churches, the meeting seems to have been an unofficial gathering. But it is evident from the written conclusions of the meeting that these church leaders came together with a particular purpose in mind.

This informal assembly, under the leadership of Petrus Dathenus,³ gathered to draft a Church Order that would serve to unite the Reformed churches throughout the Lowlands in a biblical form of church government.

The fruit of the meeting in Wesel was recorded in writing under the heading "The Articles of Wesel 1568." The introduction to these articles reads as follows:

Certain specific items or articles which the ministers of the church in the Netherlands have judged to be partly necessary, partly useful for the church's service.

The apostle Paul prescribes that in the church of God all things must be done decently and in order so that unanimous agreement may be established and maintained not only in doctrine but also in the polity (of the church) itself and in the ecclesiastical regulation of office. In order that completely equal regulation of these matters may now be observed in all churches of the Netherlands, it seemed good to us to propose the following matters in an orderly fashion, concerning which we have consulted with the best reformed churches, so that these regulations may be unanimously adopted and maintained by the ministers of the Netherlands for the benefit of the church.⁴

Noteworthy in the introduction is the reference to having "consulted with the best reformed churches."

Some nine years earlier, in 1559, the first national synod of the Reformed churches of France had been

held in Paris. There a Church Order had been adopted, clearly influenced by John Calvin and the principles of ecclesiology that Calvin had restored from Holy Scripture over several years of labor in Geneva and Strasbourg. Thus indirectly the Church Order eventually adopted by the Synod of Dordt was also influenced by John Calvin.

In addition, in the northern Netherlands, the Polish Reformer John à Lasco was an influential leader. He initially introduced the confessions and church orders of the Swiss Reformers, Bucer and Zwingli, and established the church council in Emden in 1544, laying the foundations for the establishment of consistories in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands.⁵ When renewed persecution forced à Lasco to migrate to London and to serve the newly formed Dutch refugee church, he labored to adopt a Church Order that was based more upon the practices in Calvin's Geneva and the restoration of a biblical ecclesiology established by Calvin.⁶

When these church leaders gathered at Wesel, therefore, seeking for the welfare of the Dutch churches to see them unified in a biblical church government, they were building upon a foundation already laid by other Reformers, and that especially under the influence of John Calvin.

In eight chapters they recorded what they considered necessary for an ecclesiastical order in a unified body of Reformed churches. That included establishing biblical principles concerning the assemblies and classes of such churches, the requirements of ministers, elders and deacons, the importance of catechism instruction, regulations of the sacraments and marriage, as well as the requirement of being faithful in the exercise of church discipline.

The church leaders who gathered at Wesel and set forth this preliminary Church Order did so understanding that their decisions could only serve as groundwork for decisions to be made by properly convened synods.⁷

The first regular synod of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands was held in Emden, Germany in 1571, during a time of persecution that prevented a synodical gathering in the Netherlands.

The Synod of Emden did not adopt the Church Order that would later be adopted at Dordt. Rather, it set

3 <http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/encyc/encyc09/htm/iv.vii.c.htm> (Article from the Schaff-Herzog *Encyclopedia* on the Reformed (Dutch) Church: I. In the Netherlands).

Dathenus became a noteworthy figure in the formation of the liturgy of the Dutch Reformed churches. He authored the first Dutch versification of the Psalms, translated the Heidelberg Catechism from the German language into the Dutch, and authored several liturgical forms that were incorporated into the liturgy of the Reformed churches.

4 *Ecclesiastical Manual, Including the Decisions of the Netherlands Synods and Other Significant Matters Relating to the Government of the Church*, P. Biesterveld and H.H. Kuyper; Transl. by Richard R. De Ridder (Grand Rapids, MI: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), 20.

5 Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 102.

6 Israel, 103.

7 Richard R. De Ridder, *A Survey of the Sources of Reformed Church Policy and the Form of Government of the Christian Reformed Church in America*, Syllabus. (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1983), 36.

forth some of the basic biblical principles of church government. Many of these principles were also applied in decisions which answered specific questions rising from overtures presented to the Synod by various churches.

The first article adopted by the Synod of Emden established a foundational principle of Reformed church government over against the Roman Catholic system of a so-called divinely ordained hierarchy of clergy members, and clearly followed the first article of the Reformed Synod of Paris in 1559: “No church shall have dominion over another church, no minister of the Word, no elder or deacon shall exercise dominion over another. Rather shall they be vigilant lest they should give cause to be suspected of desiring dominion.”⁸

Immediately distinguishing Reformed church government from the hierarchical rule of the Roman Catholic Church is the parity of officebearers in a federation of churches, each congregation being autonomous, but all which are unified as conscience-bound to the Word of God. Furthermore, the truth of that Word of God is set forth in the Reformed confessions.

That means that no minister, even a seminary professor, has any higher place than any of his colleagues, nor is anyone to dominate his fellow officebearers, even though he might have years of experience over his younger colleagues. At the same time, no church within the federation may lord it over another church. The biblical principle is that all churches and officebearers are equally subordinate under Christ. All are servants of Christ.

The decisions that followed and which would be embodied in the Church Order adopted at the Synod of Dordt, unfolded that basic principle of what it means to serve Christ in the rule of the church.

Essential to serving Christ is faithfulness to His Word. As at Wesel, so the Synod of Emden recognized that church unity is doctrinal unity. So the Synod required that all ministers express agreement with the Belgic Confession of Faith, as well as the French Confession in the French-speaking churches of the Lowlands. In addition, they required the Genevan Catechism to be used in the French-speaking churches, and the Heidelberg Catechism in the Dutch-speaking churches.

With doctrinal unity there can also be unity in church life.

That includes the requirements for faithful officebearers and the exercise of their offices, regulations concerning the administration of the sacraments, the orderly and godly conduct required of the members of

the churches, and the proper biblical exercise of Christian discipline against those who walk ungodly, including officebearers.

