The Synod of Dordt

The year 1994 commemorates an event which took place three hundred seventy-five years ago in the Netherlands, and which has such an important meaning for the Reformed churches of our days. In the year 1619 the renowned Synod of Dordt completed its proceedings, having been in session for more than six months. It behooves us to be aware of the background and decisions of this meeting, since the Canons of Dordt, one of our three Forms of Unity, came into existence at that meeting, and the other two, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Confession of Faith, were both officially adopted as doctrinal standards. The following was taken from an essay written in 1841 by Rev. Samuel Miller, professor in the Theological Seminary at Princeton, New Jersey.

The convocation and proceedings of the Synod of Dordt may be considered as among the most interesting events of the seventeenth century. The Synod of Dordt had, undoubtedly, a species of importance peculiar to itself and altogether pre-eminent. It was not merely a meeting of the select divines of a single nation, but a convention of the Calvinistic world, to bear testimony against a rising and obtrusive error; to settle a question in which all the Reformed churches of Europe had an immediate and deep interest. The question was whether the opinions of Arminius, which were then agitating so many minds, could be reconciled with the Confession of the Belgic churches.

The opinions denominated Arminian had been substantially taught long before Arminius appeared. The doctrine of Cassian of Marseilles, France, in the fifth century, commonly styled semi-Pelagianism, was almost exactly the same system. Bolsec, too, in Geneva, about the year 1552, according to some had also taught very much the same doctrine, though justly regarded as infamous on account of his shameful moral delinquencies. And about fifteen or twenty years before Arminius arose, Corvinus, in Holland, had appeared as the advocate of opinions of similar import. But having less talent than Arminius, and being less countenanced by eminent men, his error made little noise and was suffered quietly to sink into insignificance until a stronger and more popular man arose to give it new consequence and a new impulse.

James Arminius, or Harmensen, was born at Oudewater in South Holland in the year 1560. His father died when he was an infant, and he was indebted to the charity of several benevolent individuals for the whole of his education. At one time he was employed as a servant at a public inn and in this situation was so much noticed for his activity, intelligence, wit, and obliging deportment that numbers became interested in his being enabled to pursue the cultivation of his mind. Accordingly, by one of his patrons, he was placed for a time in the University of Utrecht; on his decease, by another in the University of Marpurg in Hesse; and finally, by a third, in that of Leyden. In 1582, in the twenty-second year of his age, the magistrates of Amsterdam had received such impressions of his promising talents and of his diligent application to study that they sent him, at public expense, to Geneva, which was then considered as the great center of theological instruction for the Reformed churches. In that far-famed institution Theodore Beza then presided, with equal honor to himself and acceptance to the students. Here Arminius, as before, manifested much intellectual activity and ardor of inquiry; but indulging a spirit of self-sufficiency and insubordination in opposing some of the philosophical opinions held and taught by the leading professors at Geneva, and delivering private lectures to turn away the minds of the students from the instructions of their teachers, he became a kind of malcontent, and was constrained to withdraw from that institution. This circumstance somewhat impaired that confidence in his prudence which his patrons had before reposed. Still they were willing to overlook it.

After traveling eight or ten months in Italy, he returned for a short time to Geneva and soon afterwards to Holland, where he met with no small acceptance in his profession. Such was his popularity, that

in 1588 he was elected one of the ministers of Amsterdam and entered on a pastoral charge in that city, with every prospect of honor, comfort, and usefulness. But his restless, innovating spirit soon began, in his new situation, again to disclose itself. Not long after his settlement, the doctrine of Beza concerning predestination was publicly opposed by some ministers of Delft in a tract which they printed on this subject. When this publication appeared, Martin Lydius, professor of divinity at Franeker, having a high opinion of the learning and talents of Arminius, judged him to be the most proper person with whom he was acquainted to answer it; and accordingly urged him to undertake the task. Arminius, in compliance with this request from his venerable friend, undertook to refute the heretical work; but during the examination of it, and while balancing the reasoning on both sides, he went over to the opinion which he had been employed to refute and even carried it further than the ministers of Delft had done.

