

The Canons of the Synod of Dort

Intro: 13th Nov. 1618- 1st session of Synod of Dort.

Calvinism is much more than the Canons of Dort but it was a crucial defense of the doctrines of sovereign grace.

1. Historical Background

The Canons of Dort arise out of controversy. **Jacob Arminius**. A theological professor at Leiden Uni.- departed from Reformed faith in several ways. He died 1609. After his death 43 of his ministerial followers presented their views to the State General of the Netherlands in 1610.

Five points of Remonstrance. Two-fold objective:

- Revise the Reformed church's doctrinal standards i.e. The Belgic Confession.
- Their minority views be protected by the government.

The controversy so severe it brought the Netherlands to the brink of civil war.

1617- a national synod called. 154 formal sessions held Nov 1618- May 1619 in Dort/ Dordt/ Dordrecht. Delegates: 62 Dutch, 27 foreign delegates.

Simon Episcopius prominent for Remonstrants, Johannes Bogerman for the Reformed group.

2. The Truth of Salvation- canons

The Decision of the Synod of Dort on the Five Main Points of Doctrine in Dispute in the Netherlands. In the original preface, the decision is called: *'a judgment, in which both, the true view agreeing with God's word concerning the aforesaid five points of doctrine is explained and, the false view disagreeing with God's Word is rejected.'*

Remonstrants	Dort (4 heads 5 points)	Sovereign Grace	Popular
Election based on foreseen faith	1 st : Of Divine predestination	Conceived	Unconditional election
The Universal Merits of Christ	2 nd : Of the Death of Christ and Redemption of Men thereby	Merited	Limited atonement
Free will of man due to only partial depravity	3 rd & 4 th : Of the Corruption of Man, His conversion to God, and the Manner thereof	Needed	Total depravity
The resistibility of grace		Applied	Irresistible grace/ calling
The possibility of lapse from grace	5 th : Of the Perseverance of the Saints	Preserved	Perseverance of the saints

3. The Translation of Scripture

The synod also initiated an official Dutch Bible translation (the Statenvertaling, i.e. Translation of the States) from the original languages that would be completed in 1637.

4. The Treatment of Sabbath

"This day must be so consecrated to worship that on that day we rest from all servile works, except those which charity and present necessity require; and also from all such recreations as interfere with worship."

Conclusion

"May Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who, seated at the Father's right hand, gives gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth, bring to the truth those who err, shut the mouths of the calumniators of sound doctrine, and endue the faithful minister of His Word with the spirit of wisdom and discretion, that all their discourses may tend to the glory of God and the edification of those who hear them. Amen."

A Selection from the Canons

1st Head: Of Divine Predestination

Art. 7: Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He hath out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen, from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from their primitive state of rectitude into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect, and the foundation of salvation.

This elect number, though by nature neither better nor more deserving than others, but with them involved in one common misery, God hath decreed to give to Christ, to be saved by Him, and effectually to call and draw them to His communion by His Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of His Son, finally, to glorify them for the demonstration of His mercy and for the praise of His glorious grace, as it is written: "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:4–6). And elsewhere: "Whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified them He also glorified" (Rom. 8:30).

2nd Head: Of the Death of Christ and the Redemption of Men Thereby

Art. 8: For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation...

3rd&4th Heads: Of the Corruption of Man, His Conversion to God, and the Manner Thereof

Art. 3: Therefore all men are conceived in sin, and by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto, and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation.

Art. 11: But when God accomplishes His good pleasure in the elect or works in them true conversion, He not only causes the gospel to be externally preached to them and powerfully illuminates their mind by His Holy Spirit, that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God; but by the efficacy of the same regenerating Spirit, pervades the inmost recesses of the man; He opens the closed, and softens the hardened heart, and circumcises that which was uncircumcised, infuses new qualities into the will, which though heretofore dead, He quickens; from being evil, disobedient, and refractory, He renders it good, obedient, and pliable; actuates and strengthens it, that like a good tree, it may bring forth the fruits of good actions.

Art. 12: ... all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated, and do actually believe. Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence, becomes itself active. Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent, by virtue of that grace received.

5th Head: Of the Perseverance of the Saints

Art. 8: Thus, it is not in consequence of their own merits or strength, but of God's free mercy, that they do not totally fall from faith and grace, nor continue and perish finally in their backslidings; which, with respect to themselves, is not only possible, but would undoubtedly happen; but with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since His counsel cannot be changed nor His promise fail, neither can the call according to His purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated.