

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

**By Daniel R. Hyde**

Copyright © 2019 The Davenant Institute

All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture quotations marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture marked KJV is taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

All quotations from the Canons of Dort are used with permission by Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary:

<https://prts.edu/wpcontent/uploads/2016/12/Canons-of-Dort-with-Intro.pdf>

ISBN: 1-949716-92-4

ISBN-13: 978-1-949716-92-4

Cover design by Rachel Rosales, Orange Peel Design.



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

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

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

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

—John Davenant, 1629

---

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

# CONTENTS

A Note on Abbreviation	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Preface	vi
Timeline	x
Introduction: Why Grace Was ( <i>and Still Is</i> ) Worth Fighting For	1
Outline of the Canons of Dort	41
<b>THE GRACE OF PREDESTINATION</b>	
1 What We Confess (Articles 1-18)	46
2 What We Reject (Rejection of Errors 1-9)	128
<b>THE GRACE OF SATISFACTION</b>	
3 What We Confess (Articles 1-9)	144
4 What We Reject (Rejection of Errors 1-7)	204
<b>THE GRACE OF REGENERATION</b>	
5 What We Confess (Articles 1-17)	216
6 What We Reject (Rejection of Errors 1-9)	281
<b>THE GRACE OF PRESERVATION</b>	
7 What We Confess (Articles 1-15)	298
8 What We Reject (Rejection of Errors 1-9)	361
Conclusion	374
Appendix 1: The <i>Remonstrance</i> of 1610	379
Appendix 2: The Opinions of the Remonstrants (1619)	382
Bibliography	389

## A NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS

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

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

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

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

---

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

## PREFACE

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

---

<sup>1</sup> Also spelled Dordt or Dordrecht.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

## PREFACE

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

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

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

It's "amazing grace!"

---

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

## TIMELINE

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

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

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

---

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

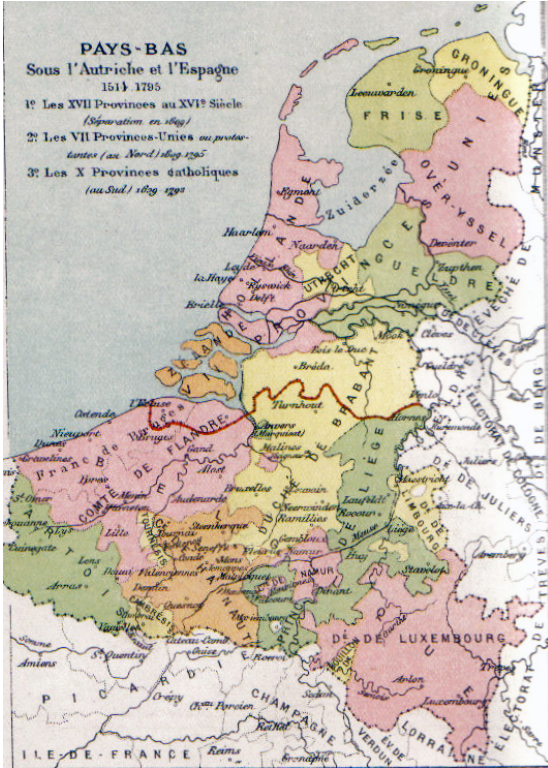
<sup>2</sup> “The Ministration of Publick Baptism of Infants to Be Used in the Church,” in the Book of Common Prayer (1662; repr., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 263. This language is also a part of the historic Dutch Reformed liturgy for

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

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

## THE REFORMATION GOES DOWN TO THE NETHERLANDS

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



**The Netherlands in the sixteenth century**

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

---

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

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