

Donald Sinnema / Christian Moser / Herman J. Selderhuis (eds.)

# **Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae (1618-1619)**

Acta of the Synod of Dordt

Vol. 1

**V&R** Academic

Acta et Documenta  
Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae  
(1618–1619)

A Project of the  
Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek Emden

In Cooperation with  
Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn  
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Acta et Documenta  
Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae  
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Edited by  
Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser,  
and Herman J. Selderhuis

in Collaboration with  
Janika Bischof, Johanna Roelevink,  
and Fred van Lieburg

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## *Foreword*

One of the stated aims of the Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek Emden – alongside the conservation and collection of documents, books and archives relating to the history of Reformed Protestantism – is to facilitate and enable the academic exploration and investigation of important sources in the Reformed tradition.

The library therefore stands in the footsteps of Emden's important historical role in the global development of Reformed Protestantism, with the Synod of Emden in 1571 as its most significant and lasting contribution to ecclesiology and church law. However, what began in Emden in 1571, was not only confirmed but developed significantly further at the Synod of Dordt in 1618/19, despite the fact that the emphasis had shifted.

Now the library has embarked on the project of making the background, developments and details of this important Synod of Dordt accessible to the academic research community. The project is undertaken in cooperative partnership with the Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, the Huygens Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, the Institut für Schweizerische Reformationsgeschichte Zürich, the Protestantse Kerk Nederland, the Remonstrantse Broederschap, the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the City of Dordrecht. We would like to take this opportunity to thank them sincerely for their contribution. This productive cooperation was made possible through the valuable contacts of the Refo500 network and its Reformation Research Consortium (RefoRC).

Our special thanks go to the general editors Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser and Herman J. Selderhuis, as well as all contributing editors. Such an enormous project would not be possible without their constant and selfless involvement.

We would also like to thank the publisher Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht and the Stichting Deddens-Koppefonds for their moral and financial support of this project.

In our fast-moving age, it may be a daring undertaking to edit and renew access to sources and historical events of the seventeenth century, which is in some ways so distant; but insights into the discourse of the future are often only possible while taking into account these past events, irrespective of the positions we may be prepared to adopt in the present.



We therefore hope that this edition of the *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae* will find attentive and creative readers.

Emden, Autumn 2014

J. Marius J. Lange van Ravenswaay

Director, Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek

## *Preface*

The series, *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae 1618–1619*, is a nine-volume critical edition of all the documents of the Synod of Dordt. Besides the actual acts, covering more than six months of sessions, all the supporting documents produced by the synod, and contemporary reports about the synod, are being made available in their original languages – mostly Latin, since the synod was conducted in this language.

Volume I of the series presents three versions of the acta of the synod – the original Acta Authentica, the printed *Acta* and the abbreviated Acta Contracta. Since the *Acta* as printed differs significantly from the Acta Authentica, the first edition of the printed *Acta* (Leiden 1620) is included in this volume for the sake of easy comparison with the original. Also included are the acts of meetings of the state delegates, who represented the States General (Dutch government) at the synod, and their instructions from their superiors.

Documents considered and produced by the synod will appear in later volumes of the series. When mentioned in any version of the acta, such documents are identified in footnotes.

The need for this edition is apparent, since many important documents of the synod have been preserved only in manuscript in a number of European archives in the Netherlands, Switzerland, England and Germany. This includes the original Acta Authentica of the synod, as well as a variety of significant journals written by participants. Moreover, Dordt materials that have been published date mostly from the seventeenth century.

The Dordt-project was conceived when Herman Selderhuis and William den Boer of the Theological University in Apeldoorn discussed the idea of celebrating the synod's 400th anniversary by producing a new edition of the *Acta* of the synod. They broached the idea with Donald Sinnema, who suggested, from many years of experience researching the synod, the need for a critical edition of all the documents of Dordt.

The vast scope of the project requires an international team of contributing editors, which is led by three general editors. Herman Selderhuis has taken leadership in organizational aspects of the project. Christian Moser (Institut für Schweizerische Reformationgeschichte, University of Zürich) joined the team and has taken leadership in editorial and technical aspects of the edition. Donald Sinnema (Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Illi-

nois) has taken leadership in matters of content and in developing a full inventory of Dort documents.

Johanna Roelevink (Huygens Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, The Hague) and Fred van Lieburg (VU University, Amsterdam) have also devoted their time and expertise to the project. Many other contributing editors are editing documents in later volumes of the series.

The Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek (JALB) in Emden decided to coordinate and sponsor the edition as its core research project. The academic board of JALB, with Michael Beintker as chairman, supported this edition as essentially related to JALB's mission and resources as a research center for Reformed Protestantism. J. Marius J. Lange van Ravenswaay, director of JALB, arranged for funding and supplied facilities, resulting in the appointment of Janika Bischof as project coordinator.