This change of opinion, which took place about the year 1591 and which he was not long in causing to be understood, soon excited public attention. About the same time, in a course of public lectures delivered in his own pulpit on the Epistle to the Romans, he still further disclosed his erroneous views. He was soon accused of departing from the Belgic Confession, and many of his brethren began to look upon him and his opinions with deep apprehension. Such, however, were the vigilance and firmness manifested by the other members of his Classis, that they so far curbed and counteracted him as to prevent the agitation of the controversy which it seems to have been his intention to excite.

Arminius, however, though deterred at that early period from public and open controversy, exerted himself in a more private way, with considerable effect. With some divines whose friendship he had before conciliated, his talents, his learning, his smooth address, and his insinuating eloquence were successful in winning them to his opinions. The celebrated Uytenbogart and Borrius were among the number of his early converts and followers. He also took unwearied pains to gain over to his cause some of the leading laymen of the country, and soon enlisted several of them in his cause.

In the year 1602, when the illustrious Francis Junius, an eminent Reformer, and no less eminent as a professor of divinity in the University of Leyden, was removed by death, to the great grief of the Belgic churches, Uytenbogart, who was just mentioned as a particular friend and partisan of Arminius, proposed, and, with great zeal, recommended him to the curators of the university as a candidate for the vacant professorship. The leading Belgic ministers, hearing of this recommendation and deeply apprehensive of the consequences of electing such a man to so important a station, besought both Uytenbogart and the curators of the university to desist from all attempts to place in such an office one who was the object of so much suspicion. But these entreaties were disregarded. The recommendation of Arminius was prosecuted with undiminished zeal, and the curators at length elected and formally called him to the vacant chair.

The call being laid as usual before the Classis of Amsterdam, that body declined to put it into his hands. They supposed that he was more likely to prove mischievous in the office to which he was called than in his pastoral charge, where he was more immediately under the supervision and restraint of his brethren in the ministry. But, at length, at the repeated and earnest entreaties of Uytenbogart, of the curators, and of Arminius himself, he was permitted to accept the call and was regularly dismissed from the Classis to enter his new office. This dismission, however, was granted upon the express condition that he should hold a conference with Gomarus, one of the theological professors in the same university to which he was called; and should remove from himself all suspicion of heterodoxy by a full and candid declaration of his opinions in regard to the leading doctrines of the gospel. Moreover, the Classis exacted from him a solemn promise, that, if it should be found that he held any opinions different from the Belgic Confession, he would refrain from disseminating them. This conference was held in the presence of the curators of the university and the deputies of the Synod, in the course of which Arminius solemnly disavowed Pelagian opinions; declared his full belief in all that Augustine had written against those opinions; and promised in the most explicit manner that he would teach nothing contrary to the received doctrines of the church. Upon these declarations and promises he was placed in the professorship.

The Synod of Dordt, which took place in the years 1618 and 1619, occupies an important place in the history of the Reformed churches. Its well-known decision (known as the Canons of Dordt or the Five Articles Against the Remonstrants) regarding the five main points of doctrine in dispute in the Netherlands at that time continues to serve as one of the Forms of Unity or Doctrinal Standards of our denomination. Rev. Miller was instrumental in the establishment of Princeton Seminary and was subsequently appointed to the chair of ecclesiastical history and church government, which he held for more than thirty-six years. Although born and educated in the United States in the Presbyterian church, his high regard for the work of the Synod of Dordt is evident from his essay. He detailed its background and significance, classifying the meeting as "altogether pre-eminent."

