

**GRACE WORTH FIGHTING FOR
RECAPTURING THE VISION OF GOD'S GRACE IN
THE CANONS OF DORT**

By Daniel R. Hyde

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A famous portrait of the Synod of Dort
By Pouwels Weyts in 1621

To all my confessional Anglican friends on both sides of “the pond”:

Fighting to preserve,
Laboring to propagate,
An inheritance rich in grace.

*“As for the aspersion of Arminianism, I can testify that in our joint employment at the Synod of Dort you [Joseph Hall] were as far from it as myself. And I know that no man can embrace it in the Doctrine of Predestination and Grace but he must first desert the Articles agreed upon by the Church of England, nor in the point of perseverance but he must vary from the common Tenet and received opinion of our best approved Doctors in the English Church.”*¹

—John Davenant, 1629

¹ In Joseph Hall, *The Reconciler, or An epistle pacificatorie of the seeming differences of opinion concerning the true being and visibilitie of the Roman Church Enlarged with the addition of letters of resolution, for that purpose, from some famous divines of our Church* (London: Printed for Nath: Butter, 1629), 84–85.

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A NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS

IN THE following work I will abbreviate the Canons of Dort as “CD.” As I’ll explain below, there are five heads or points of doctrine (*doctrinae caput*) and each have multiple positive articles as well as rejections of the errors of the Remonstrants (Arminians). When I’m referring to a point of doctrine and one of its *articles*, I will abbreviate as 1.1 (first point of doctrine, article 1). When referring to a point of doctrine and of its *rejection of errors*, I will abbreviate 1.RE 1 (first point of doctrine, rejection of errors 1).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACCORDING TO one recent survey, after the initial 90% of manuscript proposals are weeded out, of the remaining 10% only 13.4% were successful in being accepted by a traditional publisher.¹ I know the feeling; nearly all my book proposals have been rejected *at least* once before finding a publisher who says yes. This book's story includes being rejected by five publishers—"A book on what? That won't sell." Each rejection became an opportunity for me to sharpen its focus. In God's providence, this led me to the Davenant Institute. I thank Joseph Minich, editor in chief, for reaching out to me and encouraging a proposal and Brad Littlejohn, president, who ultimately had a vision for bringing this work to the public. And since all books require a lot of behind the scenes work that never gets mentioned on an acknowledgments page, I thank Michael Lynch and Chase Vaughn for their historical theological insights and April LeHoullier, whose editorial assistance was invaluable in making this a more readable book.

With every book I write I am reminded of my congregation, the Oceanside United Reformed Church. You are a model of being "hearers and doers" (Jas. 1:22) of the Word of God's grace that comes to you week in and week out. May the Lord continue to pour out his grace upon us that we might demonstrate that grace to the lost!

Last but certainly not least is my wife, Karajean, who holds the army of children at the gate of my study at bay so that I may write! I pray all four of you—Cyprian, Caiden, Daxton, and Sadie—never know a day outside the grace of the triune God in whose name you were baptized. You're why grace is worth fighting for!

¹ <https://medium.com/publishizer/calculating-the-odds-of-getting-a-traditional-publisher-798b1c7b94b0> (Accessed February 9, 2019).

PREFACE

THE END of 2018 through the beginning of 2019 will mark the four hundredth anniversary of the Synod of Dort (held November 13–May 29) and its greatest achievement: the Canons of Dort.¹ These words may not mean much to you—yet. This **synod**² or ecclesiastical assembly was “one of the most remarkable gatherings of protestant divines ever assembled”³ as professors, pastors, and politicians from throughout Reformed regions in Europe gathered in the city of **Dort** in the Netherlands to debate and deliberate how to respond to the teachings of Jacobus (James) Arminius (1559–1609) and his followers. The result was its **canons**⁴ or theological rules. While there is increasingly a wealth of English material already in print on Reformation and post-Reformation confessions of faith such as the Belgic Confession (1561),⁵ Heidelberg Catechism (1563),⁶ and Westmin-

¹ Also spelled Dordt or Dordrecht.

² From the Greek *συνοδία*, “a caravan, a group of travelers.” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Second edition, 1958; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 791.

³ Anthony Milton, “Introduction,” in *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort (1618–1619)*, ed. Anthony Milton, Church of England Record Society 13 (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2005), xvii.

⁴ From the Greek *κανών*, which originally referred to a straight rod and therefore a rule or standard. By the second century AD, Christians used this word to speak of “the rule of faith.” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 403.

⁵ See Daniel R. Hyde, *With Heart and Mouth: An Exposition of the Belgic Confession* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 2008), and especially the bibliography on pp. 533–43.

ster Standards (1648),⁷ there is scant material on the Canons.⁸

I don't precisely recall the first time I encountered the Canons of Dort, but what I do know is that ever since they have been fascinating to me. Over the course of many years I've read what I could when I could on them, researching their history and theology to equip myself to teach and even preach occasionally their doctrines. Knowing the four hundredth anniversary year of 2018–2019 was on the horizon, I began consolidating notes. Having written a commentary on the Belgic Confession of Faith, I desired to do something similar for the Canons. Since four hundredth anniversaries don't occur often for those of us whose "span" is but "seventy or even by reason of strength eighty" (Ps. 90:10), I would like to lead you who long for a greater knowledge and deeper application of what it means to say "by grace [I] have been saved" (Eph. 2:5, 8). To do this we'll delve into the Reformed vision of God's grace presented in the Canons of Dort.⁹

We sing hymns about grace: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me." For those who prefer Psalm-singing: "O Lord, my God, most earnestly my heart would seek thy face, within thy holy house once more to see thy glorious grace."¹⁰ Nowadays it's a cottage in-

⁶ For bibliographies of primary and secondary works on the Heidelberg Catechism, see: Lyle D. Bierma, *The Theology of the Heidelberg Catechism: A Reformation Synthesis*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013), 231–42, and *A Faith Work Teaching: The Heidelberg Catechism's Enduring Heritage*, ed. Jon D. Payne and Sebastian Heck (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 263–69.

