

Canons of Dort



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From the Editor

I was reminded recently of the pastoral focus of post-Reformation theologians by Petrus Van Mastricht's (1630–1706) *Theoretical-Practical Theology*. The very title demonstrates the emphasis that theology is eminently practical: living unto God through Christ. The vital connection between theology and the church, signifying the academy's service to the church, is especially evident by the fact that Van Mastricht begins his systematic theology with a brief but powerful homiletical treatise, "The Best Method of Preaching." So now think of your theology as the foundation for your ministry of the Word for the church.

R. Scott Clark accents this emphasis in his article, "The Synod of Dort: Keeping Venom from the Lips." What was and is at stake in this confessional document, the Canons of Dort, is nothing less than the heart of the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace. The Canons of Dort were meant to protect the church from serious error and supply preachers and teachers with the biblical, Reformed response to the faulty teaching of the Remonstrants. This article should encourage the church to know this Reformed symbol better than it does. To assist in this our new *Trinity Psalter Hymnal* contains the Canons as one of the Three Forms of Unity, as well as the Westminster Standards.

Coordinating with this article, John R. Muether reviews W. Robert Godfrey's *Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dort*. Godfrey focuses on the central importance of the Canons to the health and survival of the Reformed churches of western Europe in the seventeenth century. He also demonstrates the falsity of the "Calvin vs. the Calvinists" interpretation in much twentieth-century scholarship. The doctrine and piety that informs the Canons were built squarely upon the Reformation itself.

Our new focus on the classics brings us to another new translation by David Noe: Theodore Beza's twenty-one theses based on his lectures on the Trinity of Persons and their unity of essence. These will be presented in three parts; this month we have 1–9.

Richard M. Gamble reviews D. G. Hart's timely new book, *Still Protesting: Why the Reformation Matters*. Hart demonstrates the real and important differences between Roman Catholicism and the theology of the Reformation in the areas of salvation, worship, and ecclesiology. This is especially important in light of the attraction to Rome experienced by many Evangelical and Reformed young people. As Gamble concludes, "The stakes are ultimate and the significance eternal."

Ryan M. McGraw, reviews Albert N. Martin's second volume of his *Pastoral Theology* dealing with *The Man of God, His Preaching and Teaching Labors*. This volume is a tour de force, dealing with almost every aspect of the preaching ministry of pastors.

Finally, don't miss poet Mark Green's reflections on Genesis 3:20 in his poem "Adam's Silence." In April, Mark treated us to the value and beauty of sacred poetry in his *New Horizon's* article "Out-of-this-World Poetry."

Blessings in the Lamb,
Gregory Edward Reynolds

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Ordained Servant exists to help encourage, inform, and equip church officers for faithful, effective, and God-glorifying ministry in the visible church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Its primary audience is ministers, elders, and deacons of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, as well as interested officers from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Through high-quality editorials, articles, and book reviews, we will endeavor to stimulate clear thinking and the consistent practice of historic, confessional Presbyterianism.

ServantHistory

The Synod of Dort: Keeping Venom from the Lips

R. Scott Clark

Introduction

Few of our Reformed confessional documents are as valuable and yet as neglected as the Canons of Dort. Today most who know about them think of them as the so-called and quite misleading “Five Points of Calvinism” or TULIP. Indeed, it is anachronistic and reductionist to call them the “Five Points of *Calvinism*” because Calvin had been dead fifty-four years when the Synod of Dort convened in the Netherlands. It is reductionist because the Canons were never intended to be a complete statement of the Reformed faith. They were the product of ecclesiastical deliberation on the attempt by some within the Reformed church in the Netherlands fundamentally to revise our doctrines of God, man, salvation, the church, and sacraments. Further, what the churches were defending was the Word of God as confessed by the churches, not the formulations of a single pastor, however significant and influential.

Background

Outwardly there was little about young Jacob Arminius (c.1560–1609) that would have signaled his dissatisfaction with the Protestant Reformation. Born in 1560, in Utrecht, he grew up in the Reformed church. His family was martyred by the Spanish when Arminius was away at school and he was supported financially by members of the Reformed church. He was a student in the famous university of Leiden. From there he studied in Geneva under Theodore Beza (1519–1605).

Given that he learned his theology from stoutly Reformed theologians in Leiden and Geneva, it is not easy to explain why Arminius became, if we may, an Arminian. One theory is that he reacted to Beza’s theology, but there is little evidence of this. Arminius’s student disputation shows no evidence of any theological movement. Further, the theory rests on a dated, untenable caricature of Beza’s theology. If Arminius did react to Beza’s supralapsarianism,¹ Beza was unaware of it. He wrote a letter of commendation for Arminius.² Another theory is that Arminius’s shift may be traced to his adoption of

¹ “Supralapsarianism (also called antelapsarianism, pre-lapsarian or prelapsarian) is the view that God's decrees of election and reprobation logically *preceded* the decree of the fall while infralapsarianism (also called postlapsarianism and sublapsarianism) asserts that God's decrees of election and reprobation logically *succeeded* the decree of the fall.” Herman Bavinck.

² The faculty in Basel was quite impressed with him and wanted to award him a doctorate. Johannes Jacobus Grynaeus wrote him a glowing letter of recommendation. See W. Robert Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dort* (Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2019), 196–97.