On first entering upon his Professorship Arminius seemed to take much pains to remove from himself all suspicion of heterodoxy by publicly maintaining theses in favor of the received doctrines; doctrines which he afterwards zealously contradicted. And that he did this contrary to his own conviction at the time was made abundantly evident afterwards by some of his own zealous friends. But after he had been in his new office a year or two, it was discovered that it was his constant practice to deliver one set of opinions in his professorial chair and a very different set by means of private confidential manuscripts circulated among his pupils. He was also accustomed, while he publicly recommended the characters and opinions of the most illustrious Reformed divines, artfully to insinuate such things as were adapted, indirectly, to bring them into discredit and to weaken the arguments usually brought for their support. He also frequently intimated to his pupils that he had many objections to the doctrines usually deemed orthodox, which he intended to make known at a suitable time. It was observed, too, that some pastors who were known to be on terms of great intimacy with him were often giving intimations in private that they had adopted the new opinions, and not a few of his pupils began to manifest symptoms of being infected with the same errors.

The churches of Holland, observing these and other things of a similar kind, became deeply apprehensive of the consequences; they, therefore, enjoined upon the deputies, to whom the supervision of the church was more especially committed, to inquire into the matter and to take the earliest and most decisive measures to prevent the apprehended evil from taking deeper root. In consequence of this injunction, the deputies of the churches of North and South Holland waited on Arminius, informed him of what they had heard, and urged him, in a friendly manner, if he had doubts or difficulties respecting any of the received doctrines of the Belgic churches, either to make known his mind in a frank and candid manner to his brethren in private; or to refer the whole affair, officially, to the consideration and decision of a Synod.

To this address of the deputies Arminius replied that he had never given any just cause for the reports of which they had heard; but that he did not think proper to enter into any conference with them as the deputies of the churches; that if, however, they chose, as private ministers, to enter into a conversation with him on the points in question, he was ready to comply with their wishes; *provided* they would engage, on their part, that if they found anything erroneous in his opinions they would not divulge it to the Synod which they represented! The deputies, considering this proposal as unfair, as unworthy of a man of integrity, and as likely to lead to no useful result, very properly declined accepting it and retired without doing anything further.

In this posture of affairs, several of the magistrates of Leyden urged Arminius to hold a conference with his colleagues in the University, before the Classis, respecting those doctrines to which he had objections, that the extent of his objections might be known. But this he declined. In the same manner he treated one proposal after another for private explanation; for calling a national Synod to consider the matter; or for any method whatever of bringing the affair to a regular ecclesiastical decision. Now a Classis, then a Synod, and at other times secular men attempted to move in the case; but Arminius was never ready and always had insurmountable objections to every method proposed for explanation or adjustment. It was evident that he wished to gain time; to put off any decisive action in the case until he should have such an opportunity of influencing the minds of the leading secular men of the country as eventually to prepare them to take sides with himself. Thus he went on evading, postponing, concealing, shrinking from every inquiry, and endeavoring secretly to throw every possible degree of odium on the orthodox doctrines, hoping that, by suitable management,

their advocates both in the church and among the civil rulers might be gradually diminished, so as to give him a good chance of a majority in any Synod which might be eventually called.

This is a painful narrative. It betrays a want of candor and integrity on the part of a man otherwise respectable, which it affords no gratification even to an adversary to record. It may be truly said, however, to be the stereotyped history of the commencement of every heresy which has arisen in the Christian church. When heresy rises in an evangelical body, it is never frank and open. It always begins by skulking and assuming a disguise. Its advocates, when together, boast of great improvements and congratulate one another on having gone greatly beyond the *"old dead orthodoxy,"* and on having left behind many of its antiquated errors; but when taxed with deviations from the received faith, they complain of the unreasonableness of their accusers, as they *"differ from it **only in words**."* This has been the standing course of errorists ever since the apostolic age. They are almost never honest and candid as a party, until they gain strength enough to be sure of some degree of popularity. Thus it was with Arius in the fourth century, with Pelagius in the fifth, with Arminius and his companions in the seventeenth, with Amyraut and his associates in France soon afterwards, and with the Unitarians in Massachusetts toward the close of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. They denied their real tenets, evaded examination or inquiry, declaimed against their accusers as merciless bigots and heresy-hunters, and strove as long as they could to appear to agree with the most orthodox of their neighbors; until the time came when, partly from inability any longer to cover up their sentiments and partly because they felt strong enough to come out, they at length avowed their real opinions. Arminius, in regard to talents, to learning, to eloquence, and to general exemplariness of moral deportment, is undoubtedly worthy of high praise; but if there be truth in history, his character as to integrity, candor, and fidelity to his official pledges and professions is covered with stains which can never by any ingenuity be effaced.