⁷ For bibliographies of primary and secondary works on the Westminster Standards, see J. V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 399–414, and Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Readings Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 369–80.

⁸ The most up-to-date scholarship is found in *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)*, ed. Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg, Brill's Series in Church History 49 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

⁹ I will not spend time in this book defending the practice of writing and confessing creeds and confessions. I've done that elsewhere and refer you to the following: *The Good Confession: An Exploration of the Christian Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006); *Welcome to a Reformed Church: A Guide for Pilgrims* (2010; Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, eighth printing 2017). See also Carl R. Trueman, *The Creedal Imperative* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

¹⁰ A versification of Psalm 63 in *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* (Willow Grove, PA: Trinity Psalter Hymnal Joint Venture, 2018), 63B.

dustry to talk about “gospel-centered” everything related to Christianity, but do we know what we’re singing when “grace” leaves our lips? Our Reformation forefathers at Dort did.

Whether you’re a pastor, member of a historic Reformed denomination, part of a network of “new Calvinist” churches and church plants, or even a person who thinks “Calvinism” is bunk, I’m going to assume you’re unfamiliar with the material in the Canons. So I’ll open up by giving you a lay of the land to know the “who, what, when, where, and why.” History is full of material, so I’ll try to keep the story going with applications to recapture your attention. Since God’s grace proclaimed in the Word of God is always under assault, it’s important to go back in history to the theological and spiritual battle that led to the Synod and Canons of Dort back in the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries. The only cure for our “chronological snobbery,” as Oxford University professor C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) described us, is to engage history.¹¹ Grace was worth fighting for back then; it still is!

The heart of this book is to follow the contours of the Canons themselves to get into their content, which describe the beauties and depths of God’s grace. I have two aims as we go through this material. First, each chapter on the positive articles (chs. 1, 3, 5, 7) will open by explaining the teachings of the followers of Arminius that led to the synod, show how these teachings have contemporary analogies today, and then trace the history of Western Christian thought on these subjects. I do this in an attempt to reassess the popular view that the Canons are “Reformed *distinctives*” by recapturing and retrieving their catholicity. My second aim in these chapters on the articles and rejections (chs. 2, 4, 6, 8) is to recapture and retrieve the riches of God’s grace so that we’re built up. There’s no sense in recapturing and retrieving something if you’re not going to use it! Carl Trueman said, “The past is the church’s past and something from which we need to draw help for the present in an appreciative, thoughtful and critical manner.”¹² As a pastor myself, I’ll lay out the material with plenty of headings and division so that whether you’re a pastor, study group leader, or just reading for

¹¹ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (1955; New York: Harcourt Trade Publishers, reprinted 1966), 204, 205, 211, 214.

¹² Carl R. Trueman, “Foreword,” in *Beyond Calvin: Essays on the Diversity of the Reformed Tradition*, ed. W. Brad Littlejohn and Jonathan Tomes, Proceedings of the 4th Annual Convivium Irenicum (Lincoln, NE: Davenant Trust, 2017), viii.

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personal edification, this material can be useful in various settings.

Throughout the Canons we'll see how God's grace in predestination must be preached and understood by God's people in the context of our sinfulness and God's free grace in Jesus Christ. We'll study how God's grace in Christ's satisfaction on the cross is necessary to satisfy God's wrath toward our sins and that this message of "It is finished" (John 19:30) must be preached indiscriminately. We'll consider how God's grace in the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration is understood best against the backdrop of our original state and subsequent depravity, which means that human reason and the law of God cannot bring us new life. Therefore a work no less powerful than creation and resurrection is necessary. We'll conclude by seeing how God's grace in the preservation/perseverance of the saints is vital to us because of our continual struggles with sin and our sinful propensity to fall into such heinous sins that would even temporarily make us feel lost again. Yet God is faithful to renew to repentance and restore to his grace. Weaved in and out of this material are various practical aspects of the doctrine of God's grace that we need to apply to our lives: why evangelize if God predestines; the response of humility by the awestruck sinner; the use of means of grace, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; striving for godliness; and the important perennial topic of assurance.

In sum, although the following description is anachronistic, what we'll see is that "the main focus of the Canons is on the *Missio Dei* (the mission of God): God's redemption of the cosmos through the saving work of Jesus Christ, applied to the hearts of his people by the Holy Spirit."¹³ That's how grand and great God's grace is; that's why it was and still is worth fighting for against all enemies "foreign and domestic."

It's "amazing grace!"

¹³ Anthony Hoekema, "The Missionary Focus of the Canons of Dort," *Calvin Theological Journal* (November 1972): 210.

TIMELINE

- 1559 Birth of Jakob Hermanszoon (Jacobus Arminius)
- 1573 William of Orange adopts Reformed faith in Netherlands
- 1575 University of Leiden established
- 1582 Arminius begins studies in Geneva
- 1588 Arminius ordained in Amsterdam
- 1591 Controversy over Arminius's sermons through Romans 7
- 1594 Franciscus Gomarus appointed professor at Leiden University
- 1602 Leiden professors Lucas Trelcatius and Franciscus Junius the Elder die
- 1603 Arminius appointed professor at Leiden University
- 1604 Arminius and Gomarus conference on predestination
- 1608 Arminius presents his *Declaration of Sentiments* to the States General
- 1609 Death of Arminius
- 1610 The *Remonstrance* published
- 1611 Conference at The Hague
The *Counter-Remonstrance* published
- 1618 Synod of Dordrecht commences (Nov. 13)
- 1619 Remonstrants dismissed from the synod (Jan. 14)
Canons of Dort published (April 23)
Synod convenes (May 29)