Ramist logic and pedagogy, but this theory fails to explain too many exceptions. Caspar Olevianus (1536–87), one of Beza’s friends and students, and a formative orthodox Reformed covenant theologian and editor of the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) was a Ramist as were William Perkins (1558–1602) and William Ames (1576–1633), whose Reformed orthodoxy is also beyond question.

Arminius did, however, use Geneva as home base from which he made study trips to Basel, Zürich, and Padua to study with scholars from a variety of backgrounds. It is possible that these trips combined with some of his contacts in Leiden, e.g., Caspar Koolhaas (1536–1615), may have helped to facilitate his desire to revise Reformed theology. The latter was a Reformed minister in Leiden who was later disciplined by the Reformed churches for refusing to subscribe to the Belgic Confession. Whether he was influenced by Romanist theologians during his tour of Italy has been disputed, but there is some evidence for it in the texts that he assigned when he began teaching in the theology faculty in Leiden and in his writings. One possible explanation for his theological movement is to be found in his desire to explain the problem of evil, which was rooted in his grief over the massacre of his family and his consequent struggle with the problem of evil and divine sovereignty.³ In this period, perhaps during his visit to Padua, he came into contact with the work of Luis de Molina (1535–1600). As a consequence, he seems to have not only rejected both supralapsarianism *and* infralapsarianism but also to have adopted the doctrine of middle knowledge (*media scientia*) as part of his theodicy.⁴

As Gisbertus Voetius (1589–76), who was Arminius’s student in Leiden, Francis Turretin (1623–87), and J. H. Heidegger (1633–98) concluded, the doctrine of middle knowledge, that God sovereignly arranges the circumstances but does not decree the choices of contingent creatures, makes God contingent upon humans and is incompatible with a Christian doctrine of God.

After his studies, he finally returned to Amsterdam to be examined by classis (presbytery) in 1587. He sustained his examination and was called to a pastorate there and, in 1590, married into an influential family.⁵ One reason to think that Arminius’s theology shifted significantly during his study trips from Geneva is that almost immediately upon taking up his pastoral duties in Amsterdam he found himself embroiled in controversy over his sermon series in Romans. On Romans chapter 7 he concluded that Paul could not have been speaking about himself as a Christian.⁶ He argued that Paul had adopted a *persona* of a man under the law.⁷

³ Herman Selderhuis observed this connection in an interview broadcast May 9, 2019.

<https://wscal.edu/resource-center/the-canons-of-dort> (accessed July 6, 2019).

⁴ Richard A. Muller, *God, Creation, and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 19–21; Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation*, 191–95; Keith D. Stanglin and Thomas H. McCall, *Jacob Arminius: Theologian of Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 45, 66–69.

⁵ Contra Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Death by Love* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 170, which bizarrely claims that Arminius married Calvin’s daughter. On Arminius’s marriage see Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation*, 201–2.

⁶ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1882), 1.510–11

⁷ James Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, The London Edition, 3 vols. (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2.491.

On Romans 9 he postured as a defender of justification *sola gratia, sola fide* but set up a system in which God elects on the basis of foreseen faith (*fides praevisa*).⁸ These sermons provoked a strong reaction in the church led by the father of Reformed missions, Petrus Plancius (1522–1622), but Arminius was not disciplined by his consistory or classis most likely because of protection by influential supporters.

Less well known, Arminius rejected the Protestant doctrine of justification *sola fide* by making faith, rather than Christ’s alien righteousness, the thing imputed.⁹ Part of his motive for this revision was his concern that the Protestant doctrine of justification made believers careless about their sanctification.¹⁰

The Crisis

Despite the controversy attached to Arminius’ teaching, in 1603 he was called from the pastorate to a position in the theology faculty at Leiden. His appointment was controversial and the governors of the university twice commissioned Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641) to investigate Arminius’s views. He suspected Arminius of heterodoxy, but he was never able to prove it to the satisfaction of the governors or the Erasmian civil authorities.

In his career at Leiden University, Arminius accumulated a following among students, who became pastors and spread his teaching in the church. He died in 1609, and his supporters sought to replace him with an even more controversial theologian, Conrad Vorstius (1569–1622), who had studied in Heidelberg, Herborn, and Geneva among other places. He was suspected, however, of harboring Socinian sympathies. Gomarus was so upset by the appointment that he left the university. Ultimately, however, Vorstius never took up his position there.¹¹

Into this boiling cauldron of controversy, mutual suspicion, and recrimination came the five points of the Remonstrants, crystallizing the issues.¹² For all the doubt surrounding what Arminius had been teaching, it became clear what the Arminians were teaching. The first article confessed that God elects on the basis of foreseen faith, obedience, and perseverance.¹³ They revised the doctrine of the atonement by arguing that Jesus did not die as the substitute for his elect to accomplish their redemption. Rather, they confessed that Jesus died “for all men and every man” so as to make redemption possible for those who meet the conditions. Their third and fourth points must be read together since what the Remonstrants gave with the third they took away with the fourth, in which they confessed the resistibility of grace. The Synod of Dort would reply to these points by combining the third and fourth heads of doctrine. The fifth point of the Remonstrants was, to put it plainly, disingenuous. After already implying the possibility of falling from a state of grace, which they suggested explicitly under the fifth point, they

⁸ Arminius, *Works*, 3.485–88.

⁹ Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 168.

¹⁰ Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 182–83.

¹¹ In May 1619 the Synod published a sentence against Vorstius declaring him to be a Socinian.

