

A Virtual Tour of the Synod of Dordt

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Occasion for the Synod

- Arminian controversy over predestination and related points
 - Arminius: predestination based on God's foreknowledge of a believer's faith
 - Gomarus: predestination based on sovereign decision of God's will without considering fall into sin
- Remonstrance of 1610: summarized Arminius' views in Five Articles
- related political conflict:
 - Oldenbarneveld supports Remonstrant cause
 - Prince Maurits supports Contra-Remonstrant cause

Convening of the Synod

- convened by the States General; Articles to Convene the synod determined the parameters
- States General pays most costs

Location and Facilities

- synod met in old Dutch city of Dordrecht
- synod held in Kloveniersdoelen (former armory)
- public ceremonies held in Grote Kerk

Participants

- 11 Dutch delegations
 - 9 from provincial synods, the Walloon synod, and a delegation of 5 Dutch professors
- 8 Foreign delegations
 - from Great Britain, Palatinate, Hesse, 4 Swiss cantons, Nassau-Wetteravia, Geneva, Bremen, Emden
- 18 State delegates (represented States General)
- 13 Remonstrant leaders summoned before synod (later 15)
 - citation letters: called -to state, explain and defend views of their Five Articles
 - to submit observations on Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism

Agenda

- determined by States General in its Articles to Convene synod:
 - first deal with controversy over Five Articles of Remonstrants
 - then overtures from the provincial synods

Language of the Synod

- Latin (international language)
- Dutch (only in Post-Acta sessions)

Procedures

- voting by delegation, not individual
- 19 delegations each give advice on any issue
- officers then draw up synod's decision, and seek approval by whole synod
- Word of God the only standard for truth

Phases of the Synod (lasts 6 ½ months, from Nov. 13, 1618 to May 29, 1619)

(1) Pro-Acta Sessions (Nov. 13 – Dec. 5, 1618)

- before arrival of Remonstrants, synod addressed several ecclesiastical matters:
 - new Dutch Bible translation
 - catechism services and catechism instruction
 - baptism of slave children
 - training of students preparing for ministry
 - printing abuses

(2) Procedural Wrangling with the Remonstrants (Dec. 6 – Jan. 14, 1619)

- five weeks of debates over authority of the synod and procedures for handling the doctrinal issues
- Remonstrants: -issue is extreme Reformed views of reprobation
 - want *conference* between equal parties
- Synod: -issue is Remonstrant view of predestination based on foreseen faith
 - synod* has right to judge case of doctrinal deviation from confessions
- Remonstrants do not fully cooperate; expelled from the synod

(3) Canons of Dordt as a Response to the Remonstrant Case (Jan. 14 – May 6)

- synod now judges Remonstrants from their writings
- theologians give speeches on the doctrinal issues
- all 19 delegations present assessments of each of the Five Articles
- President Bogerman makes early drafts of Canons
- Drafting committee (works for 3 weeks)
 - 3 committee drafts; after each draft 19 delegations make suggestions for amendment
- final version of Canons of Dordt approved and signed
- synod addresses 4 other discipline cases
- also reviews & approves doctrine of Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism
- Canons publicly presented at Grote Kerk
- foreign theologians dismissed

(4) Post-Acta Sessions (May 6 – 29)

- only Dutch delegates deal with various matters of concern to Dutch churches
- approve in substance Church Order of 1586
 - then revise and add various articles; result: Church Order of Dordt
- other matters:
 - reform of Dutch universities
 - regulations for Sabbath observance
 - Dutch translation of Canons
 - new forms of subscription,
 - new liturgical forms, etc.

Aftermath

- 200 Remonstrant ministers deposed from office; Remonstrant leaders banished from country
- documents of Dordt preserved in 17 vols. in a trunk
- 1620 *Acta* published by States General; original *Acta Authentica* only recently
- Remonstrants publish their own documents to the synod