INTRODUCTION: WHY GRACE WAS (AND STILL IS) WORTH FIGHTING FOR

WIJ STRIJDEN voor de Dordtse leer, omdat die is van God de Heer! Translated into English from Dutch, this means, “We fight for the doctrine of Dort, because it is from God the Lord!” These words from the pen of Lambertus G. C. Ledebouer (1808–1863) became a rallying cry of early nineteenth-century Reformed Christians in the Netherlands as they struggled against the tide of theological indifference and liberalism. It’s a launching point for us to say that regardless of where or when you live, the doctrines of God’s grace found in the Word of God are always under assault. Paul fought against the legalism of neonomianism in his letter to the Galatians (e.g., 2:21; 5:4) and against antinomianism in his letter to the Romans (e.g., 5:20–6:2). It sounds strange to put the two words, “fight” and “grace,” side by side. Yet this is precisely what Jude did: “*contend* for the faith...for certain people have crept in unnoticed...who pervert the *grace* of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (vv. 3–4).¹ Historic Reformation baptismal services even go so far to say that in baptism we are called “manfully to fight under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ’s faithful soldier and servant unto his life’s end.”²

¹ On Jude, see Daniel R. Hyde, *Content Yet Contending: Jude* (Welwyn Garden City, UK: EP Books, 2017).

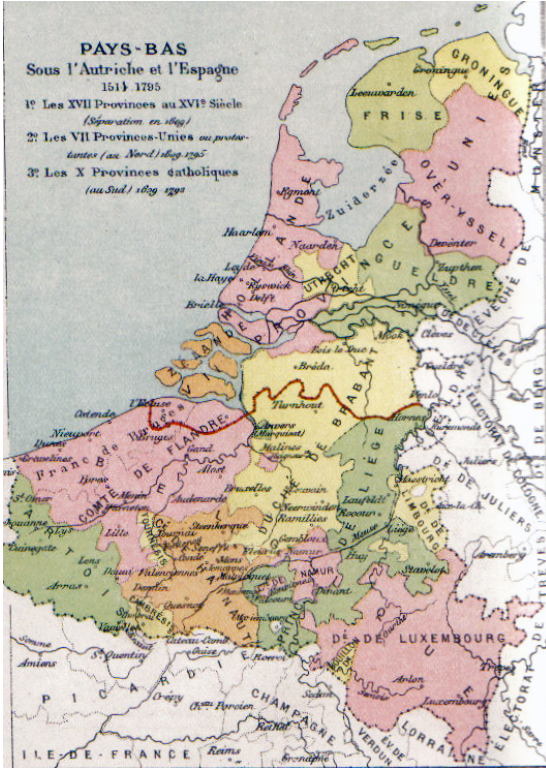
² “The Ministration of Publick Baptism of Infants to Be Used in the Church,” in the Book of Common Prayer (1662; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 263. This language is also a part of the historic Dutch Reformed liturgy for

In this book I want to go back with you to the beginning of the seventeenth century to a major theological and spiritual fight about grace that culminated at the Synod of Dort and its major result: the Canons of Dort. If we never go back and learn the lessons of history, we'll remain perpetually

infantile in our faith. Since this same spiritual fight for the doctrine of God's grace to sinners continues today, going back and learning from the experiences of those who have gone us before will equip and inspire us to "fight the good fight of the faith" (1 Tim. 6:12).

THE REFORMATION GOES DOWN TO THE NETHERLANDS

The strife at the Synod of Dort was just one episode in a larger drama that hit the scene of Europe in



The Netherlands in the sixteenth century

what we know as the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation. The Reformation, though, didn't come out of nowhere or even start on October 31, 1517, with Martin Luther but was rooted in a series of lengthy medieval debates.³ In this book, though, we'll focus our attention on late sixteenth-

baptism: *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Board of Publications of the Christian Reformed Church, 1976), 125, 139.

³ See especially the works of Heiko Oberman: *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (1963; rev. ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967); *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thoughts Illustrated by Key Documents*, trans. Paul L. Nyhus (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966); *The Dawn of the Reformation: Essays in Late Medieval and Early Reformation Thought* (1986; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992); *The Two Reformations: The Journey from the*

and early seventeenth-century Netherlands.⁴

At the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation, the Netherlands (“Low Countries”) consisted of seventeen independent territories in what today are the Netherlands, Belgium, northern France, and Luxembourg.⁵ In those days the Holy Roman emperor Charles V (1500–1558) ruled these lands and was very popular in doing so. Proving that all politics is local, his popularity stemmed from his having been raised in the Netherlands, his ruling as the count of each of the seventeen territories individually, rather than as emperor, and his appointing local men to stand in his place as *stadhouder* (“steward”) since he could not be in every place at once.



Charles V with Armor by Juan Pantoja de la Cruz (1605)

For a century and a half before *the* Reformation, “reformation” movements found a home in the Netherlands. The Waldensians who formed in the late twelfth century in Lyon, France, spread into northern Italy, and then when mercilessly persecuted by Rome sought refuge in the Netherlands. The Lollards or lay preaching movement who formed in fourteenth-century England escaped persecution in the Netherlands. Also in the

Last Days to the New World (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). On late medieval catholic “reformers,” see also David C. Steinmetz, *Reformers in the Wings: From Geiler von Kaysersberg to Theodore Beza*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9–46.