¹² See Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.545–49.

¹³ Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation*, 101. He comments that, in Remonstrant theology God does not elect persons as much as conditions. “Saving the Reformation,” Office Hours podcast, Westminster Seminary California (website), March 4, 2019, <https://wscal.edu/resource-center/saving-the-reformation>.

go on to coyly claim that they had not yet made up their minds.¹⁴ Their rejection of the Reformed doctrine of perseverance, of course, laid waste to the Protestant doctrine of assurance and pushed the Reformed churches back toward the very Franciscan covenant theology against which Luther had rebelled in the early sixteenth century: “To those who do what lies within them, God denies not grace.”¹⁵

The Crisis Intensifies

Because the followers of Arminius have been (mostly) ecclesiastically separated from the Reformed churches for centuries, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the Arminian crisis occurred originally *within* the doors of the Reformed church. Despite the grave reservations about his theology and teaching expressed by Plancius and other ministers in his classis, and by his colleagues Gomarus and Lucas Trelocatius Jr. (1573–1607), Arminius was and remained a minister in good standing in the Reformed church in the Netherlands. The fact that he conducted his ministry and died within the church intensified the problem, because, in the absence of any unequivocal ecclesiastical pronouncement, that fact made it possible for his apologists to say that “he is a minister in good standing.” Thus, the Remonstrants defended their right to teach their revisions of Reformed theology within the bounds of the church. They also actively campaigned, with help from sympathetic civil magistrates, to revise the Belgic Confession (1561), the church order, and the relationship between church and state (toward Erastianism), so that those sympathetic magistrates might not only defend them but advance their theology, piety, and practice within the Reformed church. Remember, too, that while this theological-political contest was occurring, the Netherlands was at war with Spain and that destructive Thirty-Years War (1618–48) was approaching. The tensions inherent in the Peace of Augsburg (1555) were about to be resolved one way or another.

The orthodox responded to the Articles of the Remonstrance at a ten-day conference at The Hague from March 10–20, 1611. Six representatives from each side, the Remonstrant and the Reformed, presented their case. The formal goal was to see if there was a way to reconcile the two sides. It became clear through the *Collatio*¹⁶ (Latin for comparison) that the differences were fundamental and irreconcilable. That much became clear in the text of the Contra Remonstrance, much of which was later incorporated in the Canons adopted by the Synod of Dort.¹⁷

¹⁴ Compare the fifth point of the Remonstrants with the doctrine of apostasy confessed in “A Joint Federal Vision Profession (2007),” in which the authors use the same sort of language on the same issue. This document has recently been deleted from its original site. See “A Joint Federal Vision Profession (2007),” *R. Scott Clark* (blog), accessed July 6, 2019, <https://rscottclark.org/a-joint-federal-vision-profession-2007/>.

¹⁵ See Heiko Oberman, “Facientibus Quod in Se Est Deus Non Denegat Gratiam: Robert Holcot O.p. And the Beginnings of Luther’s Theology” in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. Stephen Ozment (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 119–41; idem, Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 135–39; idem, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 103–04.

¹⁶ The *Collatio Hagiensis* (1611) was the conference held at the Hague between the Remonstrants and the Contra-Remonstrants.

¹⁷ See P. Y. DeJong, ed. *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, 1968), 209–13.

One of the most intriguing and perhaps surprising points of the Contra Remonstrance is their confession that “children of the covenant” are to be reckoned as “God’s elect children” and “children of the covenant so long as they do not manifest the contrary” and thus, “believing parents, when their children die in infancy, have no reason to doubt the salvation of these their children.”¹⁸ We know this doctrine from Canons 1.17. Contrary to the Remonstrant caricature,¹⁹ most of the Reformed were not and never have been supralapsarian.²⁰ Believing parents are to rest on the promises of God in Christ made to them in the covenant of grace and signified and sealed in baptism.

Synod Approaches

The Remonstrants adopted a victim identity. In their narrative, Arminius was just a godly Reformed pastor who was unjustly singled out for his preaching and teaching and they were unjustly persecuted along with him. In fact, concern over Arminius’s teaching arose almost immediately, but the final resolution took nearly thirty years.

Further, concern about what Arminius and his followers were teaching was widespread across Europe and in the British Isles. It was perceived immediately as a fundamental attack on basic Augustinian theology and the material doctrines of the Protestant Reformation (salvation *sola gratia, sola fide*). In Herborn, Johannes Piscator (1546–1625) wrote against the Arminians. Pierre DuMoulin (1568–1658) wrote *The Anatomy of Arminianism* (1618), still perhaps the greatest critique of Arminianism. For some years before Arminius, Peter Baro (1534–99) had been teaching something like what Arminius would teach in Amsterdam and Leiden. Archbishop Whitgift (c. 1530–1604) responded in 1595 with the Lambeth Articles reaffirming the Augustinian view of sin, grace, and election. After Synod, William Ames (1576–33) would publish his *Animadversions* against the Remonstrants in 1629.