One of the greatest disputes from a church political point of view was the relation between church and state. That dispute intensified after 1575 when the Prince of Orange ordered that the civil authorities were to appoint the consistories.⁹

The National Synod of Dordrecht in 1578 was the first truly national synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. It was especially the church-state dispute that occupied the attention of the Synod. The Synod took the stand that Christ has given the church alone power in things ecclesiastical. But Synod also made concession to the state in deciding that a congregation’s call to a minister must also have the approval of the magistrates.

The church-state issue was also front and center at the Synod of Middleburg in 1581. While unable to settle that issue, the Synod of Middleburg did make a significant revision of the Church Order, with the articles arranged under essentially the same four major headings that would be adopted at the Synod of Dordt.

Then followed the National Synod of ’s-Gravenhage 1586, the last national synod to be held prior to the Synod of Dordt. There were tensions in the churches over the differing views of church-state relation, the requirements of the Formula of Subscription, prescribed preaching from the Heidelberg Catechism, and other matters. The Synod made very little change to the Church Order adopted at Middleburg, but gave greater attention to matters concerning “Censure and Ecclesiastical Admonitions,” probably in response to the some of the unfaithfulness observed in the churches not only with some of the officebearers, and ministers in particular, but also among the members of the churches. The embrace of the teachings of Jacobus Arminius did not arise in a vacuum.

So the Church Order that the Great Synod of Dordt would adopt in May 1619 was also the foundation upon which it would face the Arminian controversy and take its stand. The Church Order served it well in the face of that great trial. Thus, near the end of the Synod the decision was made to adopt for all the churches that Church Order previously set forth and adopted at ’s-Gravenhage.

The Church Order of Dordt did not receive the approval of the States General. But the churches were guided by that Church Order and were able to function in a unified way because of it.

⁸ *Calvinism in Europe*, A.C. Duke; Gillian Lewis; Andrew Pettegree, Eds., 158.

⁹ De Ridder, *A Survey of the Sources*, 62.

That Church Order is substantially the Church Order maintained today in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

It continues to be one of the great blessings that we have received as a fruit of the Synod of Dordt.



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Dordt and the schools

[Believers] truly worship God by the righteousness they maintain within their society.

John Calvin, Commentary on Matthew 12:7 (1558)

Since for the building up of the churches, the republic, and the welfare of the country it is especially important that the youth from childhood on be well instructed in the knowledge and fear of God, languages, and liberal arts...it is above all necessary that for our time good attention and oversight be given to [the schools, so that they] may be reformed together with the reformation of the churches in the clarity of the Gospel and may become fitting in spirit.

From the Church Order written by the National Synod of 's-Gravenhage, 1586

All consistories shall see to it that there are good schoolmasters who not only teach the children reading, writing, languages, and liberal arts, but also train them in godliness and in the catechism.

From the Church Order written by the Synod of 's-Gravenhage, 1586, and adapted verbatim by the Synod of Dordt, 1618–19 as article 21 of the Church Order

I Will Maintain.

Motto of the House of Orange-Nassau, the Royal Family of the Netherlands, leaders of the Dutch War of Independence, 1568–1648

John Calvin's goal during his Genevan pastorate was to establish and maintain a holy church within a Christian state, a state in which pious citizens, living decently and in good order, would be led by godly rulers whose duties included the promotion and protection of the instituted church. Calvin insisted that the building of a faithful pew, pulpit, and government demanded education on every level.

With one eye on Geneva as the model for a Christian society, Dutch delegates to the Synod of Dordt swore faithfulness to the Belgic Confession, including Article

36 on the relationship between church and state. Based on the understanding of this article shared by the Reformed churches in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the orthodox confessed that the responsibility for Christian education in schools belonged neither to the church nor to the home, but to the state.

The Dordt delegates were never as blunt as Luther, who once declared that parents lacked the heart to start schools, the money to maintain them, and the brains to run them. But Synod did not seek parochial or parental schools. Roman Catholics desired parochial schools, and Arminians might push for parental schools. But at the time of Dordt, the Reformed believed that Christian education by means of a school was the duty of the state, to be administered through the church.

Local civil government exercised financial control and regulative oversight of the schools. Throughout Dordt's discussion of education, whether it was catechism instruction in the school, or the teaching of reading, writing, languages, and the liberal arts; whether it was school staffing, teacher salaries, or the Formula of Subscription that teachers should sign, the delegates repeatedly acknowledged that all their decisions were subject to the will of the state, and could only be enacted through the good graces of the high and mighty rulers to whom all of Synod's work was addressed. As we learn about Dordt's deliberations regarding the schools, we must remember that the teacher was a salaried civil-servant working in a "public school with the Bible." And since the Reformed Church was the privileged church of the Netherlands, the understanding of the Bible as taught by the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism (as well as the Canons themselves) would form both the basis and the goal of instruction.

Dordt wanted such an understanding to form the heart of the professing church member. Although at this time parents who wished to have a child baptized



*Woodcut of Dordt and the school
by Albert Meijer
(found at the PRC Seminary)*

in a Reformed church did not have to be confessing members, the state-run public schools with a Bible would have as their goals that which the delegates understood to be en-

tailed in the baptismal vows, vows that Dordt itself had confirmed for the church. Those goals were Christian education (namely, catechism instruction), profession of faith, a godly life that witnessed to the world of one's faith, and prayer, which included psalm singing.

Therefore, when the third question of the Baptism Form asked, "Whether you promise and intend to see these children...instructed in the aforesaid doctrine?" that "doctrine" meant the catechism, the psalms for singing, and the many set prayers then included with the Psalter. It bound the parents to nothing but catechism—not to reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, or history. Education in the Netherlands was not compulsory and would not be so for another three centuries. If a child could learn enough catechism to make profession of faith by memorization, never setting foot in a school, the baptismal vows were still fulfilled. (In one of the great orphanages in the Netherlands, where two teachers taught eight hundred students, one requirement for leaving the orphanage was profession of faith. If anyone left the orphanage without having made profession, the orphanage was fined 20 percent of an average workman's yearly wage.)

