

**“Commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the Synod of Dort (1618-1619)
First Class: “The Historical Background and Acts of the Synod”**

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1. This year of our Lord, 2018, marks the 400th anniversary of the convening of the Synod of Dort in Dordrecht, the Netherlands. The Synod of Dort was convened in order to settle the ongoing controversy in the Dutch churches regarding the teaching of Arminius and his followers on the topic of election. For those who cherish the teaching of salvation by grace alone through the work of Christ alone, the 400th anniversary of this great Synod and the confession it produced, the *Canons of Dort*, ought to be an occasion for thanksgiving for the rich inheritance in the gospel that the Synod bequeathed to the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. In a period of history when many evangelical believers are rediscovering the “doctrines of grace,” it would be ironic and disappointing were the Reformed churches to miss the opportunity to celebrate the Synod and its achievements. In many respects, the work of this Synod completed the Reformation of the church in the Netherlands, and provided an enduring legacy for the conduct and ministry of the Reformed churches throughout the world.

2. **My aim in this class** is to provide a small contribution to the commemoration of the Synod of Dort. In our first class, I will begin with a summary of the history of the controversy regarding election that necessitated the convening of the Synod. I will also identify some of the Synod’s less well-known contributions to the life and ministry of the Reformed churches. In the second class, I will offer a summary of the five main points of doctrine that were adopted by the Synod as a response to the Arminian or Remonstrant part. The third class will treat the topic of the assurance of salvation, which was a particularly important part of the controversy between Arminius and the Reformed churches. The fourth class will treat the topic of the implications of the Canons for the preaching of the gospel and evangelism.

3. Arminius’ Doctrine of Conditional Predestination and the History of the Controversy prior to the convening of the Synod.

The controversy regarding the doctrine of election in the Dutch churches arose as a result of the teaching of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). Arminius, who was a brilliant student of Theodore Beza, Calvin’s successor in Geneva, initiated the controversy during his tenure as a pastor of the Reformed church in Amsterdam and subsequently as a professor of theology at the University of Leiden. Shortly before his death in 1609, Arminius summarized his teaching on election in two important works, his *Public Disputations* and *Declaration of Sentiments*.¹ In these works, Arminius expressed serious objections to the Reformed view of unconditional election as it was set forth in Article 16 of the Belgic Confession. According to this Article, the salvation of those whom God

¹ *Public Disputations*, in *The Works of James Arminius* [hereafter: *WJA*], trans. James Nichols and William Nichols (London: 1825, 1828, 1875; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 2:80-312; and *Declaration of Sentiments of Arminius, delivered before the States of Holland*, in *WJA* 2:580-732. For helpful summaries of Arminius’ teaching, including the history of the Arminian controversy, see Carl Bang, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971); and P. Y. De Jong, ed., *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort 1618-1619* (2nd ed.; Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968 [2008]).

mercifully elects in Christ depends entirely upon God's gracious purpose of election, and not upon any human merit or achievement.

We believe that, all the posterity of Adam being thus fallen into perdition and ruin by the sin of our first parents, God then did manifest Himself such as He is; that is to say, merciful and just: *merciful*, since He delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom He in His eternal and unchangeable counsel of mere goodness has elected in Christ Jesus our Lord, without any respect to their works; *just*, in leaving others in the fall and perdition wherein they have involved themselves.

According to Belgic Confession, the salvation of God's people rests wholly upon his undeserved mercy toward them in Jesus Christ. From out of the fallen human race in Adam, God has out of "mere goodness" chosen to save some unto everlasting life and justly to leave others in their sinful and lost estate.

Contrary to the consensus of the Reformed churches, Arminius argued for what is best described as a doctrine of "conditional election." In his *Declaration of Sentiments*, Arminius summarized his teaching by distinguishing four decrees or features of God's eternal mind and will. Though Arminius formulated these four decrees in a highly "scholastic" and theological manner, his position can be simply stated in four points:²

First, God eternally and absolutely wills to save all fallen sinners, and therefore has decreed to appoint his Son Jesus Christ as the Mediator and Savior of all who are lost. The first and foundational decree of God expresses his universal and gracious intention to save all fallen sinners without exception upon the basis of Christ's atoning work.

Second, God eternally and absolutely wills to receive into favor all fallen sinners who repent and believe, and to leave under his wrath all who remain impenitent and unbelieving. Though God eternally and absolutely wills the salvation of all, he also wills to save only those who choose to believe and persevere in believing, and to damn those who choose to remain in their sin and unbelief.