At length, after various attempts to bring Arminius to an avowal of his real opinions had failed, he was summoned by the States General, in 1609, to a conference at the Hague. He went, attended by several of his friends, and met Gomarus, who was accompanied with a corresponding number of orthodox divines. Here again the sinister designs and artful management of Arminius and his companions were manifested, but overruled; and he was constrained, to a considerable extent, to explain and defend himself. But before this conference was terminated, the agitation of his mind seems to have preyed upon his bodily health. He was first taken apparently in a small degree unwell and excused himself for a few days, to the States General; but at length grew worse; was greatly agitated in mind; and expired on the 19th day of October, 1609, in the forty-ninth year of his age. His mind, in his last illness, seems to have been by no means composed. *"He was sometimes heard,"* says Bertius, his warm friend and panegyrist, *"He was sometimes heard, in the course of his last illness, to groan and sigh, and to cry out, 'Woe is me, my mother, that thou hast borne me a man of strife, and a man of contention to the whole earth. I have lent to no man on usury, nor have men lent to me on usury; yet every one doth curse me!'"*

Attempts have been made to show that Arminius did, in fact, differ very little from the received doctrines of the Belgic churches; nay, that he, on the whole, coincided with sublapsarian Calvinists; and, of course, was most unjustly accused of embracing the heresy since called by his name. It is evident that Dr. Mosheim, himself an Arminian, was not of this opinion. He plainly thought that the friends of the Belgic Confession had much more reason to apprehend hostility on the part of Arminius and his followers to the essential principles of their creed than their published language would seem to intimate. And the Rev. Dr. Murdock, the latest and best translator of Mosheim, has delivered the following opinion, which will probably commend itself to the judgment of all well-informed and impartial readers:

> *It is a common opinion that the early Arminians, who flourished before the Synod of Dordt, were much purer and more sound than the later ones, who lived and taught after that council; and that Arminius himself only rejected Calvin's doctrine of absolute decrees, and its necessary consequences, while in everything else he agreed with the Reformer; but that his disciples, and especially Episcopius, boldly passed the limits which their master had wisely established and went over to the camp of the Pelagians and Socinians. But it appears to me very clear, that Arminius himself revolved in his own mind, and taught to his disciples, that form of religion*

which his followers afterwards professed; and that the latter, especially Episcopius, only perfected what their master taught them, and casting off fear, explained it more clearly. I have as a witness, besides others of less authority, Arminius himself, who, in his will, drawn up a little before his death, explicitly declares that his aim was to bring all sects of Christians, with the exception of the Papists, into one community and brotherhood. The opinion that Arminius himself was very nearly orthodox and not an Arminian, in the common acceptation of the term, has been recently advocated by Professor Stuart, of Andover, in an article expressly on the Creed of Arminius, in the ***Biblical Repository****, No. II., Andover, 1831, see pp. 293 and 301. To such a conclusion the learned professor is led, principally, by an artful and imposing statement made by Arminius to the magistrates of Holland, in the year 1608, one year before his death, on which Mr. Stuart puts the most favorable construction the words will bear. But from a careful comparison of this declaration of Arminius with the original five articles of the Arminian creed, (which were drawn up almost in the very words of Arminius, as early as the year 1610, and exhibited by the Remonstrants in the conference at the Hague in 1611; and were afterwards, together with a full explanation and vindication of each article, laid before the Synod of Dordt in 1617, changing, however, the dubitation of the fifth article into a positive denial of the saint's perseverance) it will, I think, appear manifest, that Arminius himself actually differed from the orthodox of that day on all the five points; and that he agreed substantially with the Remonstrants on all those doctrines for which they were condemned in the Synod of Dordt. And that such was the fact, appears to have been assumed without hesitation by the principal writers of that and the following age, both Remonstrants and Contra-remonstrants.*