Working within that limitation, Dordt sought a literate church membership, capable not only of memorization but of understanding, of not only head knowledge, but of heart commitment to Reformed doctrine unto a godly witness in all areas of life. This was made clear in Dordt's treatment of catechism instruction during its seventeenth session in November 1618. Here was set forth the triple obligation of school, church, and home to instruct children in the Heidelberg Catechism. What Dordt said about the attitudes, methods, and goals of catechism instruction applied to all instruction in the schools.

First, instruction had to be age and ability appropriate. Dutch primary schooling was generally for children aged six to twelve. Students met usually in a single classroom (often the teacher's home), separated into

groups first by ability, then by age, then in some cases, gender. Dordt took care to outline what should be included in the catechism instruction of each of the three age groups it described, and the schoolmaster had to spend two days a week teaching catechism.

For the youngest group, this meant preparing them for the (Heidelberg) Catechism by memorizing the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. The next age group would be taught one of the shortened forms of the Catechism approved by Synod. For the oldest students there was instruction in the full Catechism, tied in with the Lord's Day scheduled for the Catechism sermon in church on the next Sabbath. Schoolmasters were to teach with compassion and in accordance with each child's ability, asking good questions to make sure each child understood what he was learning. And finally, it would be the schoolmaster who led the oldest students to church on the Sabbath. There, they would answer questions about the Lord's Day under consideration. In front of the entire congregation, students would give account of themselves, and, by implication, of their teacher. A lax or unorthodox teacher was in for a rough time of it.

To help insure orthodoxy, Article 54 of the original Church Order declared that schoolmasters sign a Formula of Subscription, swearing faithfulness to the Belgic Confession, the Catechism, and the articles of Dordt itself. This signed Formula and attestations from others as to personal godliness were the only teacher qualifications for teaching in a primary school. There was no such thing as teacher education, and the state pay and oversight of teachers were scandalous. As a result of starvation wages, applicants for teaching positions were always few and often appalling, so that in many places the magistrates waived the signing of the Formula and reduced the qualifications for the job to mere sobriety. Despite the repeated pleas of consistories to the magistrates to find qualified men and to pay them a living wage as Dordt had requested, the quality of teaching throughout the United Republic was at best uneven, at worst the stuff of nightmare. Never would the adage, "Pay peanuts, get monkeys," prove so true.

But the diligent schoolmaster took care that Scripture verses were memorized, pious poems were learned, and that there was much singing at every level. Students memorized prayers and psalms for the beginning, middle, and end of the school day. They practiced for singing at church as well. Psalm singing played a significant role in Christian education from the start of the Reformation in the Netherlands. The first Reformed synod, at Wesel in 1568, insisted that all schoolmasters be able to lead school and congregational psalm singing. One

modern scholar of Reformed worship has remarked with admiration that generations of Hollanders knew almost the entire Psalter by heart. If Dordt had left no other learning legacy for us than this, the debt we owe would still be inestimable.

The consistory was to be deeply involved in the school. Dordt directed that the local minister with an elder, and, “if needed,” a local magistrate, should visit the schools frequently, ensuring that all was done decently and in good order, confirming that lessons unto godly citizenship were given, and questioning students in the Catechism. Dordt urged these visitors to treat all students kindly, but to be especially mindful of the youngest, and encouraged these visitors to hand out little prizes for those students who gave of themselves a good report. After four hundred years, the tender concern that the learned delegates of Dordt sought from all who instructed the children and young people still warms and informs the heart.

Dordt’s austere company of pastors and professors, themselves the product of some of the sternest education available in Europe, knew well how to win the hearts of children. And though corporal punishment in the form of spanking was expected, the Dutch delegates showed in their advice to schoolmasters that they were in full agreement with the Dutch proverb that warned, “A child who fears punishment and pain / Is broken in body and in brain.” Discipline unto godliness was not a course of daily beatings and cruel whippings—the staple of schooling throughout much of Europe at the time—but a patient, loving admonition given with corporal encouragement when needed. This idea of school discipline is another debt we owe, in part, to Dordt.

The deacons also had their role in education. Article 41 of Dordt’s Church Order pointedly asked if deacons took care of the poor and the schools. At this time, the state money given to the church was distributed by the diaconate for all the purposes a church might have. It was up to the deacons to make sure that sufficient money was kept aside for school use, including the teacher’s salary. Were they being diligent in this?

Part of this due diligence was augmenting the teacher’s meager salary by providing church work and pay for the teacher. Thus, many teachers were also song leaders, Scripture readers, church janitors, comforters of the sick, catechism teachers, and as circumstance demanded, fill-in sermonizers. It is no surprise that thirty years after Dordt, one quarter of Dutch pastors had first been schoolmasters, and this despite Dordt’s explicit discouragement of that career change.

Since this state salary and church pay were so small, parents had to pay out-of-pocket for all subjects taught

beyond catechism. There was a fee charged for instruction in each subject: so much for reading, a bit more for writing, still more for arithmetic, and so on. This tuition had to be collected personally by the teacher, weekly or monthly as the market would bear. But parental tuition even when added to other sources of income was insufficient to provide the teacher with a living wage. So local governments, in addition to providing side jobs for the teacher (such as dike monitor, toll-bridge operator, inspector of weights and measures) supplemented teacher pay through a system of use-taxes: so much on tobacco, so much on alcohol, so much on heating and cooking fuel, and so on. Thus, each parent paid taxes for the school in addition to the tuition for each subject taught to his child. But since the needy purchased little, they paid little in taxes, and they could afford the tuition fees not at all. What then of the poor?

Enter again the deacons. Dordt demanded that the poor have opportunity to be educated, but at the same time, had forbidden the church itself to add a single penny directly to the teacher’s salary. The solution was this: the diaconate could, on behalf of poor parents, make a payment to the teacher for a child’s education that would not be counted as official salary, but as the poor parents’ tuition and tax costs. Some diaconates believed that education was so important that receiving diaconal aid for any reason meant one was henceforth required to enroll his children in school. No schooling, no aid.

Lastly, there is that article in Dordt’s Church Order regarding the schools with which we are most familiar, Article 21. The original article read:

All consistories shall see to it that there are good schoolmasters who not only teach the children reading, writing, languages, and liberal arts, but also train them in godliness and in the catechism.