Third, God eternally wills to appoint the means by which fallen sinners are able to come to faith and repentance. These means include the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who uses the Word and sacraments to invite fallen sinners to respond to the gospel in the way of faith and repentance. The actual salvation of fallen sinners depends upon their willingness to meet the "conditions" of the gospel invitation. Those who do not resist the work of the Spirit through the gospel, but respond in faith and repentance, are saved in consequence of their freely choosing to do so. Those who persist in resisting the work of the Spirit through the gospel remain in their lost condition in consequence of their freely choosing to do so.

And fourth, God eternally decrees to save those particular persons whom he foreknows will believe and persevere in believing in response to the gospel; and he eternally decrees to damn those whom he foreknows will choose not to believe and persevere in believing. The election and actual salvation of some fallen sinners rests upon God's foreknowledge of their free choice to believe and to persevere in faith.

² *Declaration of Sentiments*, in *WJA*, 1:653-54.

It is not difficult to ascertain from this brief summary of Arminius' teaching why his view amounts to a doctrine of "conditional" election. Arminius' fourth point clearly draws out the implications of the preceding three points for the doctrine of election. Though God wills absolutely and antecedently to save all fallen sinners, he wills relatively and consequently to save only those particular persons whom he foreknows would believe and to damn those whom he foreknows would not. The basis for God's decree to save and damn "certain particular persons" is his foreknowledge of the way these persons freely (independently) choose to respond to the gospel call. Since God's decree to elect is based solely upon his foreknowledge of those persons who would meet the "conditions" (faith and repentance) required to be saved, Arminius' doctrine of predestination amounts to a doctrine of "conditional predestination." The ultimate condition and ground for salvation rests upon the free choice of some to believe and to persevere in faith. Though God wills to save all through the work of Christ as Mediator, the actual salvation of the elect and the damnation of the non-elect depends ultimately upon what they choose to do with the gospel offer. On the one hand, God's universal will and intention to save all fallen sinners is frustrated or thwarted in the case of all those who persistently refuse to respond in faith to the invitation of the gospel. And on the other hand, God's decision to save the elect is dependent upon, or in consequence of, their choice to believe and to persevere in doing so.

4. The Ensuing Controversy with the "Remonstrants"

Because Arminius' departed from some of the most basic features of the doctrine of election among his Reformed contemporaries, it is not surprising that his teaching became the eye of a storm of controversy among the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. During the early seventeenth-century, the Dutch churches (and others as well throughout Europe) were racked with controversy and two parties emerged, a party favoring the position of Arminius and a party opposing his position. Two important events also occurred, preparing the way for the calling of an international synod in Dordrecht in 1618.

After Arminius' death in 1609, the Arminian party in the Dutch Reformed churches prepared a summary statement of their position. On January 14, 1610, more than forty representatives who championed Arminius' views gathered in Gouda. These representatives drew up a *Remonstrance* or petition in which their case was set forth and defended. After complaining that their cause had been misrepresented by their opponents, and then appealing to the state to exercise its authority to settle the controversy, this *Remonstrance* presented the Arminian position in a series of five articles. The "Remonstrants," as they were called, hoped that this statement would be approved by the civil authorities, thereby answering the charge that their doctrine was in conflict with Scripture and the Reformed confessions.

Shortly after this *Remonstrance* was prepared, the States of Holland made arrangements for a meeting between representatives of the Arminian or Remonstrant and the anti-Arminian parties. This meeting took place from March 10, 1611, until May 20, 1611, and was the occasion for the preparation of a reply to the five points of the Arminians. The reply of the Reformed opponents of Arminianism was termed the *Counter Remonstrance of 1611*.³ In this reply, the main features of the later, more expansive statement of the *Canons of Dort* were anticipated. Finally, when the debate between the Arminian/Remonstrant and anti-Arminian/Counter-Remonstrant parties showed no signs of abating in the Netherlands, the States-General of the Republic of the Netherlands called a

³ For an English translation of this *Counter Remonstrance*, see De Jong, *Crisis*, 247-50.

national synod to settle the dispute. The express purpose of this synod, to be held in 1618 in Dordrecht, was to judge whether the position of the Remonstrants was in harmony with the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions, particularly Article 16 of the *Belgic Confession*. Though officially a synod of the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, the synod had in addition twenty-six delegates from eight foreign countries.⁴

5. By the time the Synod convened, the Remonstrants were generally agreed on the following main points of doctrine:

The First Point: Conditional Election. Following Arminius, the Remonstrants taught that God elected before the foundation of the world to save those whom he foresaw would respond in faith to the gospel call. God does not give faith to those whom he chooses to save. Rather, God elects those whom he foresees will believe and repent of their own free will. Therefore, God's election is neither sovereign nor unmerited in the proper sense of these terms.