⁴ On the Reformation in general, see Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Penguin, 2003). On the Reformation in the context of the history of the Netherlands, see Alastair Duke, *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003); Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477–1806* (1995; repr., Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

⁵ For more detail on what follows, see Hyde, *With Heart and Mouth*, 7–24; Karel Blei, *The Netherlands Reformed Church, 1571–2005*, trans. Allan J. Janssen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 9–18; Peter Y. De Jong, “The Rise of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands,” in *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618–1619*, ed. Peter Y. De Jong (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 1–21.

fourteenth century there was an indigenous group to the Netherlands who sought a simple life of faith known as the Brethren of the Common Life. It's said that on the eve of the Reformation, even the Friesland fishermen who lived in huts could read, write, and discuss biblical interpretation.⁶ Soon after Martin Luther's (1483–1546) translation of the Old Testament (1522) and complete Bible (1534) was finished in German, they were translated into Dutch and used by Augustinian monks in preaching in the Netherlands. Among these were the first Protestant martyrs in the Netherlands, Johann Esch and Heinrich Voes, burnt at the stake on July 1, 1523, in Brussels. Especially moving is Luther's hymn "A New Song Shall Now Be Begun," memorializing them:



The Martyrdom of Johann Esch and Heinrich Voes by Ludwig Rabus (1554)

1. A new song now
shall be begun,
Lord, help us raise
the banner
Of praise for all that
God has done,
For which we give
Him honor.
At Brussels in the
Netherlands
God proved himself
most truthful
And poured his gifts
from open hands

On two lads, martyrs youthful
Through whom He showed His power.⁷

In the 1530s "radical" reformation came in the form of the Anabaptist movement (from the Greek words *ana*, "again," and *baptizo*, "baptize," meaning "re-baptizers"). Soon after, Reformed theology infiltrated the southern Netherlands around the year 1544 most likely from French Reformed missionaries via Geneva. It wasn't until the 1560s that Reformed

⁶ De Jong, "The Rise of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands," 6.

⁷ In *Martin Luther: Hymns, Ballads, Chants, Truth* (4-CD set; St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2004), 8–13.

INTRODUCTION

theology spread to the northern provinces.

As we see today all over the world, in places like China, Egypt, and Iran, this struggle for religious freedom coincided with a newfound political struggle for independence.⁸ In a surprise move, in 1556 Charles V did what honorable men whose political life had ended in those days: he retired out of public life to the Monastery of Yuste in Spain and abdicated his rule over the Netherlands. The rule of these provinces moved to his son Philip II of Spain (1527–1598). But the apple fell very far from the tree. While his father was respected, Philip was despised. The peasants despised him because he raised taxes and didn't speak Spanish. The Catholic nobility despised him. He wasn't raised in the Netherlands, so when he "reformed" the church by adding bishoprics this lessened the territories of existing ones, thereby shrinking the nobles' coffers and hereditary inheritance. This showed how out of touch he was. "Follow the money," as we say. Protestants despised him for his persecution. While Charles enacted laws outlawing Protestantism, he never strictly applied them. One such law was the 1550 *Edict*, which Philip reenacted and applied. It forbade reading and possessing forbidden books, worshipping outside the Roman Church, talking or disputing openly or secretly the Scriptures and especially difficult doctrines, and reading, teaching, or expounding the Scriptures unless a graduate of a university. The penalty for confessors was the sword for men and being buried alive for woman, while for those who would not confess, the fire awaited.⁹ There even was a law conscripting the citizenry into Philip's information apparatus that said if you failed to inform the authorities of someone later found to be a heretic, *you* would be guilty of treason.

The pressure upon and persecution of the Reformed led Guido de



*Philip as Prince by Titian
(1554)*

⁸ See W. Robert Godfrey, "Calvin and Calvinism in the Netherlands," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 95–120.

⁹ De Jong, "The Rise of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands," 18n5.

Brès (1522–1567), primary author of the Belgic Confession, to toss over the wall of the Castle of Tournai a copy of the Confession and a letter from his faithful Reformed subjects on November 2, 1561, which was then passed on to the king. In the letter, de Brès described the situation:

But our enemies have stopped your ears with so many false accusations and reports that we are not only prevented from appearing before you, but driven from your territories, murdered and burnt wherever we may be. Therefore grant us at least, most gracious Lord, in the name of God that which no one can deny even to the animals, namely to hear from afar our cries. If your Majesty, having heard us, judges us to be guilty, let the burnings increase and the tortures and torments multiply throughout your kingdom. And contrariwise, if our innocence is manifest to you, may you be for us a support and refuge against the violence of our enemies.

He went on to describe the many “banishments, prisons, racks, exiles, tortures and countless other persecutions” of the Reformed and that “we would lead a far easier life if we did not embrace and maintain this doctrine.” In words reminiscent of the ancient martyr Polycarp, de Brès then said in the name of the Reformed churches throughout the Netherlands:

But having the fear of God before our eyes, and being in dread of the warning of Jesus Christ, who tells us that He shall forsake us before God and His Father if we deny Him before men, we suffer our backs to be beaten, our tongues to be cut, our mouths to be gagged and our whole body to be burnt, for we know that he who would follow Christ must take up his cross and deny himself.¹⁰

¹⁰ For this letter, see Hyde, *With Heart and Mouth*, 499–504.

OUTLINE OF THE CANONS OF DORT

I. First Point of Doctrine: Redemption Planned

- A. *Common Christian Convictions (arts. 1–6)*
 - 1. Humanity’s sin and condemnation (art. 1)
 - 2. God’s love in Christ (art. 2)
 - 3. God’s mercy in preaching (art. 3; cf. RE 9)
 - 4. Faith in Christ delivers from condemnation (art. 4)
 - 5. Humanity is guilty for unbelief (art. 5)
 - 6. Faith is given according to God’s plan (art. 6; cf. RE 8)
- B. *Election Defined (art. 7; cf. RE 1, 9)*
- C. *Elaborations on Election (arts. 8–11)*
 - 1. One kind of election, not many (art. 8; cf. RE 2)
 - 2. Not based on foreseen qualities (art. 9; cf. RE 4, 5)
 - 3. Persons not conditions (art. 10; cf. RE 3)
 - 4. Unchangeable (art. 11; cf. RE 6)
- D. *Answers to Alleged Problems Caused by Election (arts. 12–14)*
 - 1. Attainment of assurance (arts. 12–13; cf. RE 7)
 - 2. Preaching election (art. 14)
- E. *Reprobation Defined (art. 15)*
- F. *Answers to Alleged Problems Caused by Reprobation (arts. 16–17)*
 - 1. Reprobation and assurance (art. 16)
 - 2. Reprobation and children (art. 17)
- G. *Conclusion: Man’s Response to God’s Revelation (art. 18)*