This did not mean that the churches were in ultimate charge of hiring teachers. It meant consistories had to petition the local government to hire qualified, Reformed people for the job. If these civic bodies were composed of godly men, things might go well. But sometimes these local boards refused to comply with the requests of consistories. Some saw such petitions as efforts to seize from the state its rightful control. Others, unfriendly toward the Calvinism of Dordt, put in place men of their own beliefs. Only seven years after the Synod, an Arminian became headmaster of the most prestigious preparatory school in Amsterdam.

Such preparatory schools readied students for the university training needed to be government administrators, lawyers, professors, and ministers. Article 21

addressed these schools explicitly, although we modern readers might miss the reference. The original Article 21 covered two side-by-side school systems. The first system was called the primary school, of which we have already spoken. These were the schools for most of the population and were the schools meant by the words “teach the children reading, writing.”

The other schools comprised what we would call the “college-prep” system and were covered by the words, “languages and the liberal arts.” The languages meant were Latin and Greek, and the liberal arts meant clear writing, logical thinking, and convincing argumentation. A young man might study in such a school from the ages of eight through eighteen after which he was eligible for university studies. Such learning was reserved only for those thought to be of university and ministerial material. Consistories and classes were told to seek out talented youth from all economic classes and to help pay for this education. The directives of Dordt helped promote a steady growth in both primary and preparatory schools, but especially in the growth of the prep schools. Nevertheless, one generation after Dordt, only about 1,500 young men nationwide were enrolled in such schools. Leadership and ministerial candidates would always be few.

All told, Dordt had a lasting effect on education in the Netherlands and wherever the Dutch settled throughout the world. At the time of the Synod, the seven provinces of the United Republic boasted the most print-centered culture in Europe. Dordt’s decisions regarding education reinforced that tradition of literacy. But Dordt’s great achievement was anchoring Christian education

to the doctrine of infant baptism, and thus, to the covenant. The next four centuries would see great upheavals of thought and deed in the world, great and overriding providences that brought changes in the relationship of church and state as well as in the responsibilities of church, home, and school regarding Christian education. These changes included developments in the doctrine of the covenant, as well as in what constituted a truly Reformed, Christian education. Finally, despite persecution from without and indifference from within, a portion of the Reformed community would come to confess that establishing and maintaining good, Reformed-Christian schools was the responsibility of the believing parents.

The struggle for Reformed educational principles and practices and the success of Christian education as we cherish it today form a story that belongs to the years after Dordt. It is the story of women and men working under different providences, in times and places and ways that the fathers of Dordt could not have imagined. But Dordt laid the foundation and set the mark for all Reformed education that would follow. Dordt hung the plumb line that all those who name themselves Reformed must meet—the simple rule of “baptize and teach.” Truly, the lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places. Praise God, our lines still run straight. Pray God, we will maintain.

Note: Due to space limitations, the bibliography for this article could not be included. If you desire a copy, please contact Mr. G. VanDerSchaaf.



Rev. Ryan Barnhill, pastor of the Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois

The Synod of Dordt and the Sabbath question

“Know the history of the church!” was an oft-repeated phrase throughout my seminary training. Officebearers and the people of God in the pew must know church history. We are not so arrogant as to cast aside this history and start anew every generation in our study of doctrine. When we wrestle with different issues, we must ask: “Has the church dealt with these matters in the past?” Specifically, this is a question we ask regarding

the subject of the Sabbath, a subject that generates a fair amount of questions and debate. We Reformed people are perhaps most familiar with instruction on the Sabbath in the Heidelberg Catechism’s explanation of the fourth commandment. What we might not realize is that the Synod of Dordt also had something to say on the Sabbath—a frequently overlooked gem in history, but one we intend briefly to examine.

Historical context

The Synod of Dordt is most well known for its formulation of five heads of doctrine to refute the errors of the Arminians. But the Synod involved itself in other important areas as well. After the international delegates from various countries departed, the Dutch delegates deliberated upon a variety of matters in what is called the *Post-Acta* (post-Acts). It was during this period that the delegates faced the Sabbath question: what relationship does the Old Testament Sabbath have to the Lord's Day of the New Testament, and what does this mean for the observance of the day?¹

The Sabbath debate at Dordt arose out of a concern some delegates had about Sabbath desecration in the town of Dordrecht. Discussion on the Sabbath issue spanned multiple sessions of Synod in the Spring of 1619. On May 17, 1619, at session 164, the Synod appealed to the States General to make laws against the growing profanation of the Sabbath. This action led to "a question concerning the necessity of observing the day of the Lord," a question that was real and pressing in the province of Zeeland. The Synod responded to this question by forming a committee to write up general rules on the Sabbath issue. Appointed to this committee were Johannes Polyander of Leiden, Franciscus Gomarus of Groningen, Anthonius Thysius of Harderwyk, and Antonius Walaëus of Middleburg, all of whom were theological professors. The professors were to arrange a private conference with the Zeeland delegates to discuss the Sabbath question and write up general rules on the issue. Finally, on May 17, at the 164th session, the Synod adopted the "rules on the observance of the Sabbath, or Lord's Day" (or: Dordt's *regulae*).²

Dordt's *regulae*

These "rules on the observance of the Sabbath, or Lord's Day" adopted by the Synod of Dordt are as follows:

1. There is in the fourth commandment of the divine law a ceremonial and a moral element.
2. The ceremonial element is the rest of the seventh day after creation, and the strict observance of that day imposed especially on the Jewish people.
3. The moral element consists in the fact that a certain definite day is set aside for worship and so much rest as is needful for worship and hallowed meditation.
4. The Sabbath of the Jews having been abolished,

the day of the Lord must be solemnly hallowed by Christians.

5. Since the times of the apostles this day has always been observed by the old catholic church.

6. This day must be so consecrated to worship that on that day we rest from all servile works, except those which charity and present necessity require; and also from all such recreations as interfere with worship.³

An explanation of these six points is in order. The first rule refers to a "ceremonial" element and "moral" element in the fourth commandment. The fourth commandment (Ex. 20:8-11) reads:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

By a "ceremonial" element in the fourth commandment, Dordt meant that there was an aspect of the commandment that belonged to the ceremonies of the Old Testament and that passed away. By a "moral" element in the fourth commandment, the Synod identified the element that yet abides in the New Testament.

