

The Remonstrants and the Synod of Dort

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – The advent of the Arminian Remonstrants and the response of the Synod of Dort
2. aim – To cause us to understand the primary differences to Calvinistic soteriology even to today

b. outline

1. The Life of Jacobus Arminius
2. The Synod of Dort
3. The State of Arminianism Today

c. overview

1. the various **responses** to the Reformation
 - a. the Catholic Reformation – the response of the medieval Catholic church at the Council of Trent
 1. **late 16th C.**; cementing the church into current state, with specific denials of biblical soteriology and anathemas *against* the teachings of the Protestants
 - b. the Puritan Response – the response of the English Puritans to the Church of England
 1. **late 17th C.**; the rise of the Presbyterians and Congregationalists (and Baptists), along with their confessions designed to articulate and codify a biblical perspective of the Christian faith
 - c. (**now**) the Calvinistic Debates – the development of specific “strands” of Protestant orthodoxy
 1. **early 17th C.**; the adoption of Calvin’s views of soteriology (particularly predestination), and the responses to those views by others within the Reformed community
 2. **e.g.** the Westminster Assembly functioned as a part of this response (**later**) = the Presbyterians *specifically* codifying much of the Calvinistic view of predestination and salvation
4. so, tonight we will be examining a “counter-Calvinistic” response that arose in the early 17th C – **i.e.** an *intermural* squabble within the Reformed branch of Protestantism (**e.g.** Particular Baptists vs. General Baptists)

I. The Life of Jacobus Arminius

Content

a. the biography of Jacobus Arminius

1. born in 1560 in the Dutch province of Utrecht, and was orphaned while still young
 - a. adopted by Theodorus Aemilius, a Dutch priest inclined towards Protestantism
2. in 1576, became a student at Leiden University, a solidly Reformed school, but with influences also from Lutherans, Zwinglians, and even some Anabaptists
3. in 1582, Arminius began studying under Calvin’s successor in Geneva, Theodore Beza
 - a. however, his philosophical methods (learned at Leiden) ran contrary to the beliefs held by the school in Geneva, so he moved to Basel to complete his training
 - b. offered a doctorate there, he refused it (due to youth), and returned to Geneva
4. in 1587, Arminius took a pastorate in Amsterdam, and was ordained in 1588
 - a. he was known as an excellent preacher and faithful pastor
 - b. however, while preaching through Romans, Arminius began to teach *at variance* with the Heidelberg Confession and other standards of orthodoxy embraced in Holland at the time
 1. **e.g.** he taught that the description given by Paul in **Romans 7** was actually of a man *not presently regenerated*, living under the law yet convicted of sin
 2. **e.g.** as he taught through **Romans 9**, he focused *almost exclusively* on it having to do with justification by faith rather than on God’s decrees
 3. **LOW**: it was during this time that Arminius began to develop opinions on grace, predestination, and free will that were inconsistent with the doctrines of his Reformed teachers
5. in 1603, Arminius returned to Leiden, and almost immediately a controversy began
 - a. the leader of the school, Franciscus Gomarus (a strong Calvinist), was forced to defend the Reformed position on predestination over against a doctoral student’s thesis defended by Arminius
 - b. this conflict between Gomarus would spill out of the school and become a set of dual-factions between those embracing Arminius’ “reforms” of Calvinism vs. the more *rigorous* defenders of a Calvinistic view of soteriology – it would continue *beyond* his death in 1609

b. the beliefs of Jacobus Arminius

1. **note:** Arminius was much more “moderate” than many of his followers eventually became
 - a. he always insisted that his views were to be gleaned from Scripture, and that his *real* intention was simply to “reform” some parts of Calvinism that had become too rigorous (**i.e.** actually used as a test as to whether or not one was *truly saved*)
 1. in many other ways, Arminius *himself* remained a Calvinist, defending other parts of Calvinistic teachings and church practices *based* on those beliefs
 - b. however, many of his followers became much more *rabid* in their views, committing (**IMO**) the same “sin” that they accused Calvinists of making in applying their views
2. the primary issue for Arminius was **predestination**: what exactly had God purposed beforehand and how did that work itself out in relation to the individual person coming to faith?
 - a. **note:** both sides believed that predestination was a biblical concept – it could not be denied that God had (in fact) determined something as a part of his purpose in creation
 - b. Calvinism asserted (at the time) that God had predestined *who would come faith by eternal decree*; that God chose the elect *entirely* on the basis of his “secret” will to do so, *and not on the basis of any action on the part of the elect person himself or herself*
 1. **note:** Calvin has often been accused of teaching a *double-predestination*: that God *actively chose both* the elect and the reprobate to their ultimate destiny; that God *predestined* each *individual* either to heaven or hell
 2. however, the Reformed view (and probably Calvin’s) is that God’s active predestination *is only for the elect* – the fate of the reprobate is passively assured based on the *general condemnation* of the race through the fall of Adam (**i.e.** the reprobate simply go down the general path of the race, while the elect are *specifically* “plucked” from that path in election; a *single-predestination*)
 - c. Arminius believed (however) that predestination was based on God’s *foreknowledge*, that those who were “elect” were so because God “foresaw” their coming to him in faith
 1. **i.e.** God “chose” those who would respond to him, leaving the choice to them *without any direction action on his part*; God simply looked “down the corridors of time” to see faith
 2. **i.e.** the decree of God was *only* to send Jesus Christ to be the mediator of humanity – God *only* decreed for the Son of God to provide an atonement, one that could be embraced by *any*
3. Arminius also embraced the idea of a **prevenient grace**: although human beings are morally incapable of righteousness (due to the Fall), God has provided *in Christ* a “general” grace that “prevents” complete failure of faith (or *precedes* the decisions of men) such that they now “can” come to Christ through their own free will