This project is endorsed by the Reformation Research Consortium (RefoRC), which fosters cooperation and commitment of partner institutions and their scholars to accomplish major research projects.

In early phases of the project, Sinnema was supported by research grants from Trinity Christian College. Carla Sinnema helped with typing and proof-reading. Joseph Tipton, classics professor at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, lent his expertise in deciphering difficult readings in the texts.

To all participating institutions, donors, as well as to all others working on this project, we express our gratitude and appreciation.

Donald Sinnema  
Christian Moser  
Herman J. Selderhuis

## Abbreviations

### Archives and Libraries

Dordrecht RA	Regionaal Archief, Dordrecht (formerly Gemeentearchief, Stadsarchief, Erfgoedcentrum DiEP)
Rotterdam BRG	Bibliotheek der Remonstrantsch-Gereformeerde Gemeente te Rotterdam, Centrale Bibliotheek Rotterdam
The Hague NA	Nationaal Archief, The Hague
Utrecht BRU	Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Utrecht
Utrecht OSA	Oud Synodaal Archief, Utrechts Archief, Utrecht

### Sources and Literature

Acta	<i>Acta Synodi Nationalis ... Dordrechtii habitae Anno MDCXVIII et MDCXIX</i> (Leiden: Isaac Elzevir, 1620)
Acta et Scripta	<i>Acta et Scripta Synodalia Dordracena Ministrorum Remonstrantium in Foederato Belgio</i> (Harderwijk, 1620)
ADB	<i>Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie</i> , 56 vols. (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1875–1912)
ADSND	Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser, Herman J. Selderhuis, eds., <i>Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae (1618–1619)</i> (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014–)
Bakhuizen van den Brink	J. N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, ed., <i>De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften in Authentieke Teksten</i> (Amsterdam: Bolland, 1976)
Balcanqual	Walter Balcanqual, “Letters,” in John Hales, <i>Golden Remains</i> , 2nd ed. (London: Thomas Newcomb for Robert Pawlet, 1673)
Baudartius	Willem Baudartius, <i>Memoryen ofte Cort verhael der gedenckweerdichste so kercklicke als werltlicke gheschiedenissen van Nederland</i> , 2nd ed. (Arnhem: Jan Jansz, 1624–1625)
BBKL	<i>Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon</i> (Hamm et al.: Bautz, 1975–)
BLGNP	<i>Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse protestantisme</i> , 6 vols. (Kampen: Kok, 1978–2006)
BLO	<i>Biographisches Lexikon für Ostfriesland</i> (Aurich: Ostfriesische Landschaft, 1993–)
Brandt	Geeraert Brandt, <i>Historie der Reformatie en andere Kerkelijke Geschiedenissen in en omtrent de Nederlanden</i> , 4 vols. (Amsterdam: Dirk and Hendrick Boom for Jan Rieuwertsz, 1671–1704)
CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina</i> (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953–)

COGD	Giuseppe Alberigo, ed., <i>Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Generaliumque Decreta: Editio Critica</i> (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006–)
DH	Heinrich Denzinger, Peter Hünemann, eds., <i>Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum</i> , 37th ed. (Freiburg i.Br. et al.: Herder, 1991)
Dijk	Klaas Dijk, <i>De Strijd over Infra-en Supralapsarisme in de Gereformeerde Kerken van Nederland</i> (Kampen: Kok, 1912)
van Dooren	J. P. van Dooren, “De Tekst van de Acta van de Synode te Dordrecht 1618–1619,” <i>Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis</i> 51 (1971), 187–198
FC	<i>Fontes Christiani</i> (Freiburg i.Br./Turnhout: Herder/Brepols, 1988–)
GCS	<i>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte</i> (Leipzig et al.: Akademie-Verlag, 1897–)
de Groot	D. J. de Groot, “Stukken met betrekking tot de opstelling der Dordtsche Canones,” <i>Bijdragen en mededelingen van het Historisch Genootschap</i> 59 (1937), 134–210
Hales	John Hales, <i>Golden Remains</i> , 2nd. ed. (London: Thomas Newcomb for Robert Pawlet, 1673)
Heyngius	Theodorus Heyngius, <i>Acta Synodi Nationalis breviter conscripta</i> , Utrecht BRU, MS 457
HLS	<i>Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz</i> 13 vols. (Basel: Schwabe, 2002–2014)
HV	[Bernardus Dwinglo], <i>Historisch Verhael van't ghene sich toegedraeghen heeft binnen Dordrecht, in de Jaeren 1618 ende 1619</i> ([Amsterdam], 1623)
Kaajan	Hendrik Kaajan, <i>De Pro-Acta der Dordtsche Synode in 1618</i> (Rotterdam: T. de Vries, 1914)
Knuttel	W. P. C. Knuttel, <i>Catalogus van de Pamfletten-verzameling berustende in de Koninklijke Bibliotheek</i> (Utrecht: HES Publishers, 1978)
Kuyper	H. H. Kuyper, <i>Post-Acta of Nahandelingen van de Nationale Synode van Dordrecht in 1618 en 1619 Gehouden</i> (Amsterdam: Höveker and Wormser, 1899)
Livre	Guillaume H. M. Posthumus Meyjes, Hans Bots, Johanna Roelink, eds., <i>Livre des actes des églises wallonnes aux Pays-Bas, 1601–1697</i> (The Hague: Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 2005)
LR	Sven and Suzanne Stelling-Michaud, eds., <i>Le Livre du Recteur de L'Académie de Genève (1559–1878)</i> , 6 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1959–1980)
NDB	<i>Neue deutsche Biographie</i> (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1953–)
Milton	Anthony Milton, ed., <i>The British Delegation at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619)</i> (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005)
NNBW	<i>Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek</i> , 10 vols. (Leiden: Sijthoff, 1911–1937)
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> , 60 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004)
PG	Jean-Paul Migne, ed., <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> (Paris, 1878–1890)