The second rule locates the ceremonial element in the fourth commandment: rest on the *seventh* day (Saturday) and its strict observance imposed on the Jewish people.

The third rule states what the moral element in the fourth commandment is: a definite day to be set aside for worship and rest. Which day of the week this is, we are not yet told in this third rule. But Dordt grasped the heart of the fourth commandment: worship and rest, and that on a definite day.

The fourth rule follows logically from rules one to three. The day the Sabbath is observed has been changed from the "Sabbath of the Jews" (the seventh day, Saturday) in the Old Testament, to "the day of the Lord" (the first day, Sunday) in the New Testament. Now, in the New Testament, the *day of the Lord* must be solemnly hallowed by Christians. *Sunday* is the New Testament Sabbath.

The fifth rule has its eye on the observance of the Lord's Day by the church in her history. This day, the first day of the week, was observed during the time of the apostles. Although the Synod supplied no scriptural

1 Daniel R. Hyde, "Regulae de Observatione Sabbathi: The Synod of Dort's (1618-19) Deliverance on the Sabbath." *Puritan Reformed Journal* 4, no. 1 (2012): 163. Also found at <https://www.academia.edu>.

2 Hyde, 163.

3 Hyde, 164-65.

proof in the rule itself, one such passage is Acts 20:6, 7: “And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” These verses describe an official worship service on the *first day* of the week. Furthermore, Sunday was observed as the New Testament Sabbath after the time of the apostles, which is the repeated testimony of the early church fathers.

The sixth rule gives some practical points on the observance of this first day. Servile works and recreations that interfere with worship are forbidden—from such servile work and recreation there is to be rest. Works that “charity and present necessity require” are the only exception to this prohibition of ordinary labor. The requirement is that the day be consecrated to worship; it is here that the Synod revisits the heart of the fourth commandment: worship. It ought not to be that recreation fills the day, for that would interfere with such worship.

Some observations

First, these rules on the Sabbath are balanced. The Synod did not slide into the ditch on one side of the road, maintaining the *seventh day* Sabbath yet in the New Testament. Neither did the delegates fall into the ditch on the other side of the road, saying that the fourth commandment is purely ceremonial and has very little, if any, application to the New Testament Christian. Instead, Dordt recognized the fourth commandment as belonging to the *moral* law, while locating the ceremonial element in the commandment. To fall into one of those two ditches has not been uncommon in the church’s history, which is why we can be thankful for Dordt’s carefulness and clarity in this area.

Second, there is much wisdom in Dordt’s *regulae*, particularly rule six. When it comes to practical points on the observance of the Lord’s Day, rule six does not present a long list of “do’s and don’ts.” Dordt was not interested in answering the question, “May we do this on Sunday? May we do that on Sunday?” Instead, the sixth point is both brief and profound, centering on worship on Sunday. Dordt steers us away from making long lists and asking such questions, and instead teaches us to ask

this question concerning the Lord’s Day: “How can this day, the whole day, be a day of worship to the God of our salvation?” Such is the wise viewpoint of Dordt.

Third, these six statements represent (although not exclusively) the historic position of Reformed churches on the Sabbath question. For this reason alone, these rules are of value to the Reformed believer. The Christian Reformed Church, our mother church, considered the *regulae* to be the historic position on the Sabbath for Reformed churches. The Christian Reformed Church Synod adopted these six formulations in 1881, and reaffirmed them in 1926 in the context of controversy over a minister’s sermon.⁴ Van Dellen and Monsma comment,

These six points were adopted by our own Synod of 1881. And according to our Synod of 1926...they must be considered doctrinal in their nature and hence binding

and also in full accord with the fundamental principles expressed in Lord’s Day 38 of the Catechism, to the effect that the fourth commandment also applies to the New Testament Church in its observance of the day of rest and worship. Synod also declared that these six points are an official interpretation of our confession and not an

addition to our Forms of Unity.⁵

That these six rules are the historically Reformed position on the Sabbath ought to be a wake-up call to those Reformed churches that have neglected to preach on Sabbath observance, and to those in the pew who view Sunday as another day for their work and pleasure. These rules set down by Dordt are a sharp reminder for us, too. We know what God requires in the fourth commandment. Our ministers preach on the fourth commandment. But what *is* the Lord’s Day like on a practical level for us? Dordt was concerned that recreation not interfere with worship. But do we switch this around, having a concern that worship not interfere with recreation? Dordt’s position on the Sabbath is as relevant today as it was in the past.

Study these six formulations of Dordt for yourself. Perhaps you can spend next Sunday afternoon discussing them with your family. And then, thank God for raising up men to bring clarity to this issue, for the good of His church then and now.

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4 Hyde, “*Regulae de Observatione Sabbathi*,” 180-81.

5 Idzerd Van Dellen and Martin Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), 276.



Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa

The big three: The Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism at the Synod of Dordt

In Latin there is a bit of doggerel that goes like this: *omne trium perfectum* (“every set of three is perfect or complete”). In English it is referred to as the “rule of three” or “good things come in threes.” Examples could be given from world history (think, the Big Three in World War II) and literature (think, Tolkien’s trilogy). But especially does this rule hold true for Reformed believers in our Three Forms of Unity. The Holy Spirit has entrusted to us a precious triad, a confessional triumvirate: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt.

There is a wonderful unity among this trio. Not only is there a unity between them from the point of view of content, but there is also a historical connection. The Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism were instrumental at the Synod of Dordt (1618-19). We can see this in two ways: first, the two earlier confessions played a part in the doctrinal controversy as a whole; and second, their content was examined and affirmed by the Synod.¹

The confessions in the controversy

In the first place, let us briefly examine the part that the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism played in the controversy at large.

Since the Belgic Confession (1561) had its origin in the Lowlands, it always had an important place in the hearts of God’s people there. But so also did they have a great appreciation for the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), though it came out of the German Palatinate. Shortly after it was written, the Heidelberg Catechism was translated into Dutch, and it was adopted by several classes and provincial synods in the Netherlands in subsequent years.