As the theological controversy heated up in the Netherlands, across Europe, and in the British Isles, the polarization between the Arminians and Calvinists threatened to break out into open warfare. Prince Maurits (Maurice of Orange, 1567–1625) and Jan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547–1619), the *de facto* prime minister of the United Provinces, were estranged. The latter supported the Arminians, and Maurits sided with the orthodox. England, which had become deeply involved in the Netherlands, sided with Maurits against Spain. After the lines of disagreement had become clear, in light of the conference at The Hague (1611), pressure mounted on Maurits to support the orthodox against the Remonstrants, to bring the matter to a resolution despite his misgivings about what that would mean for national unity (such as it was) against the Spanish. The Remonstrants had favored a synod but only to revise the church order in order to give the (typically latitudinarian) magistrates more control over the church and to revise the Belgic Confession to allow the Remonstrant view of conditional election.

There was some popular support for the orthodox in the Netherlands. When the Remonstrants gained control of churches, they forbid the Reformed to leave in order to

¹⁸ De Jong, *Crisis*, 211. See also R. Scott Clark, “Baptism and the Benefits of Christ: The Double Mode of Communion in the Covenant of Grace,” *The Confessional Presbyterian Journal* 2 (2006): 3–19.

¹⁹ See the “Conclusion” (Latin, *Conclusio*) of synod, which restates the orthodox case against the Remonstrants (Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.576, 3.596).

²⁰ Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation*, 190–91.

start new, confessional congregations. This heavy-handed approach backfired. There was popular support in the churches for the confessional doctrine of salvation, for the contra-Remonstrant position as articulated in The Hague in 1611. In 1617 riots by the contra-Remonstrants broke out. Four provinces urged the States General to call a national synod to resolve the crisis.

The Province of Holland, dominated politically by Oldenbarnevelt and supporters of the Remonstrants, resisted the call for a synod. They sensed that things might go against them. Now the survival of the United Provinces was at stake. Oldenbarnevelt even sought to persuade members of the army to take an oath of allegiance to Holland against the United Provinces. His troops gave way, however, and in August, he, Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), and others were arrested. The Remonstrant leader Johannes Uytenbogaert (1557–1644) fled the country. Oldenbarnevelt was condemned for high treason and was beheaded at The Hague on May 14, 1619, after synod. His son retaliated by attempting to assassinate Prince Maurits, whose father had been murdered in 1584. A synod was called for November 13, 1618.

The Reformed knew that the controversy with the Remonstrants represented more than a parochial theological dispute. They believed that the Remonstrants were leading the nation backward toward the heresy of Pelagianism and thence to Socinianism. Not only had they supported Vortsius's appointment to Leiden University, but the Remonstrant leader Simon Episcopius (1583–1644) was also suspected of being sympathetic to Socinianism. In recent decades both John Platt and Sarah Mortimer have seen connections between Episcopius and Socinianism.²¹

The Resolution

The Synod of Dort did finally convene in the armory in Dordrecht on November 13, 1618, and concluded their work in May 29, 1619. Though the Remonstrants were defeated at synod they did not disappear. Uytenbogaert, Episcopius, and others convened a Remonstrant Synod in Antwerp in October 1619, attended by forty Arminian ministers. They were protected by Archduke Albert who benefited from the ongoing controversy. Episcopius and Grotius moved to France, others to Denmark. Other Remonstrants held clandestine meetings across the Netherlands.²² The Princeton church historian Samuel Miller (1769–1850) noted in 1841 that the Remonstrants were re-admitted to pulpits after Maurits's death in 1625. It was not long thereafter that rationalism began to spread through the Reformed church in the Netherlands.²³

Finally, one aspect of the Canons that has not received much attention is its formal judgment against the Remonstrants and their theology. Synod used the word *heretic* of the Remonstrants, beginning in the preface, where synod complained about the “impious violence of heretics.”²⁴ Synod equated the Remonstrants with the “proud heresies of

²¹ John Platt, *Reformed Thought and Scholasticism: The Arguments for the Existence of God in Dutch Theology, 1575–1650* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 218, 231; Sarah Mortimer follows Platt in *Reason and the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 26.

²² Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall, 1477–1806*, Oxford history of early modern Europe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 464.

²³ Samuel Miller, “Introductory Essay,” in *The Articles of the Synod of Dort*, trans. and ed. Thomas Scott, (repr., Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1993), 46–47.

²⁴ “et hæreticorum impietate” (Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.550).

Pelagius” (Canons of Dort 3/4.10; hereafter, CD),²⁵ and urged authorities to “check all heresies and errors, unquiet and turbulent spirits.”²⁶

Given synod’s affirmation of the judgment of the ecumenical Council of Ephesus (431) against Pelagianism (CD 3/4.10), we should see the implicit condemnation of the Remonstrant error as heresy when synod says that their doctrine of conditional election “savors of the teaching of Pelagius” (Rejection of Errors, 1.4; hereafter, RE).²⁷ In RE 2.3 synod denounced the Remonstrants for “recalling from hell the errors of Pelagius” for their doctrine that Christ made salvation possible for those who do their part.²⁸ In RE 2.6 synod complained bitterly that the Remonstrants, by using the distinction between “meriting” and “appropriating,” tried to “give to the people to drink the venom of Pelagianism.”²⁹ Synod called Remonstrant theology Pelagian in 3/4.2, 7, 9 and in RE 4.9 and in RE 5.2 “manifest Pelagianism” (RE 5.2).³⁰

Observations

Four centuries after Synod, in North America, Dort might seem remote, but it should not. The confessional Reformed churches may not be facing Spanish persecution, but we are a distinct minority in an overwhelmingly Arminian evangelical culture. The assumptions that fueled the Remonstrant movement live on. We may not have Remonstrants within Reformed churches today but we do have Federal Visionists, who openly affirm the Remonstrant denial of the perseverance of the saints. There are those in our midst who would turn the covenant of grace into a covenant of works and who seek to revise the doctrine of the atonement. The setting changes but the issues remain. Thus, the Preface, the Canons, the Rejections of Errors, the Conclusion, and the Sentence of the Synod of Dort all continue to instruct us as we seek to feed our flocks and keep the venom of Remonstrant theology and piety from their lips.