PL	Jean-Paul Migne, ed., <i>Patrologia Latina</i> (Paris, 1878–1890)
RCP	<i>Registres de la Compagnie des Pasteurs de Genève au temps de Calvin</i> , 14 vols. (Geneva: Droz, 1962–2012)
RSG NR	<i>Resolutiën der Staten-Generaal: Nieuwe Reeks, 1610–1670</i> (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971–)
Reitsma/van Veen	J. Reitsma and S. van Veen, eds., <i>Acta der Provinciale en Particuliere Synoden, gehouden in de Nederlanden gedurende de jaren 1572–1620</i> , 8 vols. (Groningen: Wolters, 1892–1899)
Rutgers	F. L. Rutgers, ed., <i>Acta van de Nederlandse Synoden der Zestiende Eeuw</i> , 2nd ed. (Dordrecht: J. P. van den Tol, 1980)
Sibellius	Caspar Sibellius, <i>Annotationes ad Synodum Dordracenam</i> , Dordrecht RA, GAD150 Ms 1113
Voetius	Gisbertus Voetius, <i>Politica Ecclesiastica</i> (Amsterdam: van Waesberge, 1663–1676)
Wijminga	P. J. Wijminga, <i>Festus Hommius</i> (Leiden: Donner, 1899)



## *Introduction to the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)*

Herman J. Selderhuis

### 1. Significance of the Synod of Dordt

The Synod of Dordt and its decisions have been decisive for the developments of international Calvinism, not least because it represented the first and, to the present, only international Reformed synod. The acceptance of the Canons of Dordt meant an end to decades of intra-Reformed discussions on the relation between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. At Dordt, the Reformed doctrine on this central issue was defined as the sole way of dealing with it scripturally. This meant that Dordt became the unifying force for generations of Calvinist Reformed churches worldwide that accepted the Canons as their confessional basis and norm. The confessional status is similar to that of the Lutheran Book of Concord, implying that for the coming centuries one's position on Dordt was essential for being Reformed. This was made clear by the compulsory signing of a declaration of agreement with the Canons, as well as with the content of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, by every new minister, professor, elder or deacon.

Although the main focus of the synod – and that of literature on the synod – was on the dispute on predestination, decisions made on other topics were very important and influential as well. Dordt was significant also in regard to church polity. With the acceptance of the so-called Dordt church order (*Dordtse kerkorde*) the responsibilities of church and state were meant to be clarified. The church would be free to call and appoint its ministers and to implement discipline. It must also be said that soon after the synod ended, local and national authorities demonstrated that they could hardly accept this status. Yet the church order of Dordt remained the rule for church polity in Reformed churches in the Netherlands and abroad for centuries, and still has this position today in many of these churches, albeit often in an adapted version.



Of further lasting importance was the decision on a new Bible translation, which was published in 1637 as the “Statenvertaling,” a translation that not only shaped Reformed spirituality for centuries, but also had a large impact on the development of the Dutch language.

## 2. Historical Background

The Synod of Dordt and its main doctrinal document, known as the “Canons of Dordt,” resulted on the one hand from an international dispute over the relationship between divine sovereignty and human responsibility which lasted more than half a century, and on the other hand from growing political and theological tensions in the Netherlands.