II. Second Point of Doctrine: Redemption Accomplished

- A. *Common Christian Convictions (arts. 1–7)*
 - 1. God’s justice requires satisfaction for sin (art. 1)

2. God gives His Son who alone can provide satisfaction (arts. 2–3)
 3. Christ satisfies as God and man (art. 4)
 4. Call to believe is to be preached to everyone (art. 5)
 5. Cause of unbelief is in unbeliever, not in Christ (art. 6)
 6. Christ is cause of faith (art. 7)
- B. *Christ's Satisfaction Defined* (art. 8; cf. RE 1–5, 7)
- C. *Elaboration on Satisfaction: Christ Will Always Have a Church* (art. 9; cf. RE 6)

III. Third & Fourth Points of Doctrine: Redemption Applied

- A. *Common Christian Convictions on Depravity* (arts. 1–2)
1. Man was created good, but has become wicked in mind, will and affections (art. 1; cf. RE 2)
 2. Original sin from Adam (art. 2; cf. RE 1)
- B. *Depravity Defined* (art. 3; cf. RE 3, 4)
- C. *Common Christian Convictions on Regeneration* (arts. 4–5)
1. Nature cannot regenerate sinners (art. 4; cf. RE 5)
 2. The Law cannot regenerate sinners (art. 5)
- D. *Regeneration Defined* (art. 6)
- E. *Elaborations on Regeneration* (arts. 7–17)
1. Sovereignly to whom He will (art. 7)
 2. Through a sincere call to believe (arts. 8–9)
 3. As a gift to the elect (art. 10)
 4. Renewing the elect in mind, will and affections (art. 11; cf. RE 6)
 5. As a completely efficacious act of God alone (art. 12; cf. RE 7)
 6. Ineffably (art. 13)
 7. Actually creating faith (art. 14; cf. RE 9)
 8. Believers & unbelievers respond differently to regeneration (art. 15)
 9. God works faith in a personal way, not a mechanical way (art. 16; cf. RE 8)
 10. God works our response through the means of grace (art. 17)

V. Fifth Point of Doctrine: Redemption Preserved

- A. *Common Christian Convictions (arts. 1–2)*
 - 1. Regeneration does not mean the end of sin or suffering (art. 1)
 - 2. The regenerate must strive for holiness (art. 2)
- B. *Perseverance Defined (art. 3)*
- C. *Perseverance and the Continuing Problem of Sin (arts. 4–8)*
 - 1. Weakness of the flesh can result in serious sins (art. 4; cf. RE 7)
 - 2. Such sins seriously disturb one's relationship with God (art. 5)
 - 3. God does not permit the destruction of that relationship (art. 6; cf. RE 3, 4)
 - 4. God renews a disturbed relationship (art. 7; cf. RE 8)
 - 5. Man is weak but God is steadfast (art. 8; cf. RE 1, 2, 9)
- D. *Perseverance and Assurance (arts. 9–13)*
 - 1. Assurance of perseverance is possible for believers (art. 9)
 - 2. Assurance is found in the promises of the Word and in holy living (art. 10; cf. RE 5)
 - 3. Assurance is attacked, but overcomes (art. 11)
 - 4. Assurance produces humility and piety (art. 12; cf. RE 6)
 - 5. Assurance after serious sin produces more care in the future (art. 13)
- E. *Perseverance and the Means of Grace (art. 14)*
- F. *Perseverance and Consolation (art. 15)*

I V D I C I V M
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R E F O R M A T A R V M
E C C L E S I A R V M B E L G I C A R V M,
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D O R D R E C H T I

Anno 1618. & 1619.

*Cui etiam interfuerunt plurimi insignes Theologi
Reformatarum Ecclesiarum Magnæ Britanniaë,
Palatinatus Electoralis, Hassiæ, Helvetiæ, Cor-
respondentiæ VVedderaviæ, Genevensis, Bre-
menfis, & Emdanæ,*

D E
Q U I N Q U E D O C T R I N A E
Capitibus in Ecclesiis Belgicis Controversis.

Promulgatum VI. May, cId. Idc. xix.

Cum Privilegio.



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THE GRACE OF PREDESTINATION

I:
WHAT WE CONFESS
ARTICLES 1-18

THE REMONSTRANT DOCTRINE

BY THE TIME of the Synod of Dort, the *Remonstrance* of 1610 was somewhat outdated. Although individual theologians had moved beyond it, it remained a public statement by which to evaluate their teaching. On the doctrine of predestination its first article opened, reflecting the language of Ephesians 1: “That God by an eternal and immutable decree has in Jesus Christ his Son determined before the foundation of the world to save out of the fallen sinful human race those in Christ, for Christ’s sake, and through Christ who by the grace of the Holy Spirit.” So far; so good. David Paraeus even advised the synod, “At first sight, this Article seemes to have no question or inconvenience in it, but to deliver the summe of the Gospel.”¹ It’s the next statement, though, that was the issue: “who...*shall believe* in this his Son Jesus Christ and [*shall*] *persevere* in this faith and obedience of faith.”²

¹ David Paraeus, “Epitome of Arminianisme: or, The Examination of the Five Articles of the Remonstrants, in the Netherlands,” in *The Summe of Christian Religion, Delivered by Zacharias Ursinus*, trans. A. R. (London, Printed by James Young, 1645), 817.