The Second Point: Universal Atonement. According to the Remonstrants, Christ "died for all men and for every man," although only those who believe in him will be saved. The atoning work of Christ made it possible for everyone to be saved, without actually securing the salvation of anyone.

The Third Point: Human Depravity. In the opinion of the Remonstrants, fallen sinners do not have the freedom to will any saving good without a prior (prevenient) work of God's grace through the Word and Spirit of Christ. On this point, there was no substantial disagreement between the Remonstrants and the authors of the Canons. However, consistent with the Arminian insistence that election is based upon foreseen faith, and that Christ's atoning work becomes effective only through the free choice of some to believe the gospel, the Arminian/Remonstrant position also maintained that human depravity is mitigated through the grace that comes to all who are called to faith through the gospel. There is a common gracious working of God in the hearts of sinners, short of granting salvation, which enables them to repent and believe. This common grace is sufficient to enable all sinners to cooperate or not cooperate with the gospel call to faith and repentance.

The Fourth Point: Resistible Grace. In the fourth article the Arminian party taught that the Holy Spirit does all that is necessary to enable fallen sinners to be saved. But the ministry of the Spirit may always be successfully resisted. Because fallen sinners can always choose to frustrate the work of the Spirit, they must first believe before the Spirit regenerates and converts them. Accordingly, the Spirit's application of the benefits of Christ's atoning death is only effectual in the case of those sinners who choose not to resist the Spirit, and persevere in the way of faith. Accordingly, God's grace alone is not effectual to the salvation of any sinner. God's grace is always vincible, never invincible.

The Fifth Point: The Non-Perseverance of the Saints. The last article of the Arminian party was addressed to the question whether believers are preserved in the state of grace by the Holy Spirit. Though there was some uncertainty on this question in the early period of the controversy, by the time the Synod of Dort met in 1618 the Arminian party had repudiated the teaching that believers may be assured that they will persevere in a state of grace by the work of the Spirit.

⁴ For a list of the delegates to the Synod, see De Jong, *Crisis*, 253-58.

6. The Proceedings of the Synod of Dort 1618-1619

- The composition of the Synod: The Arminians objected to the convening of the Synod, and believed it would be something of a “kangaroo court.” To answer the worry about the Synod’s fairness, Reformed ministers and professors from throughout Europe were invited to attend. This decision was prompted by a request from James I, King of England, and seconded by Maurice, prince of Orange, to invite eminent divines from foreign churches to sit and vote in the Synod. Three or four delegates were invited from these Reformed churches. In addition to 26 foreign delegates, there were five academic delegates and 53 ecclesiastical delegates from the Netherlands, resulting in a total of 84 delegates.
- The work of the Synod: The Synod met from November 13, 1618, concluding six and a half months later on May 28, 1619 with its 180th session! There are four distinguishable periods in the chronology of the Synod’s meetings: 1) the *Pro Acta* sessions held from November 13 to December 5, 1618; 2) the procedural debates with the Remonstrants held from December 6 to January 14, 1619; 3) the preparation of a response to the Remonstrants held from January 15 to May 9; and 4) the *Post Acta* sessions held from May 13 to May 29.
- Procedures of the Synod: Before summarizing some of the actions of the Synod, before and after the main item of business (settling the dispute with the Remonstrants, answering their five points), a few comments are in order regarding the synod’s procedures. From January 15 through March 24, the delegations composed their respective “opinions (*iudicia*) on each of the five points of the Remonstrants. Thereafter a nine member Drafting Committee was appointed to draw up the Canons. While this Committee did its work, no sessions were held. When the Drafting Committee completed its work, the Synod met in plenary session to approve what was written.