The international dispute actually goes back to the debate between Luther and Erasmus over the freedom of the will, to Augustine’s battles with Pelagius, and even to the Bible itself in the discussion in Romans 9–11 about the election of Israel. For the Reformed tradition, Calvin’s view has been decisive. In his *Institutes*, he provided a systematic treatment of the doctrine of predestination by way of an examination of biblical passages, but in his sermons and commentaries it hardly ever appears. Over the course of time, the dispute on predestination was fed especially by the question as to whether or not the Calvinist – or Reformed – doctrine of election, combined with the Reformed view on the Lord’s Supper, made it impossible to extend to Calvinists the protection offered by the Peace of Augsburg of 1555. The Lutherans attacked the Reformed precisely on this point, claiming that they made God into a tyrant as well as the author of sin. The theologians of the University of Heidelberg, by contrast, argued in the period from 1583–1622 that their Reformed view of election did not depart either from what Luther had written in such works as *De servo arbitrio*, or from the Augsburg Confession of 1530. In their view, Luther and Calvin were in agreement on this. There was in essence hardly any change of position on this issue with Calvin’s successor Theodore Beza – although his scholastic formulations could give rise to questions<sup>1</sup> – but Beza’s student Jacobus Arminius (1559–1609) thought that neither Beza nor Calvin did justice to human responsibility and, even less so, to God’s justice. Beza’s standpoint would work as a catalyst for the debate on predestination.

<sup>1</sup> See Donald Sinnema, “Beza’s View of Predestination in Historical Perspective,” in Irena Backus, ed., *Théodore de Bèze (1519–1605): actes du colloque de Genève (septembre 2005)* (Geneva: Droz, 2007), 219–239.

## 3. Gomarus and Arminius

Although the preface of the first printed version of the Acta of the Synod of Dordt mentions the debates with Caspar Coolhaes, Herman Herbetsz and Cornelis Wiggertsz in the late sixteenth century as the beginning of the conflict in the Netherlands, the conflict over predestination as a national issue erupted at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It took place in the context of a simultaneous church-political dispute over the government's role in the affairs of the church, and over the binding nature of the church's confessional documents (i.e., the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism). There is a clear relationship between the latter two disputes, for those who were critical of the confessions' contents and of their binding authority generally also promoted the government's authority in church matters. For that reason, they were referred to as the *politieken* ("politicals"), as opposed to the *kerkelijken* ("ecclesiasticals").

The controversy over divine election became a public issue with the dispute in 1604 between two Leiden theologians, Franciscus Gomarus (1563–1641) and Jacobus Arminius (1559–1609). Already during his time as pastor in Amsterdam, Arminius had argued in his sermons and elsewhere that regeneration does not occur without human assent.<sup>2</sup> From 1591 on, this position was disputed by Arminius' colleague, the reverend Petrus Plancius. After Arminius had become professor in Leiden in 1603, he became embroiled in a controversy with his colleague Gomarus, who stated that God elects or reprobates man considered as yet "to-be-created." For Arminius, the object of God's election is those whom God foresees will believe; for Gomarus, the object is man considered as he is yet to be created, to fall into sin, and to be saved. Arminius criticized Gomarus by stating that he made God the author of sin, while Arminius himself was accused of making God dependent on man.

Gomarus's view is what came to be called "supralapsarianism;" that is, in electing, God considered man as not yet fallen into sin, meaning God has elected some and rejected others already before the fall. The majority of Arminius' opponents, however, held to an infralapsarian position, where God's election assumes a situation where man has fallen into sin. This however was also a position held by many of those on Gomarus' side. So the key issue was not "supra" or "infra", but whether God elects and then gives faith to whom He elected, or if He elects those He foresees will believe in Christ.

<sup>2</sup> For Arminius' standpoint see William den Boer, *God's Twofold Love: The Theology of Jacob Arminius (1559–1609)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), and Th. Marius van Leeuwen, Keith D. Stanglin and Marijke Tolsma, eds., *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe: Jacobus Arminius (1559/60–1609)* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2009).

The Canons of Dort are formulated in infralapsarian terms, although they do not exclude the supralapsarian view.

Because of the relevant nature of the issue of predestination, the controversy did not remain merely academic or political, but pervaded society more broadly. The relevance can be seen, for example, when it came to the assurance of faith and the destiny of children who die in infancy – issues which touched the lives of each and every person directly, and for which the differing views of Arminius and Gomarus each had its implications. It is also important to remember that the wide extent of the debate caused division in the Netherlands at a time when it was still at war with Spain. Arminius and his followers, in line with their conviction on church-state relations, kept appealing to the government (i.e., the States General) to convene a national synod where the issue would be resolved. In 1607, a meeting took place in The Hague, where delegates from various provincial synods prepared for a national synod, but when it became clear that the differences were actually considerable, the States General – under pressure from the States of Holland – first refused such a synod. The efforts made by both church and state to bring the two parties to peace, by way of a publication ban or by other means, produced no results and failed to end the polemics, even after Arminius's death on 19 October 1609.