In the years leading up to the Synod of Dordt, however, trouble began to brew in the churches. There were ministers who deviated from the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism. Some refused to sign their names to the two confessions at all, while others subscribed but did so tongue-in-cheek, continuing to preach and teach contrary to the confessions. At the time, very little was done to hold such men accountable.

It was in this context that Jacob Arminius rose to prominence. He first served as a pastor in Amsterdam, and then in 1602 he was appointed to serve as a professor of theology in Leiden. Like others, he also expressed misgivings about the confessions. For example, in 1593, Arminius called into question the teaching of Article 16 of the Belgic Confession on the doctrine of eternal election. He claimed that the language of the article was too difficult to explain.

After his death, his followers—called Arminians or Remonstrants—took up the cause he had championed. They continued to raise suspicions about the orthodoxy of the confessions. In 1610, they made a formal request for a synod to be convened at which the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism could be revised.

The Reformed refused to be swayed by this thinking. Rather than questioning the orthodoxy of the confessions, they consistently used the clear language of the confessions to refute the false doctrines of the Arminians. The Reformed also called for a national synod to be held, not to revise the confessions but to expose the Arminians’ deviation from the confessions.

The response of the Arminians was subtle. Rather than openly rejecting the teaching of the confessions, they followed their namesake’s lead by arguing that the quotations from the creeds were not clear.

These troubling circumstances in the churches eventually led to the Synod of Dordt being convened. Once the Arminians appeared, the Synod demanded of them that they present their objections to the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism in writing. The Arminians stalled. Up to this point their objections to the creeds had been expressed verbally or only in general terms in writing. On three different occasions the

¹ The information that follows is drawn largely from the following three sources: Nicolaas Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Richard De Ridder, *The Church Orders of the Sixteenth Century Reformed Churches of the Netherlands* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1987); and H. H. Kuyper, *De Post-Acta, of Nahandelingen van de Nationale Synode van Dordrecht* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, 1899).

president of the Synod, Johannes Bogerman, ordered them to submit to the Synod and present their objections. Eventually they did but, rather than honestly stating their objections, they presented them in the form of questions. According to Gootjes, “This allowed the Remonstrants to bring forward their objections without having to state their own opinions.”

These questions were given to two committees of pre-advice. The objections to the Heidelberg Catechism were naturally given to the delegates from the Palatinate. And the objections to the Belgic Confession were placed in the hands of Dutch delegates. Based on the advice of these two committees, the Synod rejected the objections of the Arminians.

Later, when the Synod drafted and adopted the Canons, they still had the earlier two confessions in view. Although the Canons has become a third confession equal to the other two, that is not how the delegates viewed their work. They saw their work not as the drafting of a third confession but simply as explaining and expanding upon the truths set forth in the other two. The Formula of Subscription bears this out when it speaks of “the Confession and Catechism of the Reformed Churches, together with the explanation of some points of the aforesaid doctrine made by the National Synod or Dordt.”

The confessions at the synod

The second way in which the Synod of Dordt is related to the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism is through the Synod’s addressing the content of these confessions.

The Synod did not spend a great deal of time on the Heidelberg Catechism. It did not revise the text of the Catechism at all. It did, however, make a decision reaffirming the practice of preaching weekly through the Catechism. There were ministers who were negligent in carrying this out, and there were church members who opposed it in the interests of their leisure activities on Sunday afternoons. The Synod decided that ministers must preach through the Catechism on Sunday afternoons, “even if the ministers in the beginning have to preach only for a few hearers, yes, if only for their own families.”

A great deal more time was spent on the Belgic Confession. The Synod treated the Confession in two significant ways. First, the Synod declared that the Confession is a faithful summary of the Word of God. Because the Confession was taking heavy fire from the Arminian camp, particularly Article 16 on election, the delegates wisely reaffirmed it and instilled confidence in their people’s minds with regard to it. What is worthy of note is

that this decision was taken on April 30, while the foreign delegates were still present. According to Gootjes, “The delegates urged the Dutch theologians to stand by this orthodox, pious and straightforward confession till the day of Christ’s return.” The fact that the foreign delegates also affirmed the Confession means that it was not just a Dutch confession but a catholic creed.

The Synod addressed the Belgic Confession on a second occasion. After the foreign delegates had departed, the Dutch delegates took up the matter of a minor revision of the text of the Confession. This was necessary because there was no uniform text to be found, but rather there were many different versions with varied wordings in circulation. The delegates wanted one, uniform text to be used in the churches. This was not the major doctrinal overhaul desired by the Arminians, but a minor revision in wording and clarity.

The delegates labored carefully over the revision. Even though the foreign delegates were no longer present, some had given their written opinions on a revision of the Confession prior to their leaving, and these were carefully consulted. Eventually, the final text was approved in both French and Dutch. These official versions were published in 1619, shortly after the Synod had adjourned, and an unofficial Latin version appeared the next year.

The Synod addressed the substance of both the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism in one other way: through the drafting of a Formula of Subscription. Earlier classes and provincial synods had required that officebearers subscribe to the confessions, but there was no official standard for the churches as a whole to follow. This was an important issue in the minds of the delegates, because the Arminians were arguing for a loosening of subscription requirements. In response, the Synod adopted a Formula of Subscription for ministers, professors of theology, and school masters. The subscription of elders and deacons was not addressed, but was left up to the individual classes to enforce their subscription. In later years, the Formula would be modified to apply to elders and deacons as well.

The Formula that was adopted included four main requirements. First, it demanded that officebearers express their complete agreement with the teaching of the three confessions. Second, it required that they promise to teach and defend these truths. Third, the Formula compelled them to reject all errors that militate against the truths of the confessions. And fourth, it obligated them to report any doubts they might have with regard to the confessions and to be willing to submit themselves to an examination of their convictions if such would be required.

By means of these decisions, the Synod was determined not only to eradicate the Arminian error but also to safeguard orthodoxy in the churches.

The confessions in conclusion

There is much that could be drawn from this history, but I will limit my points to three, brief ones.