7. The Five Main Points of the *Canons of Dort*

In the course of its deliberations, the Synod of Dort judged the five articles of the Remonstrants to be contrary to the Word of God and the confession of the Reformed churches. Against the Arminian teachings of divine election based on foreseen faith, universal atonement, resistible or ineffectual grace, and the possibility of a fall from grace, the *Canons* set forth the Reformed teachings of unconditional election, definite atonement or particular redemption, radical depravity, effectual grace, and the perseverance of the saints. In form, the *Canons* were structured to answer to the five points of the Remonstrants. On each major head of doctrine, the *Canons* first present a positive statement of the Scriptural teaching, and then conclude with a rejection of the corresponding Arminian error.⁵

The First Main Point of Doctrine: Unconditional Election. In the opening articles of the first main point of doctrine, the Canons begin with a summary of the most important aspects of the

⁵ For a comprehensive treatment of the Scriptural basis for the Canons’ teaching, see: Steele, David N., & Thomas, Curtis, C., eds., *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, Documented* (New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co., 1963), 30-38. For popular treatments of the Canons, see Cornelis P. Venema, *But for the Grace of God: An Exposition of the Canons of Dort* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship Inc., 1994, 2011); James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002); and Timothy George, .

biblical gospel. These include the fact that “all people have sinned in Adam and have come under the sentence of the curse and eternal death” (Art 1), that God has manifested his love in the sending of his only-begotten Son (Art. 2), and that God’s anger continues to rest upon those who do not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ (Art.3). Within the framework of these truths—all have sinned and are worthy of death, God in love sent his Son to redeem fallen sinners, such sinners must believe in Christ to be saved—the authors of the Canons raise the fundamental question to which the biblical doctrine of election is addressed: why do some believe and repent at the preaching of the gospel, but others remain in their sins and under the just condemnation of God? The answer to this question at its deepest level is God’s unconditional election in Christ of some persons to salvation:

The fact that some receive from God the gift of faith within time, and that others do not, stems from [God’s] eternal decision. For *all his works are known to God from eternity* (Acts 15:18; Eph. 1:11). In accordance with this decision he graciously softens the hearts, however hard, of his chosen ones and inclines them to believe, but by his just judgment he leaves in their wickedness and hardness of heart those who have not been chosen. And in this especially is disclosed to us his act—unfathomable, and as merciful as it is just—of distinguishing between people equally lost. (Article 6)

Because this sovereign and gracious purpose of God in the election of his people is the source of faith, the Canons go on to assert that it cannot therefore be based upon faith: “This same election took place, not *on the basis of* foreseen faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, or of any other good quality and disposition, as though it were based on a prerequisite cause or condition in the person to be chosen, but rather *for the purpose of* faith, of the obedience of faith, of holiness, and so on” (Art. 8).

After articulating the Scriptural teaching of unconditional election, the *Canons* further affirm that this sovereign and gracious election of a particular number of persons unto salvation means that some sinners have been “passed by” and “left” in their sins.

Moreover, Holy Scripture especially highlights this eternal and undeserved grace of our election and brings it out more clearly for us, in that it further bears witness that not all people have been chosen but that some have not been chosen or have been passed by in God’s eternal election—those, that is, concerning whom God, on the basis of the entirely free, most just, irreproachable, and unchangeable good pleasure, made the following decision: to leave them in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves; not to grant them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but finally to condemn and eternally punish them (having been left in their own ways and under his just judgment), not only for their unbelief but also for all their other sins, in order to display his justice. (Art. 15)

The formulation of this article is expressly “infralapsarian.” Those whom God does not elect to save in Christ belong to the company of all fallen sinners who “by their own fault” have willfully plunged themselves into a “common misery.” In the case of the elect, God mercifully and graciously elects to grant them salvation in and through the work of Christ. In the case of the reprobate, God demonstrates his justice by choosing to withhold his grace and to finally condemn them for their sins and unbelief.

The Second Main Point of Doctrine: Definite Atonement or Particular Redemption. Of the five points of doctrine summarized in the Canons, the second is given the briefest treatment. In the

opening articles of this second point, the Canons affirm that the only possible way for sinful human beings to escape the condemnation and death that their sins deserve, lies in the gracious provision through God's mercy of a Savior who has satisfied God's justice on their behalf (Art. 2). After affirming the need for Christ's atoning work on the cross, the Canons affirm the infinite value and worth of Christ's satisfaction. Christ's atoning sacrifice "is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins," and "is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world." Therefore, the church must proclaim the gospel of salvation through Christ to "all nations and peoples, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel." The church is called to proclaim "indiscriminately" that all who believe in Christ crucified and turn from their sins shall not perish but have eternal life.

After establishing the need for Christ's atoning work and affirming its infinite value and sufficiency, the authors of the Canons set forth the central thesis of the second point of doctrine. The atoning work of Christ was by God's design and intention provided for the elect in particular:

For it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son's costly death should work itself out in all his chosen ones, in order that he might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that he should grant them faith (which, like the Holy Spirit's other saving gifts, he acquired for them by his death); that he should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual (Art. 8).

The Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine: Radical Depravity and Effectual Grace. In the Third and Fourth Main Points of Doctrine, the Canons set forth the Scriptural teaching regarding the radical depravity of fallen sinners and the effectual work of Christ's Spirit in regeneration and conversion.

The position of the Canons on the plight of sinful man is starkly portrayed in the first five articles of this section of the confession. In the first article, a sharp contrast is drawn between man's original state of integrity, as he was created by God, and his sinful state after the fall.

Man was originally created in the image of God and was furnished in his mind with a true and salutary knowledge of his Creator and things spiritual, in his will and heart with righteousness, and in all his emotions with purity; indeed, the whole man was holy. However, rebelling against God at the devil's instigation and by his own free will, he deprived himself of these outstanding gifts. Rather, in their place he brought upon himself blindness, terrible darkness, futility, and distortion of judgment in his mind; perversity, defiance, and hardness in his heart and will; and finally impurity in all his emotions (Article 1).

Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform. (Art. 3).

The Canons of Dort begin their treatment of the work of the Spirit in the application of redemption by stressing that the gospel must be published to all the nations. In this publication of the gospel, God “seriously and most genuinely . . . makes known in his Word what is pleasing to him: that those who are called should come to him. Seriously he also promises rest for their souls and eternal life to all who come to him and believe” (Article 8).⁶ This means that the blame does not belong with Christ or the gospel, when sinners refuse to believe and repent when called to do so through the gospel. God sincerely calls everyone through the Word of the gospel to believe, promising salvation to all without distinction who answer this call through faith and repentance. The fault for the unbelief and impenitence of many is, therefore, entirely their own.

But what about those who do believe and repent, who are converted, at the preaching of the gospel? Are they to be credited for their faith and repentance, as though these were their own accomplishment? The authors of the Canons answer this question, first, by denying that such faith and repentance are to be credited to the believer, and second, by affirming that they are the fruit of the Spirit’s working through the gospel.

The fact that others who are called through the ministry of the gospel do come and are brought to conversion must not be credited to man, as though one distinguishes himself by free choice from others who are furnished with equal or sufficient grace for faith and conversion (as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains). No, it must be credited to God: just as from eternity he chose his own in Christ, so within time he effectively calls them, grants them faith and repentance . . . in order that they may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called them out of darkness into this marvelous light, and may boast not in themselves, but in the Lord, as apostolic words frequently testify in Scripture (Article 10).

In the following articles of the Canons, the authors attempt, to the extent this is possible, to provide a biblical account of the manner of the Spirit’s working in the heart and life of the believer. Speaking of the Spirit’s work in applying the gospel, the Canons affirm that God by the Spirit powerfully enlightens the mind of the believer “so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God” (Article 11). Furthermore, by “the effective operation of the same regenerating Spirit,” God also “penetrates into the inmost being of man, opens the closed heart, softens the hard heart, and circumcises the heart that is uncircumcised.” This work of the Spirit includes: giving to the sinner’s will, otherwise captivated to sin, the readiness to do good; making the will, otherwise dead and lifeless to the things of God, begin to live and become receptive to the gospel’s call; making the will, otherwise unwilling because unable, begin to desire the right; and activating and enlivening the will, otherwise inactive and lifeless, to produce the good fruits that come from a tree that has been made good. In so doing, the Spirit of God effectively enables the sinner, by nature spiritually dead and in bondage to sin, to turn willingly in repentance and faith to God.

As a result, all those in whose hearts God works in this marvelous way are certainly, unflinching, and effectively reborn and do actually believe. And then the will, now

⁶ The language of the Canons, describing the serious and genuine call that God issues through the gospel to all, is virtually identical with that employed by the Remonstrants in their fourth opinion. However, the authors of the Canons refused to follow the logic of the Remonstrants or Arminians, who drew the conclusion that all sinners must then be able of themselves to comply with the gospel’s demands.

renewed, is not only activated and motivated by God but in being activated by God is also itself active. For this reason, man himself, by that grace which he has received is also rightly said to believe and to repent (Article 12).