#### 4. The Remonstrants

Three months after his death, 43 of Arminius's followers, under the leadership of Johannes Uytenbogaert (1557–1644), pastor at The Hague, published a document in which they treated five questions, largely by way of citations from Arminius' works. This document was given the name "Remonstrance," and was the background for the names "Remonstrants" and "Contra-Remonstrants" for the two opposing parties. The group also pleaded for a national synod under the guidance of the government and with the goal to revise the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, as they saw problems with parts of the content of these documents, as well as with the fact that preachers, elders and deacons were bound to them. Following a set pattern, the 1610 Remonstrance first reported the views of the Contra-Remonstrants, but in exaggerated fashion so that the latter did not recognize them as their own. For example, in regard to reprobation the Contra-Remonstrants were said to see faith as the fruit of election and unbelief as the fruit of reprobation, while they had actually stated that reprobation does not occur in the same way as election. The Remonstrance then stated the position of the Remonstrants themselves on the five points of the controversy:

1. God elects those he foresees will believe.
2. Christ died for all.
3. Faith is not from man himself, but from Christ.
4. Grace is resistible.
5. Further examination of Scripture is needed to determine whether or not faith can be lost.

These Five Articles of the Remonstrance became the focus of the doctrinal controversy in the next decade. In the end, these five points determined the structure of the Canons of Dordt. Their division was thus not conceived by the synod or even by the Contra-Remonstrants; but as a response to the Remonstrance, the Canons owe their structure to a document the Remonstrants first produced.

In June 1610, the Remonstrance was presented to the States of Holland and West Friesland, which under the leadership of the Grand Pensionary Johan van Oldenbarnevelt decided to adopt it as a binding document in order to put an end to the conflicts. Because of the unrest this decision caused, the States decided to hold a conference with six proponents and six opponents of the Remonstrance. This “Hague Conference” (or “Schriftelicke Conferentie”), held from 11 March – 20 May 1611, did not achieve the unity it was intended to produce. But it did advance the knowledge each party had of the other’s views and led each to formulate its views with greater precision. During this conference, the opponents of the Remonstrants submitted a “Counter-Remonstrance” in which they not only gave their view on the five debated points, but also stated that it was not the government, but the church, which had the right of decision in matters of doctrine. In order to somehow silence the debate, the States issued a resolution in 1611 requiring that candidates for the ministry should not be questioned beyond what was stated in the Remonstrance. Since this in fact implied that the political leadership took sides with the Remonstrants, this resolution caused even more unrest instead of peace.

The dispute continued after Johannes Uytenbogaert, the leading theologian among the Remonstrants, managed to get Conrad Vorstius (1569–1622) – who had been professor at Steinfurt (Germany) – appointed as successor to Arminius. Gomarus refused to work with him, and after Vorstius started his teaching in May 1611, Gomarus resigned and became pastor in Middelburg. In 1618, he would become a professor in Groningen. In the meantime, the English King James I (1566–1625), who regarded himself – and indeed was seen by many – as the leading European protestant ruler, entered the discussion by making complaints against Vorstius’ book *De Deo*. The result was that Vorstius was forced to resign and move to Gouda. To the vacant seats in Leiden,

Johannes Polyander was appointed as successor of Gomarus, and Simon Episcopus took the place of Vorstius.

For decades, the church had asked the government to convene a national synod, but these requests remained without result. At the Synod of Emden in 1571, the Reformed churches had decided that a general synod should be held every two years.<sup>3</sup> However, the political situation in the Netherlands, where the Spanish rulers took every possible measure against Protestantism, made it impossible to implement this decision. Although a so-called “particular synod,” in which the churches of South-Holland gathered, was held in Dordrecht in 1574, the first official national synod in the Netherlands was held in 1578 in Dordrecht. Here it was decided that a general synod should be held every three years,<sup>4</sup> and such a synod was convened in Middelburg in 1581. After that, however, it took another five years for the next general synod to be held in The Hague in 1586.

After this synod, more than 30 years passed before another national synod convened, which was the Synod of Dordt in 1618/1619. From 1590 on, the churches had frequently pleaded with the States General to allow for calling together a synod. In 1606, permission was granted for a committee to meet and prepare an agenda for a general synod. The States of Holland and Zeeland added that agenda items should include the revision of the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the church order. Since no agreement could be reached between the churches and the States on these topics as part of the agenda, it was decided by the States General that there would be no general synod and also that particular synods would no longer be held. The Contra-Remonstrants then started to combine forces, and from 1615, they held some synodical meetings in secret.<sup>5</sup> The States had no real interest in a national synod, because they did not expect it to restore peace, and the idea of a national synod clashed with each individual state’s desire for independence.

As the ecclesiastical and political positions became more intertwined, the conflict escalated from two disputing factions in the church into a national crisis. Contra-Remonstrants in various places started to have their own church services, but were hindered in doing so in those places where the political majority was Remonstrant. On the national level, Oldenbarnevelt became more and more suspect as being not sufficiently supportive of the

<sup>3</sup> Acta Emden 1571, Art. 9: “Voorder salmen alle twee jaren eens, een alghemeyne versamelinghe aller Nederlantsche Kercken houden.” Rutgers, 59.