² As cited in “The *Remonstrance* of 1610,” appendix C in De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 208. Emphasis added.

THE ISSUE

The key issue was that the Remonstrants understood God's act of election to salvation to be *conditional*. They said God's eternal and immutable purpose in Christ to save was conditioned and dependent on those whom God foreknew "*shall* believe...and [*shall*] persevere."³ While the Reformed distinguished God's unconditional act of electing from God's decreeing to use various conditions to bring about that salvation such as faith and perseverance, the Remonstrants defended their position at the synod in a list of theses. The first said, "God has not decided to elect anyone to eternal life, or to reject anyone from the same...without any consideration of preceding obedience or disobedience." The seventh said, "The election of particular persons is decisive, out of consideration of faith in Jesus Christ and of perseverance; not, however, apart from a consideration of faith and perseverance in the true faith, as a condition prerequisite for electing."⁴ In other words, God took into account a person's obedience when he elected.

At the synod, the British delegation considered the Remonstrant thesis of election to salvation under the condition of faith *the* fundamental issue.⁵ Their Collegiate Suffrage to the synod illustrated the difference between them and the Remonstrants this way: "For the Decree of God predestinating cannot bee conceived after this forme, I will choose *Peter* to eternall life, if it shall so happen that he doth believe, and persevere. But rather after this manner: I doe choose *Peter* unto eternall life, which that he may infallibly obtaine, I will give unto him persevering faith."⁶ What makes the decree of election unconditional is that there is nothing antecedent to it that caused and compelled God to act. He acted of grace. All the aspects of the elect's salvation—faith, perseverance, and final glory—are consequent effects of election. This is still the issue. One of the men I first listened to after I was converted was Chuck Smith of Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa. Here's how he explained Ephesians 1 and God's predestination:

³ Paraeus, "Epitome of Arminianisme," 817–18.

⁴ See appendix 2: The Opinions of the Remonstrants (1619). As cited in "The Opinions of the Remonstrants," appendix H in De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, 222–29.

⁵ *Thesis de electione huius vel illius ad salutem sub conditione fidei, fundamentalis est*. Milton, *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort*, 175 (4/13).

⁶ Milton, *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort*, 230 (6/1).

Now imagine if you had that kind of capacity that you knew everything in advance before it ever happened. You knew exactly how it was going to turn out. You could sure go back and improve your lot, couldn't you? I have made some choices in my life that I was sorry that I made afterwards. I have made some poor decisions in my life. I sold too quickly. I bought at the wrong time. Oh, if I only had foreknowledge when I made my decisions I wouldn't have chosen the losers. That would be sort of stupid to choose losers, wouldn't it? If you knew in advance. If you knew who was going to win the ball game. Or better yet, you could go to the race-tracks with this kind of knowledge. Imagine what you could do, having foreknowledge, knowing every horse what he was going to do in that race, and you would go to the racetrack with this kind of knowledge. Now, if you could, do you think you would go there and pick out a ticket of losers? I don't know what you do at racetracks. Would you pick out a bunch of losers? You would be stupid if you did. Of course, you wouldn't. You would pick the winners, because you know in advance who is going to win the race. What the outcome is going to be. And so you make your choices predicated on what the outcome is, because you already know in advance what it is going to be. That is just using your head.

Now that is what thrills me about God choosing me. Because He don't choose no losers. God has only chosen winners. And by virtue of the fact that I have been chosen, that ensures that I am going to win.⁷

The elect, then, are a class of people who meet certain conditions, not individuals chosen by God in his love.⁸ Men like Gomarus saw through this issue with Arminius and said this jeopardized the whole reason for the Reformation in the first place: God's gracious work of justifying sinners by faith alone, not because of anything in them or done by them.⁹

⁷ "Ephesians 1." <https://calvarychapel.com/pastorchuck/c2k/ephesians-1> (accessed May 9, 2018).

⁸ Paraeus, "Epitome of Arminianisme," 818.

⁹ See on Rejection of Errors 3 in chapter 2 below. For a comparison of similarities and differences in the doctrine of predestination between the Lutheran Book of Concord and the Reformed canons in the context of both affirming justification *sola fide*, see Joel R. Beeke, *Debated Issues in Sovereign Predestination: Early Lutheran Predestination, Calvinian Reprobation, and Variations in Genevan Lapsarianism*, Reformed Historical Theology 42 (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 55–69.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the history of Western catholic theology we distinguish three great camps when it comes to the relationship between God's grace and the salvation of sinners: Pelagianism, what is popularly called Semi-Pelagianism, and Augustinianism.

The British monk Pelagius (360–418) ended up in Rome and was scandalized by the state of morality among professing Christians. In one of his letters he reflects his struggle with what he saw:

Do you consider him a Christian in whom there is no Christian act, in whom there is no righteous conduct, but evil, ungodliness and crime? Do you consider him a Christian who oppresses the wretched, who burdens the poor, who covets others' property, who makes several poor so that he may make himself rich, who rejoices in unjust gains...and a man of this kind has the audacity to go to church.¹⁰

Pelagius and his followers developed a theology with several features. First, created human nature was to have a body and soul with the power of contrary choice between good and evil called “free will” (*liberum arbitrium*). Since sin has no essential existence of its own, it cannot be part of human nature that is passed down from one man to another. Sin is merely imitating the sins of others. Thus subsequent humans are born unaffected by Adam's sin and in a similar situation as Adam, capable to exercise the power of contrary choice in fulfilling God's moral will. The “grace” of God is his giving humans inherent free will to determine right from wrong, revelation such as the law, and Jesus as an example to emulate. When man uses his will aright in following this revelation he does good, which is the ground of acceptance with God. In fact, it is possible for a human being even after Adam's sin to live a sinless life.¹¹

¹⁰ “On the Christian Life,” in B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: Life and Letters* (1988, 1991; repr., Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 1998), 119.

