

Call for Papers

The Theology of Dort (1618–1619)

Confessional Consolidation, Conflictual Contexts, and Continuing Consequences

Groningen, May 8–9, 2019



Dutch theological faculties at the Synod (painting Museum of Dordrecht)

On May 6, 1619, the Synod of Dort promulgated the *Canons* as a final statement on the controversial issues that disturbed the Reformed church in The Netherlands. The international character of the synod underscores the importance of its theological decisions. The importance of its theology justifies an academic re-assessment of the theology of Dort. The *Canons* close with this claim:

This doctrine [of perseverance] is something which the flesh does not understand, Satan hates, the world ridicules, the ignorant and the hypocrites abuse, and the heretics attack. The Bride of Christ, however, has always loved this doctrine most tenderly and defended it (Canons of Dort 5.15).

This strong statement raises questions regarding the doctrinal content of the Synod and its *Canons*. What is at stake here? It also invites a critical assessment of the theological claims in the broader historical and theological context. Can the continuity with ‘the bride of Christ’ be substantiated, and is it fair to label its opponents as hypocrites and heretics? The closing statement finally also evokes thoughts regarding the reception of Dort in the later development of Reformed theology. What are the potential and real misunderstandings and how do they relate to the theology of Dort? There seem to be at least three different though related fields of academic interest.

Confessional Consolidation

What exactly was at stake at the Synod of Dort, and how was the content of the Reformed faith consolidated at the Synod? Are there underlying issues and debates? The final article paraphrased above mentions perseverance and assurance. How are they related to predestination? What is the practical relevance of the theology of Dort? What were the (pastoral) concerns of the delegates and of their opponents? The final claim quoted above suggests unity, but the discussion at the Synod reveals diversity among the delegates. The first field thus covers all aspects of the theology of Dort and of the Arminians whose position, opposed to the theology of Dort, was rejected.

Conflictual Contexts

A second field covers not only—or even in the first place—the historical and political context of the Twelve Years’ Truce (1609–1621)—but also the broader context of European confessionalization. How did the Reformed and the Lutheran positions relate to each other? How can Dort be understood in the broader context of early modernity, and how does its theology and the underlying philosophical presuppositions relate to late medieval theology or to renaissance humanism?

Continuing Consequences

A third field regards the reception of Dort in later stages. The later development of Reformed theology reveals a continuous struggle to understand and apply the theological principles of Dort in new cultural and historical contexts. Not only pietism and methodism, but also liberal theology felt the need to deal with Dort. Today the theology of Dort is still used to characterize the essence of Reformed Protestantism (i.e., the twentieth-century TULIP acronym). But is the theology of Dort really understood by those who appreciate it?

Keynote Speakers

The following keynote speakers will highlight several aspects of the theology and theological reception of the Synod of Dort.

Harm Goris, Tilburg School of Catholic Theology

Total depravity or relapse into natural state? Roman Catholic views on the effects of the Fall.

Michael Haykin, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary/Andrew Fuller Center

“Abunde sufficiens ad totius mundi peccata expianda”: Particular Baptists & the reception of Dort.

Arnold Huijgen, Theological University of Apeldoorn

The Lasting Value and Limitations of the *Canons of Dort*

Volker Leppin, Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen

A disliked doctrine: Predestination, Dort and the Lutherans.

Dolf te Velde, Theological University of Kampen

Justified by Faith? Franciscus Gomarus on the Crucial Issue with Jacob Arminius

Groningen

The University of Groningen was founded in 1614 because of unrest in the University. One of its first professors, Franciscus Gomarus, initiated the conflict that led to the Synod's controversy with Jacobus Arminius. Groningen sent Gomarus to Dordrecht who became one of the most controversial delegates. The papers at the conference do not have to relate to his contribution to the synod, but perhaps some papers can illuminate an aspect of his theology. In any case, the intended venue for the closing dinner is his parsonage in Groningen.

Organization

The Theological University of Apeldoorn, the Hersteld Hervormd Seminarium (VU Amsterdam), and the Special Chair of Reformed Theology (University of Groningen) are co-organizing an international academic conference on the theology of Dort. They invite all interested scholars to send proposals for a paper presentation related to one of the fields listed above. The conference is organized within the academic network of RefoRC. Except for the invited key-note speakers, we have no funds for travelling costs and accommodation, but we will provide lunches and dinners for all those who attend. The costs for participating are € 150.

Proposal: Title and abstract of 200–400 words.

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Due date: November 1, 2018.

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Willem van Vlastuin, Professor of Theology and Spirituality of Reformed Protestantism, VU University Amsterdam