<sup>4</sup> Acta Dordrecht 1578, Art. 45: “De generale ofte nationale Synodus sal ordinarelick alle dry iaren ghehouden worden, dogh alsoo datse in dien de noot sulckes eyscht eer mach te samen gheroepen worden.” Rutgers, 245.

<sup>5</sup> A. Th. Van Deursen, *Bavianen en Slijkgeuzen: Kerk en Kerkvolk ten Tijde van Maurits en Oldenbarnevelt* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 265.

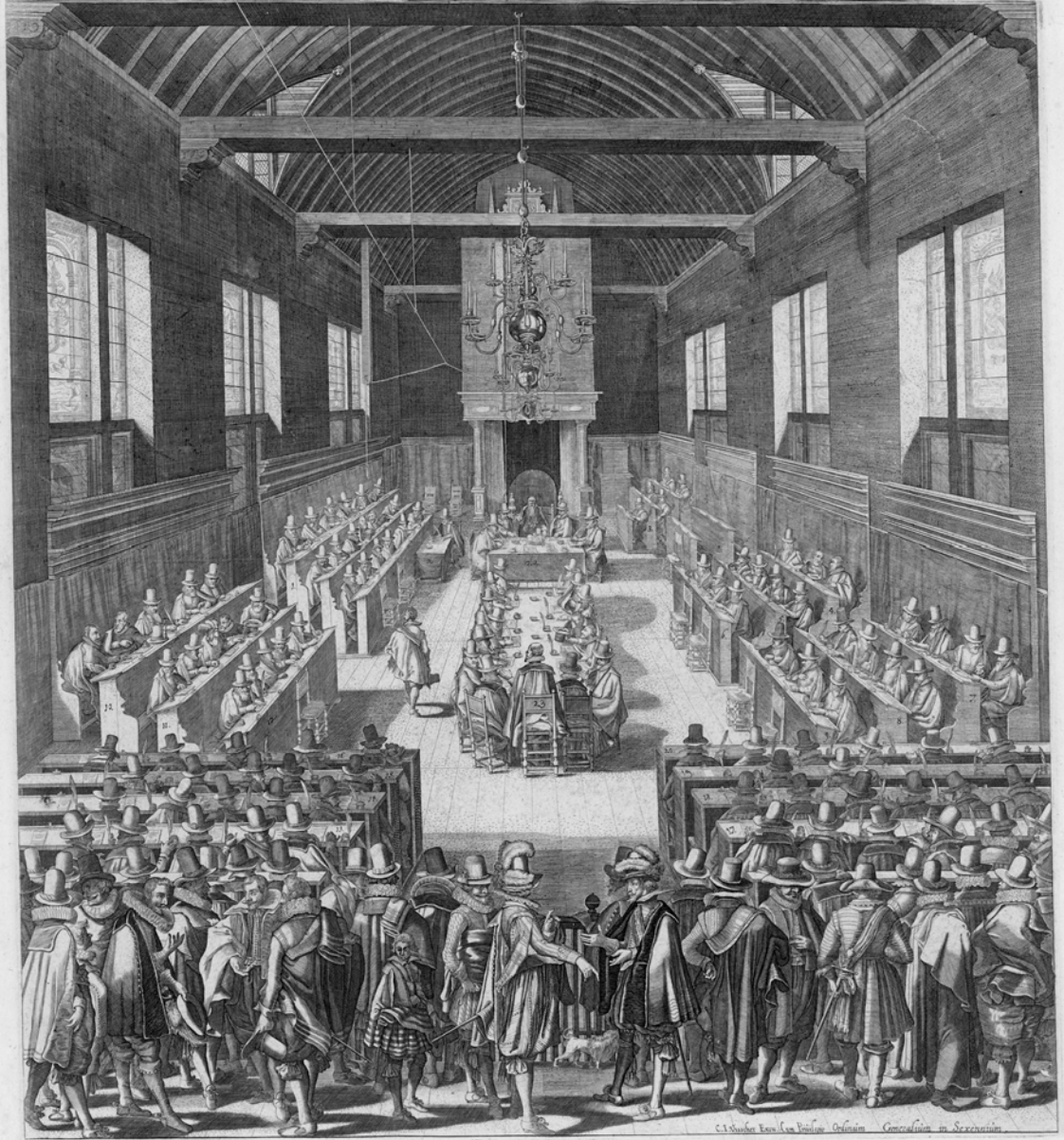
revolt against Spain, which, in the eyes of many, made him a potential traitor. One of his main political opponents was Prince Maurice, the son of William of Orange, although they had long been political allies. The Remonstrants were predominantly seen as less loyal to Spain and the Contra-Remonstrants as supporters of the Revolt, mainly to attain a free church in a free nation. In this climate, Maurice made it clear, by attending a Contra-Remonstrant service in The Hague on 23 July 1617, that he chose against the Remonstrants and thus the “politicals” as well. He refused to send in troops to act against local riots that were mainly directed against Remonstrants. Oldenbarnevelt responded with a decision (the Sharp Resolution) to allow the cities to hire troops in order to settle the unrest, and to refuse a national synod in spite of the appeals for one made by such cities as Amsterdam and Dordrecht. This was seen by Maurice and his party as a declaration of independence by the province of Holland and thus as a revolutionary act. However, the pressure also exerted by other cities led the States General, by a narrow 4–3 decision, to decide that a national synod should be held. Hence, the Synod of Dort was convened on 13 November 1618 and lasted through May 1619.<sup>6</sup> During the same period, Maurice managed in Holland and Utrecht to replace Remonstrant governors with Counter-Remonstrants. This policy was motivated by his fear that things would end in civil war if the state were to force a solution in this ecclesiastical conflict. On 13 May 1619, Oldenbarnevelt was beheaded for treason.