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²⁵ Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.566.

²⁶ “omnes hæreses et errores, spiritus inquietos et turbulentos compescant” (Schaff, *Creeds*, 5.579).

²⁷ “Pelagium enim sapiunt” (Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.557).

²⁸ “Pelagianum errorem ab inferis revocant” (Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.563).

²⁹ “populo perniciosum Pelagianismi venenum conantur propinare” (Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.564).

³⁰ “manifestum Pelagianismum” (Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.574).

ServantClassics

Beza on the Trinity, 21 Theses, Part 1 (1–9)

by David C. Noe

Theses or Axioms on the Trinity of Persons and their Unity of Essence as Derived from Theodore Beza's Lectures

- Thesis I:** True knowledge¹ concerning God is the principal aspect of truly calling upon God. This is because we cannot worship what we do not know.
- Thesis II:** We must seek our conception² of God from his Word, because in it, and nowhere else, does he fully disclose himself to us for our salvation, and he does so such that the one who gains knowledge³ of God outside his Word gains no knowledge for his salvation.⁴
- Thesis III:** Because God has not only fully disclosed himself to the world in the writings of the Prophets and Apostles in the most true fashion,⁵ but even, most of all and especially, in their very suitable words and phrases, we must devote our effort not only to confining ourselves within the boundaries of Scripture (as regards the main point), but also observe the customary formulas of Scripture down to the finest little bit.⁶
- Thesis IV** Nevertheless, the stubbornness of heretics made it necessary sometimes to fashion terminology in order to avoid their petty objections. But the Holy Fathers of the church did not do this carelessly. Instead, they used the greatest reverence so that the meaning of the Scriptures was not in any way whatsoever diminished, nor was any innovation introduced into God's Word.
- Thesis V** This was why, long ago, the Greek terms οὐσία (*ousia*) and ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*) were adopted against Sabellius Afer, who confused the persons with the essence, and against Samosatenus of Antioch,⁷ who destroyed the Son's divine nature. Nevertheless, the author of the letter to Hebrews in chapter 1 employed the second of these terms. Nearly the whole controversy regarding these topics depends upon the explanation of these two terms.

¹ *de Deo scientia.*

² *dei cognition.*

³ *sapit.*

⁴ Beza here both recognizes the existence of natural theology and limits its efficacy.

⁵ *verissime.*

⁶ *mordicus.*

⁷ Also known as Paul of Samosata, c. AD 200–275, who was Bishop of Antioch 260–268.

Thesis VI Therefore, we must understand that when the Fathers are discussing the divine mysteries they have borrowed these terms from natural phenomena.⁸ This is not because they thought that subjects so distinct could properly be explained using the same terms. Instead, they did this so that, in some way, they might by a kind of comparison of things unequal set before our eyes divine realities. And with these as their weapons they resolutely silenced those who were transforming theology into mere philosophical wrangling.

Thesis VII Therefore, we will state what οὐσία (*ousia*) and ὑπόστασις (*hypostasis*) mean when it comes to natural phenomena,⁹ at least as much as the present argument will require, and then explain in what respect the same terms are applied to the divine mysteries.

Thesis VII There are some designations of a type of universal and indeterminate meaning. These by similar reasoning¹⁰ are attributed to a whole host of predicates in which we note there is something shared. This element is in fact present in the very many different subjects concerning which, by similar reasoning, it is predicated. But still, it does not subsist outside of those subjects, just as likewise those subjects do not subsist except in that common shared element. When, for example, I say “person,” I do not conceive of anything that is properly subsisting *per se*, but I note in my mind a certain shared nature apart from any particular demarcation. By a similar reasoning Peter, Paul, Timothy, and other individual subjects like these subsist. Therefore, “person” is a term that indicates οὐσία (*ousia*), a concept expressed by the designation “person.”

Thesis IX Furthermore, because this conceptualizing afterward descends from that aforementioned universal to the individual and particular instances through which those subjects are distinguished—I mean those in which that common notion was previously conceived and which subsist fully delineated¹¹ by those properties—therefore, designations have also been found that are adapted to expressing these distinctions. Thus we say Peter, Paul, and Timothy, which are expressed as names of these ὑπόστασεις (*hypostases*) or ὑφιστάμενοι (*hyphistamenoι*), i.e., names of subjects defined by their own properties and subsisting in their own, shared οὐσία (*ousia*).

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⁸ *a rebus naturalibus.*

⁹ *in rebus naturalibus.*

¹⁰ *pari ratione.*

¹¹ *circumscrip̄te.*

ServantReading

Still Protesting: Why the Reformation Matters,

by *D. G. Hart*

A Review Article

by Richard M. Gamble

Still Protesting: Why the Reformation Matters, by D. G. Hart. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2018, xiii + 207 pages, \$18.00.

Scores of local churches and evangelical colleges face the challenge of Roman Catholicism today in ways for which they may not be prepared. Catholic theology, liturgy, aesthetics, and in some parishes a tight-knit community prove attractive to more members of our congregations than we might expect, especially our young people.