c. the beliefs of the Remonstrants

1. in 1610 (just a year after Arminius died), the Arminian party issued **Five Articles of Remonstrance**:
 - a. **Article #1:** salvation (and condemnation) is conditioned by graciously enabled faith (or unbelief)
 1. the article defines predestination in ambiguous terms (**i.e.** that God determines who is saved)
 - b. **Article #2:** Christ’s atonement is *qualitatively* adequate for all, but only *efficacious* for believers
 1. **IOW:** Christ died “for all,” but only those who come to him in faith are actually saved by it
 - c. **Article #3:** no person is able to respond to God’s will without the aid of the Holy Spirit
 1. **note:** like Calvinists, the original Arminians agreed in a *form* of total depravity (**see below**)
 2. **note:** this was to address the accusation that Arminians were *Pelagians*
 - d. **Article #4:** the grace of God is the beginning of any good, yet man may *resist* the Holy Spirit
 - e. **Article #5:** believers are able to resist sin, and Christ will keep them from falling, but whether they are *beyond* the possibility of forsaking God cannot be precisely determined from the Scriptures
 1. **IOW:** the Remonstrants refused to “take a position” on the security of the believer, instead arguing that the position will need to be taken up by each person studying the Bible for himself

II. The Synod of Dort

Content

a. the nature of the Synod

1. the rising nature of Arminianism in Holland required a response by the Dutch Reformed Church
 - a. **note:** part of the issue was *political*: in the ongoing war with Spain (during the Twelve Years’ Truce), the Arminians were perceived as being *sympathetic* with the Spanish by propagating false doctrines – thus, the Church needed to address the Arminians as a part of this reality
2. so, on 13 November, 1618, a Synod was convened in Dordrecht (English: Dort) to address it
 - a. the **Synod of Dort** lasted until 29 May, 1619, and took 180 meetings to complete

b. the Canons of Dort

1. the Synod roundly rejected the Arminian view and established a series of Canons, colloquially known as the **Five Points of Calvinism** (i.e. the “badly named” TULIP acronym)
 - a. **note:** Reformed Theology is *far wider* than just these simple five points; Calvinism (per se) addresses certain *soteriological truths*, but those truths have *wide ranging* implications
2. **Canon #1:** total depravity – that human beings are *by virtue of their fallen nature in Adam* unable to respond to the demands of God to righteousness under his law – that *all of the Imago Dei* within them has been corrupted by *both* personal sin *and* by the affects of the Fall in general
3. **Canon #2:** unconditional election – that God has, in his eternal decree, chosen a *certain* people to himself to be saved *entirely on the basis of his will to do so*, and not in anything foreseen in them
4. **Canon #3:** limited (definite) atonement – that Christ *purposely* took for himself the elect to the cross and *perfected* their atonement before God (i.e. that only the *elect* were atoned for at the cross, and that his work to make atonement for the elect was *complete and finished in him*)
5. **Canon #4:** irresistible grace – that the calling of the Spirit of the elect person to faith is *irresistible* to him or her because it flows out of a nature *regenerated* by the Spirit to love God and his law
6. **Canon #5:** perseverance of the saints – that because God is the *author* (originator) and *finisher* of faith in the elect, they are divinely preserved by God to persevere in the faith inculcating in their born-again hearts unto *and through* the day of judgment (i.e. the truly elect *cannot* apostatize)

III. The State of Arminianism Today

Content

a. the triumph of synergism over Arminianism

1. **thesis: there are few true Arminians in American churches today** – most Baptists, *having never analyzed their view of salvation*, have simply embraced a “default” version, which is actually a **synergism** rather than true Arminianism
2. Arminianism teaches that it *does* require a work of God’s grace to come to faith (i.e. a **prevenient** grace; one that is *actively given* by God over the entire race to remove the “inability” to come to faith)
 - a. the new term “provisionism” is now employed to describe those who *might* adhere to this view (i.e. that God has *provided* a generalized grace that “allows” all to believe *within their own freedom*)
3. but, synergism suggests that grace is an “afterthought” to the *decision* of a free individual to embrace the gospel (i.e. the individual is *fully free* to accept or reject the gospel *without any real act of God required*; grace is simply God’s “response” to the free decision of the creature)
 - a. the concept of “predestination” is *denied* in synergism – there is no decree of God in determining salvation, there is no elect people, and all are “equally” free to come to Christ and believe
4. **IOW:** the synergist position takes the older (and still very popular) semi-Pelagian view (i.e. that sin has “infected” humans, but they still possess the ability to respond to God *without his effort*) and combines it with the Arminian take that *human beings* are the arbiters of their own destiny
 - a. i.e. this is the “thoughtless” (default) position – since human beings are *inclined* to see themselves as “divine” (by right of choice), then any action on the part of God *himself* is utterly unnecessary in the face of *free human choice*