##### 5. Mandate, Location and Participants of the Synod

The main goal of the synod as convened by the States General was to remove the debates and conflicts that had arisen in the churches. The synod therefore did not aim at excommunicating one of the parties in the conflict but to attain peace in the church, which was also the mission the foreign delegates were given by their churches and rulers. Peace here meant maintaining the confessional unity among the Calvinists in Europe, a unity seen as endangered by the Remonstrant plea to revise the confessions. Yet Dort should also be recognized as a theological and ecclesiastical confirmation of the political victory attained by Maurice, although this goal was not defined in the official documents.

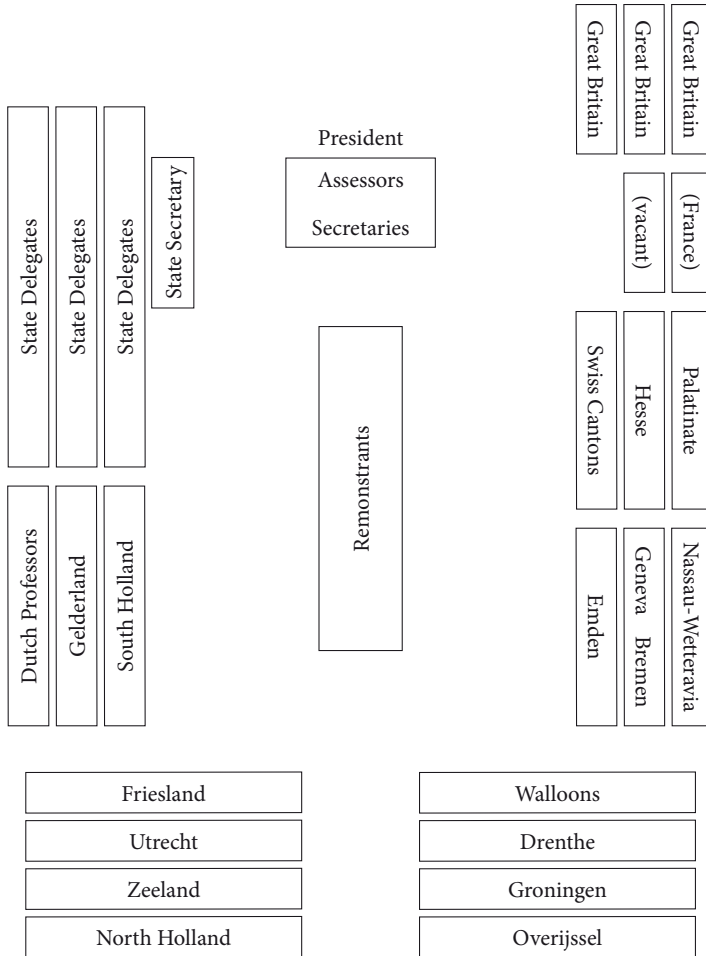
<sup>6</sup> For overviews of the proceedings of the synod see Nicolas Fornerod, “Introduction,” in RCP 14:VII–CIII, and Donald Sinnema, *The Issue of Reprobation at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) in Light of the History of this Doctrine* (Ph.D. diss., University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto, 1985), chs. IV and V.

# Synodi Dordracenae descriptio.



François Schillemans (1575–1630), Copperplate, 515×436 mm, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-77.280

*Seating chart*



2 galleries  
above entrance

François Schillemans was born in Middelburg in 1575 and lived there until his death in 1630. Schillemans worked as an engraver (“plaetsnyder”) and was quite famous for the quality of his work. Upon the letter of recommendation Schillemans received from the authorities in Zeeland, the States General gave him a patent to publish the engraving he had made of the Synod of Dordt during his stay there in 1618. For making copies of this engraving he received a total of 214 guilders and 10 “stuivers” (half a guilder). The engraving was printed by the Middelburg printer Claes Jansz Visscher.