In the case of college students, their conversion to Rome typically starts with friendship. As a courtesy, they accompany a roommate or classmate to Mass, usually with the promise of a return visit to their own Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, or Methodist church. Surprised in some cases by a kind of earnest Catholicism they didn't know existed, they become curious. They start reading. They get into disorienting debates over justification, sanctification, the sacraments, tradition, and beauty. They might find the Roman Church's pro-life activism and emphasis on marriage and the family compelling. They might sense the alienation of modernity, resent the damage done by divorce to their childhoods, feel awash in a culture of radical individualism and global capitalism, have grown tired of megachurch innovations, seek certainty and authority in a whirl of competing truth claims, and long to be connected to the grand narrative of Western civilization. All of this the Catholic Church seems to provide in abundance, especially in those parishes where these emphases set the tone, however rare such parishes may be. Ultimately, seekers buy into the plausibilities offered by Rome, while their circle of Catholic friends and mentors—often converts themselves—pressure them to convert. Despite Pope Francis's liberalism, alarms over heresy, and pedophilia in parish after parish, Protestant converts believe they are coming home. Some even enter the priesthood or convent.

Are Protestants just being cranky and obscurantist if they resist these conversions? Is the Reformers' dissent from Rome five hundred years ago still relevant? Is the Catholic Church the same institution that Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli denounced and from which they were severed in the sixteenth century? If so, then the old Protestant cause is one still worth fighting for. Here we stand. We can do no other.

These are the kinds of questions Darryl Hart tackles in *Still Protesting*—a two-word title that states a thesis. Hart, a professor of history at Hillsdale College and a ruling elder in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, has good friends and colleague who are devout Catholics and has witnessed Rome's attraction for students, including those in the OPC. Much of this book grows out of personal experience. It is not abstract. He has seen the

heartbreak that families, pastors, elders, and congregants have endured. For many of us, this is a pressing concern, and he addresses it with his wide knowledge of the Reformation, especially historic Calvinism, a sympathy for converts, and a fair-minded assessment of what Catholicism teaches and practices. Caricature has no place in a sober response to Rome.

At its core, the Protestant Reformation still matters since “salvation, worship, and the institutional church still matter” (xiii). To prove this thesis, Hart divides his task into two parts: the first five chapters are meant to refresh our memories about the Reformation; the second five chapters refute Rome’s claims about the consequences of Protestantism. Hart concludes with reflections on sainthood, contrasting Catholicism with the testimony of the Bible. On the eve of John Henry Newman’s scheduled beatification in October 2019, this chapter is an especially timely reminder of just what it means for all believers to be saints. Above all, Hart’s hope is “to make the objections to Rome not political or cultural but religious and theological” (14).

To that end, Hart goes right back to Luther and other early Reformers. Much of Hart’s overview will be familiar ground to students of history and hopefully to officers in the OPC. These chapters lay out the context for understanding the debate that still divides Rome from Protestantism, especially from confessional churches that know who they are and what they believe. Hart rightly emphasizes the recovery of *sola scriptura*, the purity of the gospel (justification by faith alone), the dubious claims of papal authority, and the priesthood of all believers.

One of the most powerful narratives being promoted today is that Protestantism is the source of everything we hate about modernity. Protestants themselves bear much of the responsibility for promulgating this story, at least a certain brand of progressive Christianity does. It was common at one time, especially in America, for cultural Protestants to boast that the Reformers were to be thanked for the manifold blessings of individualism, the market economy, civil and religious liberty, and the absolute sovereignty of private judgment. These Protestants celebrated American civilization and gradually secularized the Reformation into an achievement for political, social, economic, and broadly cultural ends. It was a happy story of how the arc of history led to themselves and their own moment in time. They abandoned theological precision and fidelity to confessions of faith in the name of advancing American greatness and the nation’s mission to the world.

Once people began to doubt the virtues of modernity, however, it was easy to blame Protestants for the very things that they had been boasting about as their contribution to civilization. A number of recent Catholic historians and apologists have accepted the Protestant Whiggish version of history as true, and have set out to deconstruct it, offering Catholicism as the antidote to the poisons of modernity. The truth, as always, is more complicated. Rather than investigating what modernity did to Protestantism and Catholicism alike, they blame modernism on Protestantism. What gets missed in these pronouncements from the bench is the fact that Protestantism itself underwent a revolution, beginning at least in the nineteenth century, that ultimately turned it into another religion altogether, having little to do with the Reformation. Hart highlights J. Gresham Machen’s compelling argument in *Christianity and Liberalism* that modernity in the shape of theological liberalism had created nothing less than a new religion disconnected from the Bible and everything for which the Reformers stood. This new

religion has a different God, a different Christ, a different soteriology, and a different eschatology.

Hart argues that Rome has been a theological and ecclesiological innovator for centuries, culminating, for the time being at least, with Vatican II's liberalization of the church. The history of Catholicism is not a seamless, organic story of remarkable continuity and harmony topped off with a happy ending. Indeed, the history of the Council of Trent alone shows a church deeply divided against itself and wrapped up with political intrigue. "History is not reassuring or comfortable," Hart warns. "If anything, history makes claims to certainty and authority look profoundly contested" (111). That note of skepticism ought to chasten American Protestants as well. Admirably, Hart shows what Roman Catholicism did *to* apostolic Christianity rather than providing an ark for its preservation. The division between the Reformers and their adversaries in Rome cannot be reduced to an unfortunate misunderstanding. To do so does an injustice to all who have contended for the faith and trivializes what is at stake.

