

Calvinism and the *Canons of Dordt*

1. American Presbyterian B. B. Warfield writes that the *Canons of Dordt* were “published authoritatively in 1619 as the finding of the Synod [of Dordt] with the aid of a large body of foreign assessors, representative practically of the whole Reformed world. The Canons ... therefore ... [possess] the moral authority of the decrees of practically an Ecumenical Council throughout the whole body of Reformed Churches” (*Works*, vol. 9, p. 144).

2. *Canons* Conclusion: “Wherefore, this synod of Dordt, in the name of the Lord, conjures as many as piously call upon the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ, to judge of the faith of the Reformed churches, not from the calumnies, which, on every side, are heaped upon it; nor from the private expressions of a few among ancient and modern teachers, often dishonestly quoted, or corrupted, and wrested to a meaning quite foreign to their intention; but from the public confessions of the churches themselves, and from the declaration of the orthodox doctrine, confirmed by the unanimous consent of all and each of the members of the whole synod.”

3. *Canons* II:5: “Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.”

4. *Canons* I:17: “Since we are to judge of the will of God from His Word, which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature, but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they, together with the parents, are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children, whom it pleaseth God to call out of this life in their infancy.”

5. *Canons* II: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; that is, it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever.”

6. *Canons* I:R:8: “... For this is firmly decreed: *He hath mercy on whom he will, and whom he will he hardeneth* (Rom. 9:18). And also this: *Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given* (Matt. 13:11). Likewise: *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes; yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight* (Matt. 11:25-26).”

7. *Canons* V:R:1: “The true doctrine having been explained, the Synod rejects the errors of those: Who teach that the perseverance of the true believers is not a fruit of election, or a gift of God gained by the death of Christ, but a condition of the new covenant, which (as they declare) man before his decisive election and justification must fulfil through his free will. For the Holy Scripture testifies that this follows out of election, and is given the elect in virtue of the death, the resurrection and intercession of Christ: *But the elect obtained it and the rest were hardened* (Rom. 11:7) ...”

8. *Canons* I:10: “The good pleasure of God is the sole cause of this gracious election; which doth not consist herein, that out of all possible qualities and actions of men God has chosen some as a condition of salvation; but that He was pleased out of the common mass of sinners to adopt some certain persons as a peculiar people to Himself, as it is written, *For the children being not yet born neither having done any good or evil, etc., it was said* (namely to Rebecca): *the elder shall serve the younger; as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated* (Rom. 9:11-13). *And as many as were ordained to eternal life believed* (Acts 13:48).”

9. What makes the external preaching or call of the Gospel sincere or serious?

a. Arminianism: “Whomever God calls to salvation, He calls seriously, that is, with a sincere and completely unhypocritical intention and will to save; nor do we assent to the opinion of those who hold that God calls certain ones externally whom He does not will to call internally, that is, as truly converted, even before the grace of calling has been rejected” (Peter Y. De Jong [ed.], *Crisis in the Reformed Churches* [Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968], pp. 226-227).

b. *Canons* III/IV:8: “As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly shown in His Word, what is pleasing to Him, namely, that those who are called should come to Him. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to Him, and believe on Him.”

10. *Canons* I:6: “And herein is especially displayed the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God, which, though men of perverse, impure, and unstable minds wrest to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation.”

11. *Canons* Conclusion: “This doctrine the synod judges to be drawn from the Word of God, and to be agreeable to the confessions of the Reformed churches. Whence it clearly appears that some whom such conduct by no means became have violated all truth, equity, and charity, in wishing to persuade the public:

That the doctrine of the Reformed churches concerning predestination, and the points annexed to it, by its own genius and necessary tendency, leads off the minds of men from all piety and religion; that it is an opiate administered by the flesh and by the devil, and the stronghold of Satan, where he lies in wait for all, and from which he wounds multitudes, and mortally strikes through many with the darts both of despair and security; that it makes God the author of sin, unjust, tyrannical, hypocritical; that it is nothing more than interpolated Stoicism, Manicheism, Libertinism, Turcism; that it renders men carnally secure, since they are persuaded by it that nothing can hinder the salvation of the elect, let them live as they please; and therefore, that they may safely perpetrate every species of the most atrocious crimes; and that, if the reprobate should even perform truly all the works of the saints, their obedience would not in the least contribute to their salvation; that the same doctrine teaches, that God, by a mere arbitrary act of His will, without the least respect or view to sin, has predestinated the greatest part of the world to eternal damnation, and has created them for this very purpose; that in the same manner in which the election is the fountain and cause of faith and good works, reprobation is the cause of unbelief and impiety; that many children of the faithful are torn, guiltless, from their mothers' breasts and tyrannically plunged into hell, so that neither baptism, nor the prayers of the church at their baptism, can at all profit by them; and many other things of the same kind, which the Reformed churches not only do not acknowledge, but even detest with their whole soul.

... Moreover, the synod warns calumniators themselves to consider the terrible judgment of God which awaits them for bearing false witness against the confessions of so many churches, for distressing the consciences of the weak, and for labouring to render suspected the society of the truly faithful ...”

12. *Canons* III/IV:R:4: “The true doctrine having been explained, the Synod rejects the errors of those: Who teach that the unregenerate man is not really nor utterly dead in sin nor destitute of all powers unto spiritual good, but that he can yet hunger and thirst after righteousness and life, and offer the sacrifice of a contrite and broken spirit, which is pleasing to God. For these are contrary to the express testimony of Scripture. *Ye were dead through trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1, 5); and: *Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (Gen. 6:5; 8:21). Moreover, to hunger and thirst after deliverance from misery and after life, and to offer unto God the sacrifice of a broken spirit, is peculiar to the regenerate and those that are called blessed (Ps. 51:10, 19; Matt. 5:6).”

13. *Canons* III/IV:14: “Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure; but because it is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him; or even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will, consent to the terms of that salvation, and actually believe in Christ; but because he who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe, and the act of believing also.”

14. *Canons* Conclusion: “And this is the perspicuous, simple, and ingenuous declaration of the orthodox doctrine respecting the five articles which have been controverted in the Belgic churches [i.e., the Reformed churches in the Lowlands], and the rejection of the errors, with which they have for some time been troubled ...”

15. Formula of Subscription: “We, the undersigned, professors of the Protestant Reformed Churches, ministers of the Gospel, elders, and deacons ... do hereby sincerely and in good conscience before the Lord, declare by this, our subscription, that we heartily believe and are persuaded that all the articles and points of doctrine contained in [*Three Forms of Unity*] ... do fully agree with the Word of God ... We declare, moreover, that we not only reject all errors that militate against this doctrine and particularly those which were condemned by the above mentioned synod [i.e., the Synod of Dordt], but that we are disposed to refute and contradict these, and to exert ourselves in keeping the church free from such errors.”