The Fifth Main Point of Doctrine: The Perseverance of the Saints. The opening articles of the Fifth Main Point acknowledge that believers continually struggle with sin and temptation, and even fall on occasion into grievous sin (cf. Peter's denial). Within the setting of this biblically realistic view of the ongoing struggle with remaining sin, the Canons affirm the Triune God's gracious preservation of true believers. If left to their own resources, believers "could not remain standing in this grace" for a moment (Article 3). Only as God, being faithful and merciful, strengthens and enables them, are believers able to continue in that state into which God has brought them through fellowship with Christ. The good news of the gospel is not only that God has provided an atonement through Christ and brought us by the Spirit through the gospel into fellowship with Christ. The gospel also promises that God will prove faithful and merciful by preserving his people within that fellowship.

For God, who is rich in mercy, according to his unchangeable purpose of election does not take his Holy Spirit from his own completely, even when they fall grievously. Neither does he let them fall down so far that they forfeit the grace of adoption and the state of justification, or commit the sin which leads to death (the sin against the Holy Spirit), and plunge themselves, entirely forsaken by him, into eternal ruin (Article 6).

8. The *Pro-Acta* and the *Post-Acta* of the Synod of Dort

In my introduction to this article, I noted that the Synod of Dort did more than respond to the five opinions of the Remonstrants on the topic of election. The Synod also addressed a number of important matters that would prove to be of abiding significance for the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and throughout the world. The work of the Synod in this area is usually described as the *Pro-Acta* (lit. "the acts before") and the *Post-Acta* (lit. "the acts after"). As these terms indicate, the *Pro-Acta* were the actions taken by the Synod in its early sessions while the delegates waited for the Remonstrants to answer the summons extended to them to come to Dordrecht and appear before the Synod. The *Post-Acta* were the actions taken by the Synod after the Canons were completed and the foreign delegates were dismissed with thanks on May 6, 1619.

9. The *Pro-Acta*.

Among the most important of these actions, I would note the following (the first three are *Pro-Acta*, while the others are *Post-Acta*):

- The Synod appointed a translation committee, which eventually produced the *Statenvertaling* ("state translation") or Dutch version of the Bible. This translation would prove to be the Dutch equivalent of the King James Version in English, as it served the Dutch church throughout much of its history until recent times.
- The Synod discussed the question of how to promote the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism. Though the Synod wisely decided not to adopt a proposal that would require

young people to demonstrate an adequate knowledge of the Catechism before they could be married, it did recommend a number of methods to the churches!

- The Synod addressed the question whether the children of non-Christian servants living in Dutch households in the Far East should be baptized. A decision was made to require that such children be catechized first, and only be baptized after they made profession of their faith.

10. The Post-Acta

- The Synod, noting that several different texts of the Belgic Confession were in circulation among the churches, approved an official text.
- The Synod adopted a revised Form of Subscription, which continues to be used to this day by Reformed churches that take seriously their adherence to the Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort).
- The Synod approved a number of liturgical forms for use in the public worship of the churches, the administration of the sacraments, the ordination of church officers, and the like.
- The Synod adopted a Church Order that continues to serve as the basis for the church orders of Reformed denominations that subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity.
- The Synod responded to a request from the province of Zeeland regarding the proper understanding of the Christian Sabbath. The points and advice of the Synod on the Christian Sabbath would prove influential in forming the piety and practice of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands throughout their history.
- The Synod responded to a letter from the French Reformed theologian, Pierre Du Moulin, who proposed that a confession be produced that would unite all the Reformed churches throughout the world. The Synod replied to this proposal with a unanimous declaration that the Belgic Confession was an acceptable statement of the Reformed faith for this purpose.

The Abiding Legacy of the Synod

My summary of the accomplishments of the Synod of Dort ought to remind Reformed believers and churches why it is necessary for us to commemorate its work. In my view, the Synod ought to be celebrated chiefly for two reasons.

First, the Canons produced by the Synod offer a beautiful, pastoral defense of the simple gospel truth that “God saves sinners.” God does not simply make salvation possible. He actually saves, and he does so out of the depths of his eternal purpose of election. The atoning work of Christ for his own, and the ministry of the Spirit in communicating to us the benefits of Christ’s work, are an expression of God’s invincible and unchanging purpose to save out of the fallen human race an elect people from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. In the words of the Canons, “The bride of Christ ... has always loved this teaching very tenderly and defended it steadfastly as a priceless treasure; and God, against whom no plan can avail and no strength can prevail, will ensure that she will continue to do this. To this God alone, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be honor and glory forever. Amen” (V/15).

And second, the Synod made a number of far-reaching decisions that continue to be of great benefit to the Reformed churches.