What is to be done? Firm in their adherence to Scripture and true to their convictions, congregations need to remain grounded in the hope of the gospel. Parents need to catechize their children, cultivate lifelong habits of faithful church attendance, and show by their own lives that the local church is the center of their ongoing spiritual formation. Elders and deacons need to care for each member, including and perhaps especially the children under their charge. They need to build relationships with young people, making the church a home and hospital, a place that nurtures their faith and affections. Pastors need to be willing to bear the burden of repeated, time-consuming conversations with young people, showing love and patience as they raise the same questions again and again. Pastors and elders need to be well versed in the history and doctrines of the Reformation, and know more than a little about the Council of Trent and about claims concerning the Virgin Mary and the intercession of saints. They need to teach the biblical and confessional doctrines of human depravity, election, grace and nature, the atonement, good works, and perseverance. Our Reformed churches also need to understand the beauty and simplicity of their own worship in Word and sacrament. As the Westminster Confession of Faith (7.6) eloquently says of the sacraments, "though fewer in number [than Rome's], and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory . . . [the gospel] is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles."

Still Protesting is a helpful and timely resource to equip the church of Jesus Christ to defend the faith. The stakes are ultimate and the significance eternal.

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Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dort, by *W. Robert Godfrey*

by John R. Muether

Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dort, by W. Robert Godfrey. Orlando: Reformation Trust, 2019, xiv, 265 pages, \$19.00.

A half-century ago it was widely accepted orthodoxy among church historians that the spirit of the Reformation was antithetical to that of the century that followed. Often described as “Calvin vs. the Calvinists,” this school of thought contended, in the words of one historian, that the “spontaneity, freshness, and joyfulness” of the Reformation was usurped by the “legalism, moralism, and rationalism” of the Protestant scholastics.¹ If the Westminster Assembly at mid-seventeenth century was the epitome of this alien spirit, the turning point took place in 1618–19 at the Synod of Dort in the Netherlands. Thankfully, that school of interpretation has been refuted by recent scholarship committed to a closer reading of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts.

In this book Dr. Robert Godfrey, recently retired as president and professor of church history at Westminster Seminary California, revisits the Synod of Dort, which was the subject of his 1974 doctoral dissertation at Stanford University. Two words stand out in the title of this book. First of all, Godfrey is not content with merely crediting Dort with maintaining the spirit of the Reformation; more than that, Dort “saved” the Reformation in several respects. It served the recovery of Augustinianism by exposing a subtle version of semi-Pelagianism, it clarified the “solas” of the Reformation, and it prepared the church for its faithful witness when the Enlightenment emerged by century’s end.

Secondly, the title notes that the chief product of the synod, the Canons of Dort (though cast in the polemical form of articles to affirm and errors to reject) is preeminently a work of *pastoral* theology. This is a feature that is sometimes lost even among its defenders. Godfrey’s book is for teachers, because the Canons especially were composed for teachers in the church. Every head of doctrine includes instruction on how the doctrines of grace must be carefully and diligently preached and taught.

Part one sets the stage by describing the crisis in the Dutch Reformed Church that prompted the call of the synod. Godfrey surveys the rise of Jacob Arminius (1559–1609), who studied at Leiden, Geneva (under Beza), and Basel before pastoring in Amsterdam and then teaching at Leiden from 1603 until his death. Though controversy followed his teaching, the debates in the church were heightened after his death. In 1610, forty-two ministers appealed for tolerance of his teachings in the form of a five-point Remonstrance. By decade’s end an international Reformed synod gathered to respond, as Reformed voices throughout Europe joined ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church. The synod’s response to the Remonstrance, the Canons of Dort, contain what we have come to call the “five points of Calvinism,” though Godfrey suggests that they are better described as “five answers to the five errors of Arminianism” (13).²

¹ Arthur C. Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), 30. Not surprisingly, mainline Presbyterians celebrated the Confession of 1967 as the church’s liberation from the legalism of the Westminster Standards.

² The concept of “five points” comes from Dort, but the acronym “TULIP” does not emerge until the early twentieth century.

In part two Godfrey offers a new translation of the Canons, followed, in part three, with his analysis and exposition of its five heads of doctrine. He illustrates how the synod refuted Remonstrant errors by constant and explicit quotations of Scripture. On the delicate matter of the extent of Christ's atonement, the synod reached a consensus of acknowledging its universal sufficiency and its particular efficacy (115). The doctrine of perseverance was premised on the simple teaching on the faithfulness of God (155). Godfrey notes that, rightly taught, perseverance has encouraged humility and godliness in the churches of the Reformed tradition (163).