It was fondly hoped by many that when Arminius died, the controversy to which his speculations had given rise would have died and been buried with him. But this, unhappily, by no means proved to be the case. It soon appeared that a number of Belgic divines of no small name had embraced his sentiments and could by no means be persuaded to desist from propagating them; and in 1610 they were organized into a body, or formal confederacy. In this capacity they presented to the States General an address which they styled a Remonstrance, from which the whole party afterward obtained the name of Remonstrants. The particular object of this paper was to solicit the favor of the government and to secure protection against the ecclesiastical censures to which they felt themselves exposed. This step amounted to a kind of schism and greatly distressed the Belgic churches.

Another event soon occurred which excited deeper and still more painful apprehension among the friends of orthodoxy. When the curators of the university came to fill the professorial chair which had been rendered vacant by the death of Arminius, the deputies of the churches earnestly besought them to select a man free from all suspicion of heterodoxy, as one of the best means of restoring peace to the university and the church. But to no purpose. The Remonstrants had, by some means, so prepossessed the minds of the curators, that Conrad Vorstius, a minister and professor at Steinfurt, in Germany, a man suspected of something much worse than even Arminianism, was selected to fill the office, and Uytenbogart, one of the most able and zealous of the Arminian party, was appointed to go to Steinfurt to solicit his dismission and removal to Leyden. The orthodox ministers and churches protested against this choice. They compared it to *"driving a nail into an inflamed and painful ulcer,"* and earnestly besought the States General not to permit a step so directly calculated still further to disturb and corrupt the churches. Vorstius had, a short time before, published a book, *"De Natura et Attributis Dei,"* and had also edited, with some alterations, a book published by Socinus the younger on the Scriptures, from both which it appeared that he leaned to Socinian opinions. Notwithstanding this, however, the Remonstrants were bent on his election, and it was with the utmost difficulty that their plan for placing him in the vacant chair was defeated. In short, their conduct in the case of Vorstius alone was quite sufficient to show that the apprehensions of the orthodox concerning the corrupt character of their opinions, were by no means excessive or unjust.

James I, king of England, having read the book of Vorstius, a book concerning the nature and attributes of God, and conceiving it to be replete with radical error, addressed a letter to the States General, exhorting them *"not to admit such a man into the important office of teacher of theology"*;

and, further, commanded his ambassador at the Hague to use his utmost influence to prevent the introduction into such a professorship, of a man, as he expressed it, rendered infamous by so many and great errors, and who ought to be banished from their territories, rather than loaded with public honors. *"In short,"* said the king, *"since God has been pleased to dignify me with the title of 'Defender of the Faith,' if Vorstius is kept any longer, we shall be obliged not only to separate from those heretical churches, but also to consult all the other Reformed churches, in order to know which is the best way of extirpating and sending back to hell those cursed heresies which have recently sprung up; we shall be forced to forbid the young people of our kingdom to frequent such an infected University and that of Leyden."*

By these and various other sources of influence, the Remonstrants were scarcely prevented from putting Vorstius into the vacant professorship. Still, though disappointed, they were not disheartened or diminished in number. On the contrary, the election soon afterwards of Episcopius, a leading man of their party, to a professorship in the University of Leyden seemed to give them new strength and new hopes. It became also more and more evident that some men of no small influence in the civil government of the country had become friendly to the Remonstrants and strongly disposed to pursue a course which should secure at least impunity to them as a party. Hence the repeated manifestation of unwillingness on the part of the States General to promote the convening of a National Synod or the adoption of any other plan for bringing the Remonstrants to discipline. It was evidently the favorable object of the Remonstrants and their friends, both in church and state, to do nothing; to secure the toleration of the growing errors; and to allow the Remonstrants as good a standing as the orthodox in the national church.