First, the Three Forms of Unity are a safeguard for Reformed churches. They have determined for us, once and for all, what is biblical and Reformed and what is not. By means of the creeds, the church is preserved in her purity and is able to ward off the false doctrines that threaten her. There is safety and confidence for the Reformed minister when all his preaching and teaching is done within the bounds of the confessions. There is safety and confidence for the Reformed believer when he knows that what he and his family are being fed is within the bounds of the confessions.

Second, the Three Forms of Unity promote true, beautiful unity. By means of the confessions, the church of the present is united with the church of the past. The Protestant Reformed Churches and other faithful, creedal churches are united with the church of

Dordt. By means of the confessions, the church in one part of the world is also united with God's people in other parts of the world. This was beautifully displayed at the Synod of Dordt itself, when the delegates from different lands all affirmed their mutual commitment to the creeds. Today we see the same, when God's people from different lands, languages, cultures, and backgrounds stand together in mutual commitment to the Reformed confessions.

Third, all this ought to stir up within us a renewed appreciation for and commitment to the Three Forms of Unity. One of the great dangers that confronts us presently is the danger of dead orthodoxy. This is the sin of which Jesus warned, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matt. 15:8; cf. Is. 29:13). The danger is that, though we have this rich confessional heritage, it means very little to us in actuality. There are many who celebrate the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordt this year and yet are not committed to the truth of the Canons and the other Reformed confessions. God forbid that this ever be true of us. May He continue to grant us a holy zeal and deep love for the rich confessional heritage that is ours.



Prof. Russell Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

The States General and the Great Synod

The ruling body in the Netherlands at the time of the Synod of Dordrecht was the States General—a gathering of delegates representing the seven provinces that comprised the Netherlands in that day. The seven provinces were Gelderland, Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Friesland, Overijssel, and Groningen, of which Holland was the largest and dominant. Called "the states of Holland" (North Holland and South Holland), it controlled much of the coast and contained many of the major Dutch cities including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Dordrecht, Leiden, and the Hague. Each of the seven provinces had but one vote in the States General. Initially, a motion required unanimous approval to be enacted. Later a majority would suffice, and yet, a majority vote without Holland's approval would rarely be carried out.

This was a fairly new form of government for the

Dutch. The provinces of the Lowlands were fiercely independent and were not eager to work together. The Dutch had thrown off the rule of Roman Catholic Spain through much bloodshed. The Twelve-Year Truce was signed with Spain in 1609, and the provinces now faced the very divisive religious conflicts brought on by Arminius. Though Arminius died in 1609, his followers, the Remonstrants, promoted his theology, while the Counter-Remonstrants defended the Reformed faith of the churches summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession.

The close relation between the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and the government had been forged in the battle to drive out the Spanish on one hand, and to break the death grip of the Roman Catholic Church on the other. But the result of this joint endeavor was that when the priests of Rome were put out of a given city,

the local magistrates gave the Reformed congregation the use of the church building but retained ownership. The local magistrates also had power over the preachers in that they approved the minister to be called and paid his salary. The control of the state over the church also included this: No *national* synod might be called without the approval of the States General. Significant in that context is this: In many of the cities and towns of the province *Holland*, the town councils favored the Remonstrants. For years, therefore, the Holland province resisted the calling of a national synod to deal with the Arminian heresy that was spreading in the Reformed church in the Netherlands.

Actually, there was an exception to that. The Remonstrants regularly called for a national synod to revise the existing confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession. In 1606, the States General had approved the calling of a national synod with that provision. The Reformed churches refused to call a national synod for that purpose, knowing that the Remonstrants intended to corrupt or even remove the doctrines of sovereign grace, especially election.

As the conflict grew, the States General faced the issue again. In June and again in September of 1617, four of the seven provinces voted to convene a national synod, and in May of 1618, Overijssel joined the majority. However, the provinces of Holland and Utrecht steadfastly resisted.

In the meantime, Prince Maurice stepped in. Prince Maurice, of the house of Orange, had long held the position of “stadtholder” in five of the provinces, including Holland and Utrecht. The stadtholder had authority over appointment of regents to the town councils—an authority that had long been unexercised. Until 1618, Prince Maurice sided with the Reformed, and with his army he systematically travelled from city to city in Holland, replacing the regents on the town councils—from Remonstrant to Counter-Remonstrant men. With Holland’s stiff opposition removed, the States General could move forward with the plans for a national synod. And the States General took ownership of the endeavor.

Preparations for the synod

The States General first determined who would be invited to attend. It was determined that, from the Netherlands, delegates from ten provincial synods, (including the French-speaking Walloon churches), and one group of theological professors from five Dutch universities would be invited. The States General also determined the Remonstrant preachers to be summoned. Of tremendous significance was the decision to invite Reformed men from England, France, various regions

of Germany, and from various Swiss cities, including Geneva (which still maintained the theology of John Calvin). The States General sent letters of invitation to the heads of state in foreign countries, except for France, the king being a devoted Roman Catholic, where the invitation went to the Reformed Churches.

The States General determined that the provincial synods must pay the expenses of the delegates that each sent. They voted to raise 100,000 guilders to pay the expenses of the foreign delegations, as well as those of the Walloon synod.

The synod’s location was set by the States General as the city of Dordrecht.

The great synod

The States General determined to have provincial deputies representing the States General sit in on all the meetings of the Synod (18 delegates came). The synodical deputies were to see to that this principle was observed at Synod: “The National Synod holden under the authority of their High Mightinesses the States General.” The synodical deputies opened the meeting of the Synod and welcome all the delegates. They received and examined the letters of the foreign delegates. The synodical deputies were to ensure that no political matters were ever raised at synod. The States General instructed them to “behave themselves...[in such a way] that they may tend to the Good, to the Peace and Unity of the Churches and Communities of these provinces...; and shall moreover do whatever may tend to promote the interests of the Reformed Christian religion.”¹

In fact, the synodical deputies stayed in regular contact with the States General the full six months that the Synod met. On two occasions, the *Acta* (minutes) of the Synod were presented to the States General in The Hague for its approval. (In both instances, the minutes had to do with the treatment of the Remonstrants.) A final report was given to the States General on May 30, though the minutes were not then presented for approval.