Godfrey underscores the pastoral dimension of the Canons in his summary of the synod's work:

The synod . . . addresses ministers and teachers in the Reformed churches to deal with these matters carefully and piously. These doctrines are taught by God in the Scriptures for "the glory of the divine name, the holiness of life, and the consolation of troubled souls." The church must be faithful in teaching them just as God has. Teachers and preachers must speak as the Scriptures do and must avoid phrases (sometimes called "harsh phrases") or expressions that can be misunderstood or abused either by the faithful or by those who reject Reformed teaching. (177)

There are five appendices to the book. The first (and by far the longest) offers a "new look" at Jacob Arminius. Godfrey surveys how biographers through the centuries have lauded the Dutch theologian's example of "nobility, moderation, and heroism" in an age that had become narrowminded and polemic. Looking especially at the influential 1971 work by Carl Bangs (which is consistent with the Calvin vs. the Calvinists approach of this era),³ Godfrey assembles evidence to paint a different and less complimentary portrait of the patron saint of the Remonstrants.

In addition, there are briefer appendices with helpful guidance for understanding the form and structure of the Canon's heads of doctrine. Here, for example, Godfrey explains that because the synod intended each head of doctrine to be read on its own, there is some built-in redundancy, and so some arguments recur under different heads. Not to be overlooked is appendix five, a translation of the "Doctrinal Statement by the Synod of Dort on the Sabbath." The synod did work beyond the Remonstrance debate, and while this statement is brief and preliminary, it challenges the popular notion that the Dutch Reformed and English Puritans were divided on the practice of Sabbath-keeping.

Godfrey's book reminds us that the doctrines of Dort "are not peripheral or obscure" (165), contrary to the impression left by their absence from many contemporary pulpits. When predestination is preached with modesty and prudence, it shapes us in our gratitude and humility before God, far from leading us to despair or presumption. If the Synod of Dort "saved" the Reformation by clarifying the Bible's teaching on grace against the errors of its day, a study of its "theology, piety, and strategy" (175) would no doubt benefit the church today as well. A careful study of Godfrey's book would certainly help toward that end. *Saving the Reformation* might be especially fitting for book discussions in church sessions.

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³ Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971).

Pastoral Theology: The Man of God, His Preaching and Teaching Labors, vol. 2, *by Albert N. Martin*

by Ryan M. McGraw

Pastoral Theology: The Man of God, His Preaching and Teaching Labors, vol. 2, Albert N. Martin. Montville, NJ: Trinity Pulpit Press, 2019, xiii + 651 pages, \$47.00.

This is the second volume of three in what will likely become one of the most extensive pastoral theologies in the history of the church. The primary strength of this volume is that it collects some of the best Reformed and biblical material on preaching available. Martin teaches pastors how to preach Christ-centered, Spirit-filled sermons to the edification of the church and to the conversion of others. This book is useful, practical, and interesting, and it has the advantage both of condensing some of the best Reformed preaching manuals into a single volume and of introducing readers to some of the best books on preaching.

Martin's treatment of preaching is thoroughgoing and engaging. The first section, on the content and form of preaching, includes seven axioms about preaching. The second section primarily addresses different kinds of exegetical preaching. The final section of this volume treats the act of preaching itself. Most of the first section deals with issues such as form, structure, the application, and illustration of sermons, along with other key issues. Drawing from a plethora of biblical and historical examples, Martin couples these things with over fifty years of pastoral experience and sanctified common sense.

Martin's counsel on different kinds of exegetical preaching is particularly noteworthy. Rather than arguing simply for consecutive expository sermon series—which he favors—he uses the best of past examples to show that topical, textual, and consecutive sermons can all be expository. From this, Martin concludes that the Spirit has blessed preachers in the past through various kinds of preaching rather than in spite of it.

He also gives balanced directions regarding manuscript versus extemporaneous preaching, arguing that achieving the goals of preaching are more important than a specific method of delivery. However, preachers should recognize the clear differences between the written and the spoken word and that simply reading a manuscript to a congregation may not achieve the goals of preaching (603–14).

One final feature that stands out in this book is that Martin includes a range of issues concerning how people hear sermons, such as the effects of good airflow, comfortable chairs, and an appropriate pulpit. While some may regard such counsel as unspiritual, Martin rightly seeks to minister to people as body and soul creatures. Beyond the items mentioned here, the scope of the author's instruction on homiletics is fairly full and includes virtually every major topic that a preacher will need.

The only major drawback in this work is that the author does not develop the place of the doctrine of the Trinity in preaching as thoroughly as some other recent authors have done. While his treatment of preaching Christ is superb and his material on the Holy Spirit is outstanding, he does not synthesize the doctrine of the Trinity into preaching

distinctly. In this regard, recent authors like Sinclair Ferguson,¹ Joel Beeke,² and John Piper³ usefully supplement this material.

Volume 2 of Martin's *Pastoral Theology* is an excellent summary of some of the best Reformed instruction on preaching. It is an excellent place for new students to cut their teeth on homiletics, and it is an ideal review that will stir the hearts of even the most seasoned preachers.

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¹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Some Pastors and Teachers: Reflecting a Biblical Vision of What Every Minister Is Called to Be* (Banner of Truth, 2017).

² Joel R. Beeke, *Reformed Preaching: Proclaiming God's Word from the Heart of the Preacher to the Heart of His People* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

³ John Piper, *Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

ServantPoetry

Mark Green (1957–)

Adam's Silence

Genesis 3:20

Before you speak, my love, let me recall
That majesty we shared before we found
Something slithering upon this sacred ground.

Ruling as regents in this tupal hall,
We knew the laws that governed sacred space
And promised life here in this Sabbath place.

But we stumbled—and just before that fall
Your silent *Yes* revealed so all could see
Me unprotected as you rejected me.

But now we tremble beneath a bloody skin,
Until One comes to take away our sin.