Accordingly, when anxious efforts were made in 1611 and again in 1613 to bring the affairs of the church to an adjustment and pacification, the friends of truth were baffled and disappointed. Every effort to bring on a crisis, or, in any form, to call the Remonstrants to an account, was resisted and evaded; and the state of things was, every day, becoming more distressing and alarming. Confusion, and even persecution, ensued. Some of the orthodox pastors were suspended, and others driven from their charges, because they could not conscientiously receive those who avowed Arminian opinions into the communion of the church.

In this situation of things, when the very pillars of society seemed to be shaken, when the ruling powers of the State were seen to be more and more favorable to the erroneous party, and when everything portended the approach of a tremendous crisis, it pleased God to employ an instrument for promoting the advancement of His cause who by no means loved that cause, and who yet was placed in circumstances which at once prompted and enabled him to favor it. James I, king of England, a man of very small mind, and of still less moral or religious principle, having been born and bred in a Calvinistic community, and coming to the throne of England when the leading clergy of that part of his dominions, as well as of the North, were almost unanimously Calvinistic, he fell in with the fashionable creed, and was disposed, as his manner was, in everything, officiously to exert his royal power in its favor. He, therefore, in the year 1617, addressed a friendly, but admonitory letter to the States General, in which he earnestly recommended the calling of a national synod to vindicate the genuine doctrines of the Reformation and to restore tranquility to the agitated Belgic churches. About the same time, Maurice, the prince of Orange and the Head of the United Provinces, took the same ground and urged the same thing.

When the Arminian party perceived that the popular current was beginning to run in this direction and that there was some prospect of a national synod being called, they were filled with uneasiness, and strove by all the means in their power to prevent it. But their evasive and intriguing arts were now in vain; and although they began to manifest a spirit more like revolt and sedition than before, yet now the state of the public mind was such, that their violence only served to show the greater necessity of some efficient measure for meeting and subduing their turbulence.

At length a decree was issued by the States General in 1618, ordering that a National Synod should convene in the following November, at Dordt, a considerable city of South Holland. The method prescribed for the convocation of this synod was that a provincial synod should meet in each of the provinces, from which six persons should be delegated to attend the General Synod. And, in most

cases, the plan adopted was to appoint four ministers and two ruling elders from each of the provincial synods, together with at least one professor from each of the universities.

It had been originally intended that this Synod should be formed of delegates from the Belgic churches only; but at the pointed request of James I, king of England, seconded, at his suggestion, by Maurice, prince of Orange, it was determined to invite eminent divines from foreign churches to sit and vote in the Synod. Accordingly letters were addressed to the king of Great Britain; to the deputies of the Reformed Churches of France; to the Electors of the Palatinate and Brandenburgh; to the Landgrave of Hesse; to the four Protestant Cantons of Switzerland, *viz.,* Zurich, Berne, Basle, and Schaffhausen; and to the Republics of Geneva, Bremen, and Embden, whom they entreated to delegate some of their most pious, learned, and prudent theologians, who, in conjunction with the deputies of the Belgic churches, should labor to compose the differences and decide the controversies which had arisen in those churches.

The Reformed churches of France, in compliance with the request made to them, appointed Andrew Rivet and Peter du Moulin, as their delegates to attend this Synod; but just as they were about to set out for Dordt in pursuance of their appointment, the king of France issued an edict forbidding their attendance. In consequence of this interdict, the churches of France were not represented in the Synod.

It would be wrong to omit stating that before the Synod came together, a day of solemn prayer and fasting was appointed, to deprecate the wrath of God and to implore His gracious presence and blessing on the approaching Assembly. This day was appointed by the States General and observed with great solemnity.