One significant advantage of the States General’s authority was that the Remonstrants were compelled to cooperate with the Synod. When the Remonstrants did not, it was considered rebellion against the States General. When Bogerman dismissed the Remonstrants from the Synod, he had the approval of government officials. In addition, until the Synod was finished, the States General forbade the printing of any record of the

1 Geeraert Brandt, *The History of the Reformation and Other Ecclesiastical Transaction in and about the Netherlands*, vol. 3 (London: T. Wood, 1720), 12.

synodical proceedings or any Remonstrant pamphlet, and they required the Remonstrants to remain in Dordrecht. These injunctions were designed to prevent the Remonstrants traversing the Netherlands with propaganda against the Synod.

When the Synod completed the Canons, the States General gave an elaborate banquet for all the delegates and sent the foreign delegates on their way with a gold

the Canons and condemned the theology of the Remonstrants, the States General enforced the deposition and/or exile of the Remonstrant preachers. On the negative side, the States General refused to approve the changes in the Church Order that would have reduced the authority of the States General over the Reformed churches in the Netherlands.

Lingering significance

The Reformed church in our day is not placed under the authority of the state, for Christ is the King of His church. Subsequent history demonstrated the importance of the church being free from governmental control. At the Synod of Dordt the proper relation of church and state was not restored, and the government's control remained firmly in place. Over 200 years would elapse before another national synod could be convened. In that period, the Reformed churches apostatized, bringing about the necessity of the Reformation of 1834, the Secession (*Afscheiding*), under Rev. H. De Cock.

Yet, God providentially determined that in this significant moment of the Reformed church (1618-19) the government exercised significant control over the church, for the good. The prayer of Balthasar Lydius at the Synod's opening session expressed hearty thanks to God for Prince Maurice and the States General for their role in the great Synod (for that prayer, see *SB*, Nov. 1, 2018).

In the providence of God, this monumental, international Synod convened in Dordrecht under the auspices of the States General. Without the support of the States General, it is unlikely that the many foreign delegates could have come, faced the Arminian error squarely, and worked for months to hammer out the magnificent confession we know as the Canons of Dordt. The Reformed churches from about Europe gathered to condemn the theology of Arminius and to set forth the truths of sovereign grace. There has never been a gathering like Dordt, either before it or since. God used this Synod to preserve the great Reformation—its truths, its liturgy, its presbyterial government, and even its emphasis on godly living.

“The king's heart,” or in this case, the States General's, “is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1). And the Reformed church through the ages has reaped the blessings. All praise to God!



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commemorative medallion. (The Dutch delegates were given a silver medallion.)

The States General oversaw the printing of the *Acts* of the Synod, intended especially for the eyes of foreign rulers. The States General determined the content of the *Acts* with a view to strengthening the ties between the foreign powers and the Netherlands. The Twelve-Year Truce would end in only two years. Should the conflict with Catholic Spain be renewed, the Netherlands hoped for the support of the Protestant nations. The *Acts* were sent with a dedicatory letter that stated:

Moreover, so that it may be well-known to all how highly we regard you, kings, princes, counts, cities, magistrates, who have readily and generously stood with us in this so godly and lofty cause, also how highly we regard the erudition, godliness, trustworthiness and uprightness of the most eminent theologians whom you sent; but especially, so that no one can have doubts about our unanimity in religion, of those who were present in this venerable synod, we by our authority, following the example of the greatest princes, publish the *Acta*, as they were read and approved there [in the synod] and afterward carefully edited by our order and mandate.²

Although the States General did not interfere with the substantive deliberations on the Canons, its authority hung heavy over the Synod. After the Synod adopted

2 Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser, Herman J. Selderhuis, Eds., *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae (1618-1619)*, vol. 1 (Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2015), xlv.

Announcements

Teacher needed

The Edmonton PR Christian School is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2019–2020 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1–4, and the board is willing to work with the teacher on a curriculum suited to their preference. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com.

Preschool teacher needed

Adam Christian Preschool is in urgent need of a teacher/program director for the upcoming 2019/2020 school year. The position will require teaching one class which will meet twice per week for 3 hours each. Days of week and AM/PM schedule is flexible. Persons with teaching degrees or qualifications in childcare or similar are encouraged to apply. To apply or for any questions/further details please contact David Dijkstra on 6165589043 or David@kleynelectric.com.

Call to Synod!!

Synod 2018 appointed First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI the calling church for the 2019 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2019 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 11 2019 at 8:00 A.M., in the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 10, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. R. VanOverloop, president of the 2018 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Dan Monsma, 460 Comstock Blvd. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505. Phone: 616 308-3664.

Consistory of
First Protestant Reformed Church
Dan Monsma, Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

- May 5 “Love Hopes All Things”
I Corinthians 13:7
- May 12 “Love Endures All Things”
I Corinthians 13:7
- May 19 “Love Never Fails”
I Corinthians 13:8
- May 26 “The Permanence of Love”
I Corinthians 13:8-11



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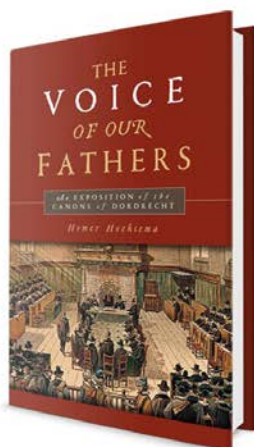
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Announcements continued

THE VOICE OF OUR FATHERS *An Exposition of the Canons of Dordrecht*

HOMER C. HOEKSEMA, author

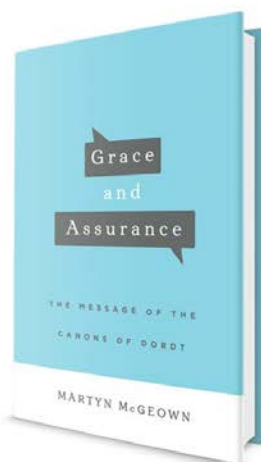


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