¹¹ For helpful summaries of Pelagius, see Justin S. Holcomb, *Know the Creeds and Councils* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 87–88; F. H. Woods, *Canons of the Second Council of Orange, A.D. 529* (Oxford: James Thornton, 1882), 5–7; David F. Wright, “Pelagianism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 499–501.

In 418 the Council of Carthage condemned various teachings of Pelagianism, including that infants do not have original sin, that God's grace is only effectual for past sins and not for avoiding sins in the future, that grace merely helps the believer learn what to desire and avoid, that the believer apart from grace can exercise free will to fulfill God's commands, and that believers only acknowledge "forgive us our debts" out of humility not reality.¹²

Then there were those like the monk John Cassian (360–435) who also rejected Pelagianism but thought Carthage (under the influence of Augustine) went too far. They were later named "*Semi-Pelagians*" in the seventeenth century.¹³ It's important for us to be clear here. As Irena Backus and Aza Goudriaan have recently shown, neither Augustine nor that later Council of Orange (529) speak of those they opposed as "semipelagian." Further, neither Cassian, Vincent of Lérin, nor Faustus of Riez identified their positions in any way with Pelagius. In fact, Augustine distinguished the monks of Marseille, whom he called the "Massilians" (*Massilienses*) from the Pelagians. It was Augustine's defender, Prosper, who labeled some of the Massilians' views as "remnant of the Pelagians" (*reliquiae Pelagianorum*). The term "Semi-Pelagian" was first used by Theodore Beza, whom Backus and Goudriaan say "seems to be the inventor of the terms 'Semipelagianism' and 'semipelagian.'" Beza used it as a synonym of Roman Catholic theology that teaches humanity is prone to sin yet not totally reliant on grace for conversion. Later it was used by Lutherans to refer to the followers of Philip Melancthon, who asserted that man's free will unaided by grace was primary in man's conversion. Finally, among Roman Catholics it was first used as a label for the Massilians in the fifth century, no doubt as a polemic against being labeled themselves a la Beza.¹⁴

While it's anachronistic to call Cassian et al. "Semi-Pelagians" themselves, the category is helpful as a way of distinguishing the various theo-

¹² "Canons of the Council of Carthage May 1, 418," http://www.seanmultimedia.com/Pie_Council_Of_Carthage_May_1_418.html (accessed May 9, 2018). See Holcomb, *Know the Creeds and Councils*, 90–92.

¹³ Justin Holcomb says, "Calling these theologians Semi-Pelagians is much akin to calling those who lived in post–World War II Germany Semi-Nazis, strictly on the basis of their historical location." *Know the Creeds and Councils*, 93.

¹⁴ Irena Backus and Aza Goudriaan, "'Semipelagianism': The Origins of the Term and Its Passage into the History of Heresy," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 65, no. 1 (January 2014): 25–46.

gies of Augustine, Pelagius, and others in the fifth century. The problem with Cassian and others was that while they rejected Pelagianism, they also rejected important features of Augustine. Within the monastic community, the concern was lethargy among Christians in prayer and evangelism. The main point at issue between Cassian and Augustine was the beginning of faith (*initium fidei*), which Augustine's critics believed was the result of unaided human freedom, while grace strengthened it *after* its inception.¹⁵ Perhaps, then, they are better called *Semi-Augustinians*?¹⁶ This movement, too, was condemned over one hundred years later at the Second Council of Orange in 529. We'll look at its decisions in more detail when dealing with the third and fourth points of doctrine,¹⁷ but for now, I'll mention the summary confession of faith from the Council of Orange that "we ought by God's mercy both to teach and believe" the following against both Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism:

- "...that through the sin of the first man free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) was so biased and weakened (*inclinatum et attenuatum*) that no one can afterwards either love God as he ought, or believe in God, or work for God's sake what is good, unless the grace of Divine mercy prevents (*praeverent, precedes*) him."¹⁸
- "...the whole multitude of old fathers, we believe, had not that glorious faith which the Apostle Paul praises through natural goodness which was first implanted in Adam, but that it was bestowed upon them by the grace of God. This grace, even after the advent of our Lord, we

¹⁵ Wright, "Pelagianism," 636–37.

¹⁶ For the most recent scholarship on the terminology, see Rebecca Harden Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency: A Study of the Semi-Pelagian Controversy*, Patristic Monographs Series 15 (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 40–41; Weaver, introduction to *Grace for Grace: The Debates after Augustine and Pelagius*, ed. Alexander Y. Hwang, Brian J. Matz, and Augustine Casiday (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), xiv–xv.

¹⁷ See chapter 5.

¹⁸ Woods, *Canons of the Second Council of Orange*, 45. On the history of this council, see Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Councils of the Church from the Original Documents: Volume 4, A.D. 451 to A.D. 680*, trans. William R. Clark (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1895), 152–69; Weaver, *Divine Grace and Human Agency*, 225–34; Ralph W. Mathisen, "Caesarius of Arles, Prevenient Grace, and the Second Council of Orange," in *Grace for Grace*, 208–34.

know and believe that all who desire to be baptized have, not as dependent on free choice (*libero arbitrio*), but that it is bestowed upon them by the bounty of Christ.”¹⁹

- “We also profess and believe this wholesome doctrine, that in every good work it is not ourselves who begin and are afterwards helped by the mercy of God, but God Himself first, without any precedent good merits, inspires us with His faith and love, that we faithfully seek the sacred ordinances of baptism, and after baptism may by His help accomplish those things which are pleasing to Him.”²⁰

The major features of *Augustine's* doctrine (354–430) triumphed at Carthage and Orange. One of the delegates to Dort, John Davenant, approvingly cited the decisions of Orange as consistent with our Reformed Catholic faith.²¹ Augustine succinctly stated his theology: “God elected believers; but He chose them that they might be so, not because they were already so.”²² Helpfully stating Augustine’s ministry, Holcomb says, “Having dealt with the Donatist disappointment of how the institution of the church looks in real life, Augustine now turned to Pelagius’ disappointment with how sinners look in real life.”²³ This history of Christian reflection brought to the fore by Augustine, rejected by the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians, was in turn responded to by Prosper of Aquitaine (ca. 390–after 455) and Fulgentius of Ruspe (467–533) culminating in the Second Council of Orange in 529. This Augustinian consensus continued through the centuries in men like Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636), Gottschalk of Orbais (ca.