The Synod convened, agreeably to the call of the States General, in the city of Dordt, on the 13th day of November, A. D. 1618. It consisted of thirty-nine Pastors and eighteen Ruling Elders delegated from the Belgic churches, together with five Professors from the Universities of Holland; and also of Delegates from all the foreign Reformed churches which had been invited to send them, excepting those of France, before spoken of. The delegates from the foreign Reformed churches on the Continent, all of whom were Presbyterian, were nineteen. The delegates from Great Britain were five, *viz.,* George Carleton, bishop of Llandaff; Joseph Hall, Dean of Worcester, and afterwards Bishop, successively, of Exeter and Norwich; John Davenant, Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge, and afterwards Bishop of Salisbury; Samuel Ward, Archdeacon of Taunton and Theological Professor in the University of Cambridge; and Walter Balcanequal, of Scotland, representing the Established Church of North Britain. The Synod thus constituted, consisted, in all, of eighty-six members. No Arminians, it would appear, were elected members of the Synod, excepting three from the Province of Utrecht; and of these only one was admitted to a seat.

It is perfectly evident from the foregoing statement, that the leading divines, and the governing policy of the Church of England, at the date of this Synod, were very far from sanctioning the spirit which has since risen in that establishment, and which has manifested itself, for a number of years past, among many of that denomination of Christians in the United States. Here we see a prelatical bishop and three other dignitaries of the Church of England, two of whom were afterwards bishops, sitting in a solemn ecclesiastical body, and, for months together, deliberating, praying, and preaching with an assembly, all of whom but themselves, were Presbyterians. This was a practical recognition, of the strongest kind, of the Presbyterian Church as a true Church of Christ; and demonstrated that the great and learned and good men who directed the counsels of the Church of England at that time never thought of denying, either in word or act, her just claim to this character. Some high churchmen, indeed, of modern times, either ignorant of facts or so prejudiced as to be totally blind to the lights of history, have alleged that the States General pointedly requested the king of England to send delegates to this Synod; and that he, unwilling to reject their solicitation, was over persuaded to depart, on one occasion, from the principles which ordinarily governed him and his Church. This statement is altogether incorrect. The solicitation was all the other way. The king of England, though he had nothing, strictly speaking, to do with the business, seemed fond of meddling with it; interposed from time to time in a way in which no other than a weak, officious, pedantic, and arrogant man would

have thought of doing; and pressed the States General to adopt a plan which would open the way for the admission of delegates from his Church to the Synod.

And to his wishes and policy in this matter his leading divines acceded. It would have been difficult to select men of more respectable character for talents, learning, piety, and ecclesiastical influence than those who were nominated and commissioned to take their seats in that Synod. They deliberated for months with Presbyterians; preached in Presbyterian pulpits; united in Presbyterian devotions; recognized Presbyterian churches as sister churches and their ministers as brethren in office and in hope. O how different the language of many prelatists of later times — many of them, it must be confessed, indeed, pygmies in talents, learning, and piety, when compared with the giants who acted their parts on the occasion of which we speak!

But to return to the Synod of Dordt. It was opened on the 13th of November, 1618. John Bogerman, one of the deputies from Friesland, was chosen moderator, or president; and Jacobus Rolandus, one of the ministers of Amsterdam, and Herman Faukelius, minister of Middelburg, his assessors, or assistants. The two secretaries were Sebastian Dammannus, minister of Zutphen, and Festus Hommius, minister of Leyden.

Each of the members of the Synod, before proceeding to business, took the following solemn oath, or engagement:

> *"I promise before God, in whom I believe, and whom I worship, as being present in this place, and as being the Searcher of all hearts, that during the course of the proceedings of this Synod, which will examine and decide, not only the five points, and all the differences resulting from them, but also any other doctrine, I will use no human writing, but only the Word of God, which is an infallible rule of faith. And during all these discussions, I will only aim at the glory of God, the peace of the church, and especially the preservation of the purity of doctrine. So help me, my Savior, Jesus Christ! I beseech Him to assist me by His Holy Spirit!"*

It was some time before the delegates of the Remonstrants, or Arminian party, made their appearance. At the twenty-second session of the Synod, Episcopius and his twelve colleagues, who had been summoned for this purpose, presented themselves to make their explanation and defence. In undertaking this task, they manifested the same disposition to delay, to elude inquiry, and to throw obstacles in the way of every plan of proceeding that was proposed. Episcopius was their chief speaker; and with great art and address did he manage their cause. He insisted on being permitted to begin with a refutation of the Calvinistic doctrines, especially that of reprobation, hoping that by placing his objections to this doctrine in front of all the rest, he might excite such prejudice against the other articles of the system as to secure the popular voice in his favor. The Synod, however, very properly reminded him that they had not convened for the purpose of trying the Confession of Faith of the Belgic Churches, which had been long established and well-known; but that, as the Remonstrants were accused of departing from the reformed faith, they were bound *first to justify themselves* by giving Scriptural proof in support of their opinions.