On 25 June 1618, letters of invitation were sent out by the States General to the provincial synods and to James I, King of England,<sup>7</sup> the Reformed churches in France, the Elector of the Palatinate, the Count of Hesse, and the Reformed cantons in Switzerland, requesting each to send three or four theologians. The invitation was accompanied by the Five Articles of the Remonstrants. All provincial synods were asked to send in their proposals for items to be discussed, the so-called *gravamina*. Every provincial synod should send six delegates, among whom were three or four pastors. At a later stage, it was decided to invite also the churches of Bremen, East Frisia, Nassau-Wetteravia, Brandenburg and Geneva. The reason for inviting foreign delegates was not only the importance of the issue at stake and its consequences for politics and for international Calvinism, but also the fact that similar discussions played a role in Heidelberg and the Palatinate in the late sixteenth and early years of the seventeenth century, as well as in Cambridge (1590s) and in Bern (1588). The States General declared that only the Word of God was to be the decisive norm, and every delegate should swear to strive only for the honor of God and peace in the church. The States General also decided that every province should appoint two Reformed individuals as state delegates (*commissarissen politiek*), whose task it was to supervise the organizational aspects of this synod.<sup>8</sup> The meeting place should be Dordrecht, Utrecht or The Hague. On 20 November 1617, it was decided that the synod would meet in Dordrecht, a Reformed city in a safe area and previously home to two national synods in 1574 and 1578. The synod was to be held in the Kloveniersdoelen, a building in the city center where the local guard met and practiced, and where the guns (called “klovers”) of the guard were stored. Most costs for the synod would be paid by the States General.

The synod was called the “National Synod of Dordrecht,” but it was a national synod with an international character. There were 26 international delegates in attendance from eight foreign territories with Reformed churches (Great Britain, the Palatinate, Hesse, the Swiss cantons, Nassau-Wetteravia, Geneva, Bremen and Emden). The French delegates were forbidden to participate by King Louis XIII, and the Brandenburg delegates were prevented from attending because of Lutheran opposition. There were also 35 pastors and 18 elders as delegates from the nine particular or provincial synods and the Walloon churches, although not every particular synod was able to send six delegates.<sup>9</sup> The provinces each sent a professor of theology.<sup>10</sup> They were counted as delegates from the church and had the right to vote as a separate

<sup>7</sup> Milton, 30–31.

<sup>8</sup> For more information on these state delegates, see the introduction by Johanna Roelevink in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> For a complete list of all participants, including biographical data, see the introduction by Fred van Lieburg in this volume.

delegation.<sup>11</sup> These professors were Johannes Polyander from Leiden, Sibrandus Lubbertus from Franeker, Franciscus Gomarus from Groningen, Antonius Thysius from Harderwijk, and Antonius Walaeus from Middelburg. The States of Holland had assigned Simon Episcopius, but he refused to go, until he was “cited” before the synod together with other Remonstrants. The States General sent 18 state delegates, whose secretary was Daniel Heinsius. In all, there were nineteen ecclesiastical delegations present at the synod – one with the professors, ten with Dutch ecclesiastical delegates representing the various provincial synods and the Walloon churches, and eight foreign delegations.

The seating order, for both the foreign (as listed above) and Dutch delegations, was arranged according to political status, as the famous copperplate of François Schillemans shows. It followed the order observed in the States General.

## 6. Synodical Procedures

The synod convened usually in the morning starting at 9.00, as well as in the afternoon starting at either 16.00 or 18.00, from Monday through Friday, and occasionally on Saturday.<sup>12</sup> At first these meetings were mostly open to the public and usually well attended by spectators, including women and young people. On sensitive issues, the sessions were closed to all except the delegates. After the expulsion of the Remonstrants, many of the sessions were closed; the Post-Acta sessions<sup>13</sup> were all closed.

In between the general sessions, the various delegations met separately and formulated a judgment (*iudicium*) on the topic that was to be discussed at the synod the next day. Usually these *iudicia* were submitted in written form, especially on important topics, but sometimes they were only offered orally. Since there were nineteen delegations, this meant that the same number of *iudicia* had to be read and discussed in the plenary sessions. The speaking order of the delegations was also by rank, like the seating order. This meant that the British were always first. For the sake of the foreign delegates, Latin was the official language to be spoken and written. The officers of the synod would collect these *iudicia* and then formulate a proposal for a general *iudicium*, which was then presented to the synod for a vote, although some

<sup>10</sup> The basis for their presence was art. 52 of the church order of Dordrecht 1578: “Soo de Classe ofte Synode in de plaetse daer de vniuersiteyt is te samen koemt, sullen de Professores der Theologie mede by koemen der welcker een wt der name der anderer stemme hebben sal.” Rutgers, 247.

<sup>11</sup> Kuyper, 104.

<sup>12</sup> See Kaajan, 42–56, for a detailed description of the procedures at the synod.

<sup>13</sup> These were the sessions held in May 1619 after the foreign delegates had left.