¹⁹ Woods, *Canons of the Second Council of Orange*, 45.

²⁰ Woods, *Canons of the Second Council of Orange*, 49, 51.

²¹ John Davenant, *A Dissertation on the Death of Christ, as to Its Extent and Special Benefits*, in *An Exposition of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians*, 2 vols., trans. Josiah Allport (London: Hamilton, Adams, 1832), 2:445–46, 490.

²² “On the Predestination of the Saints,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: First Series*, Volume 5 (1887; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, fourth printing 2004), 515. See also Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 340–407; Matthew Levering, *The Theology of Augustine: An Introductory Guide to His Most Important Works* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 71–87; David F. Wright, “Augustine and Augustinianism,” in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 58–63.

²³ Holcomb, *Know the Creeds and Councils*, 89. On Augustine’s theology, see Woods, *Canons of the Second Council of Orange*, 7–12.

803–869),²⁴ Peter Lombard (ca. 1095–1160), Alexander of Hales (1170/1180–1245), Albert the Great (1200–1280), Bonaventure (ca. 1217–1274), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), Duns Scotus (ca. 1266–1308), William of Ockham (1285–1347), Nicholas of Lyra (1270–1349), and in the *schola Augustiniana moderna* of Thomas Bradwardine (ca. 1300–1349), Gregory of Rimini (ca. 1300–1358), Etienne Brulefer (d. ca. 1499), and John Eck (1486–1543).²⁵ Therefore van Asselt concluded, “The *theological* struggle at Dordt concerned the kernel of the Augustinian tradition within the whole of the Western church.”²⁶

This brings us to the first counterpoint or head (*caput*) of doctrine in the Canons of Dort on predestination. Christians need to talk about it; pastors need to preach it. It’s offensive to unbelievers; it’s even offensive to believers. To be effective witnesses for Jesus Christ and his grace we need to grow in the knowledge of his truth; we also need to grow in the wisdom of “speaking [his] truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).

COMMENTARY

Predestination is like a beautiful painting. Before an artist applies paint he or she needs a canvas. Then the painting can begin. The first point of doctrine opens with a canvas of six articles that are the common inheritance of all Christians. After this canvas is laid out, the paint of predestination is applied.

²⁴ See *Gottschalk and a Medieval Predestination Controversy: Texts Translated from the Latin*, ed. & trans. Victor Genke & Francis X. Gumerlock, Mediaeval Philosophical Texts in Translation 47 (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2010).

²⁵ See Heiko A. Oberman, *Masters of the Reformation: The Emergence of a New Intellectual Climate in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (1963; rev. ed., Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967); Donald W. Sinnema, “The Issue of Reprobation at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) in the Light of the History of This Doctrine” (PhD diss., University of St Michael’s College, 1985), 8–51; David C. Steinmetz, *Luther and Staupitz: An Essay in the Intellectual Origins of the Protestant Reformation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1980).

²⁶ W. J. van Asselt, “No Dordt without Scholasticism: Willem Verboom on the Canons of Dordt,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 87, no. 2 (2007): 205. Emphasis in original.

Article 1

As all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are deserving of eternal death, God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish, and delivering them over to condemnation on account of sin, according to the words of the apostle, “that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom. 3:19). And verse 23: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” And Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death.”

The first Christian conviction you need to know *before* saying a word about predestination is your sin and God’s justice because of it.

YOUR SINFUL CONDITION

As all *people* (*homines*) have sinned in Adam and have come under the sentence of the curse and eternal death... Unlike the *Remonstrance* that began with God’s eternal decree, the canons begin with biblical history:²⁷ the universal sinfulness of humanity and the justice of God.²⁸ In Romans 5, Paul explains the narrative of Genesis 1–3, saying, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (v. 12). The point of verses 13–14 that follow is to say that even after Adam broke God’s law and before Israel would break God’s law again under Moses, everyone was still sinful. Why? Because of Adam. Notice the progression: Adam, sin, death. God created Adam (Gen. 1:26–27; 2:7); God gave Adam a command (Gen. 2:16–17); Adam violated the command (Gen. 3:1–6). What you have to understand is that what Adam did affected everyone else who was to come into the world. He was what our forefathers called “a public person,” a representa-

²⁷ Jason Van Vliet points out this obvious contrast: “Election: The Father’s Decision to Adopt,” *Unio Cum Christo* 4, no. 2 (October 2018): 132–33.

²⁸ On Bishop Carleton’s desire to begin this way, see Sinnema, “Reformed Scholasticism and the Synod of Dort,” 496. See also Matthew Barrett, *The Grace of Godliness: An Introduction to Doctrine and Piety in the Canons of Dort* (Kitchener, ON: Joshua, 2013), 31; Feenstra *Unspeakable Comfort*, 13; cf. 24; Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers*, 135; Cornelis Pronk, *Expository Sermons on the Canons of Dort* (St. Thomas, ON: Free Reformed, 1999), 16. 1980 *Acts of Synod* (Grand Rapids, MI: Board of Publication of the Christian Reformed Church, 1980), 517–18.