To this plan of procedure they would by no means submit. It disconcerted their whole scheme; but the Synod firmly refused to adopt any other plan. This refusal, of course, shut the Remonstrants out from taking any part in the deliberations of the body. Day after day were they reasoned with and urged to submit to a course of proceeding ecclesiastically regular and adapted to their situation, but without success. They were, therefore, compelled to withdraw. Upon their departure, the Synod proceeded without them.

The language of the President (Bogerman) in dismissing the Remonstrants was rough, and adapted to give pain. He pointedly charged them with fraudulent proceedings, with disingenuous acts, with falsehood, etc. For this language, however, he alone was responsible. It had not been dictated or authorized by the Synod. And a number of the members, we are assured, heard it with regret, and expressed their disapprobation of it (*Hales's Works,* III. 123). And yet, while this language was severe, and, for an ecclesiastical assembly, unseemly, was it not substantially according to truth?

The Synod does not appear to have accomplished its work by referring different portions of it to different committees; but the plan adopted was to request the divines from each country represented in the Synod to consult together and bring in their separate opinions or judgments in regard to the main points in controversy. So the sentence or opinion of the Dutch divines, of the English divines, of the Genevese divines, etc., were separately obtained and distinctly recorded in the proceedings of the Synod. This method of conducting the business was probably less favorable to dispassionate and perfectly calm proceedings than if committees had matured in private every part of the work.

The Synod examined the Arminian tenets; condemned them as unscriptural, pestilential errors; and pronounced those who held and published them to be enemies of the faith of the Belgic churches and corrupters of the true religion. They also deposed the Arminian ministers; excluded them and their followers from the communion of the church; suppressed their religious assemblies; and by the aid of the civil government, which confirmed all their acts, sent a number of the clergy of that party and of those who adhered to them, into banishment. From a large part of their disabilities, however, the Remonstrants, after the lapse of a few years, were relieved.

It is probable that all impartial persons, who make up an opinion with that light and those habits of thinking with regard to religious liberty which we now possess, will judge that some of these proceedings were by far too harsh and violent. To suppress the religious assemblies of the Remonstrants by secular authority and to banish their leaders from their country were measures which we cannot, at this day, contemplate but with deep regret, as inconsistent with those rights of conscience which we must regard as indefensible. But when we consider that those rights were really understood by no branch of the Christian church at that day; when we recollect that in the Church of England, during the reign of the same James I who sent representatives to this Synod, more than twenty persons were put to death for their religion, at least two of whom were burnt alive; and that many hundreds were banished from their country; and when we recollect that even the pious Puritans, who migrated from their own country to America that they might enjoy religious liberty, persecuted, in their turn, even unto death for the sake of religion; and especially when we remember the disingenuous, provoking, unworthy course by which the Remonstrants had divided and agitated the Belgic churches for a number of years; and also the highly unbecoming language which they employed even before the Synod; when all these things are considered, it is presumed no impartial man will wonder, though he may weep, at some of the proceedings of that far-famed and venerable Synod. After all, however, there can be no doubt that a large part of the violence popularly ascribed to that Synod existed only in the imaginations, the complaints, and the books of the Remonstrants; who were not, of course, impartial judges. The learning, piety, and venerable character of the great and good men who composed it ought to be considered as an ample guarantee of the decorum of their proceedings.

The Synod of Dordt continued to sit from the 13th of November, 1618, to the 29th of May, 1619. It held, in all, one hundred and eighty sittings, and was conducted entirely at the expense of the States General.

Samuel Miller