

SYNOD OF DORDRECHT: AN ICONOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS¹

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Introduction

The Synod of Dordrecht was a religious and political meeting held between November 13, 1618 and May 29, 1619 in the Dutch city of Dordrecht. In religious terms, the Synod set out to end Remonstrantism, establishing the five points of 1610 protest (which will be later reviewed in the first section) as heretical, in addition to expelling the Remonstrants from the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands; in political terms, this meeting accused the *Landsadvocaat* (State Attorney), Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619), of high treason and sentenced him to the death penalty, executing him in a public square for decapitation.

The Synod of Dordrecht has often been noted in the Calvinist tradition as an event that brought justice to the Dutch Reformed Church, as a bastion of truth and orthodoxy³. On the other hand, there are studies that point out how the political scenario influenced the Synod's decision-making and that the *coup d'État* by Maurício de Orange was decisive for its outcome⁴. Both narratives, however, date back to the time of the controversies, to 17th century Holland. One of the instruments used at that time, in order to pulverize the narratives, was through pamphlets, logotypes and emblems, through which engravings with visual narratives were inserted for propagandistic, apologetic and polemic purposes. From this point of view, the Synod of Dordrecht has not yet been analyzed with due care. Therefore, in this article, I will analyze four visual narratives, the first two coming from the Calvinist milieu and the last two from the remonstrant milieu.

¹ For a more complete discussion of these iconographies, read Vinicius Couto. “Iconografia Dortiana: ataques gomaristas e contra-ataques remonstrantes.” in Couto (Ed.), *(In)tolerâncias religiosas nos Países Baixos: uma história das reformas religiosas ocorridas antes e durante a Era Dourada, 1515-1648* (São Paulo: Reflexão, 2021) 463-514.

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³ Cf. W. Robert Godfrey. *Saving the Reformation: the pastoral theology of the Canons of Dort* (Orlando: Ligonier Ministries, 2019), 21-34; Louis Praamsma. “The Background of the Arminian Controversy (1586-1618)”. In: Peter Y. De Jong (ed.). *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in commemoration of the great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1968), 22-38, esp. 33, Where the author says that “The churches were permitted at the synod of Dort to express themselves and make decisions which insured the maintenance of the pure doctrine of the Gospel”; W. Robert Godfrey. “The Synod of Dort and Strategic Thinking” in: Joel R Beeke and Martin I Klauber (eds.). *The Synod of Dort: Historical, Theological, and Experiential Perspectives* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 13-24, esp. 24, Where he concludes that the calvinists at the Synod of Dordrecht were “concerned for Christ, the truth, and the souls of sinners”, as if the Remonstrants had no such worries.

⁴ Cf. Keith D. Stanglin. “The Remonstrant Perspective and the Synod of Dort”. *Calvin Theological Journal* 54, 2 (2019):325-52.

These iconographies follow the characteristic Renaissance artistic style, with linearity, closed figure, planar effects, plurality and clarity, distinguishing themselves from the Baroque artistic style. To analyze these iconographies, I will use, more briefly, the Panofskian methodology.⁵ This method proposes the interpretation of works of art from the Renaissance in a course of three moments: the first is the *pre-iconographic* one, also called as *Primary or natural subject matter*, which consists of describing the content of the visual narratives, such as the present elements, the characters, their gestures, features, etc., as well as presenting the primary and secondary motives; the second is the *iconographic*, also named *Secondary or conventional subject matter*, which deals with specific subjects and concepts manifested in images, such as myths, stories, etc.; finally, the third is the *iconological*, also called *Intrinsic meaning or content*, which discusses how concepts and themes present in the visual narrative in question are present in other times and works of art⁶.

1. The background of visual narratives

The Synod of Dordrecht was the result of a series of religious developments, but above all, political ones, in which the Stadholder⁷ Maurice of Orange (1567-1625) joined himself to the Calvinists of the Dutch Reformed Church in order to strengthen their public support for a *coup d'état* he had been planning and gradually moving forward. Some important evidence before the coup is found in the fact that Maurice had Johannes Wittenbogaert as his Army Chaplain and still attended the Walloon church that Wittenbogaert pastored.

Things started to change, however, from April 9, 1609, when Oldenbarnevelt signed an armistice with the Spaniards, known as the 12-Year Truce. Maurice was not pleased with this, as he wanted to continue conquering southern Dutch territories belonging to the Spaniards. He had in his favor the fact that Spain was facing numerous crises in recent years (political, economic,

⁵ Cf. the first chapter, "Iconography and Iconology: An Introduction to the Study of Renaissance Art", from Erwin Panofsky. *Meaning in Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955), 26-54.

⁶ Ibid, 28-30.

⁷ This was the highest office of the Republic of the Seven United Netherlands. The nation's name dates back to the time when Maurice's father, Stadholder William of Orange, the Silent (1533-1584), spearheaded an independence revolt against the Spanish Empire, starting what became known as the 80 Years War (1568-1648). While the Dutch provinces were linked to Spain, the Stadholder was a Regent / General Governor, who was accountable to the King of Spain. With independence, the Dutch chose not to follow a regime of absolutist monarchy and gave rise to a republican system of government, in which the Stadholder was the major leadership, but linked to provincial representatives (counselors), forming the States General. The Dutch Stadholder was responsible for military matters, from protection to territorial conquests and reconquests. The State Attorney, in turn, was the diplomat, who dealt with international politics as well as legal matters. More informations on this offices can be read in Derk Visser. *Establishing the Reformed Church: Clergy and Magisters in the Low Countries 1572-1620*. In: W. Fred Graham (Ed.). *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives* (Kirksville: Northeast Missouri State University, 1994) 393.

health, agricultural and food), which could give him some advantage. However, Oldenbarnevelt represented the many people who wanted the stoppage of wars and who longed for peace.

Since the armistice was against the wishes of Maurice and Oldebnarnevelt gained more and more popularity among the people, the Stadholder was changing judges and manipulating other positions of trust, moving these pieces like a game of chess. His goal was to leave those people in office who were aligned with his worldview and who would agree with the changes he would soon make. Nevertheless, in 1610 the Remonstrants, led by Wittenbogaert, published their articles protesting rigid Calvinism.

These articles said that (1) election and predestination are conditional, unlike Calvinism, which understands this *modus operandi* of God unconditionally; (2) that the scope of Christ's atonement is universal, that is, for each and every person, being sufficient for any individual and any sin, but efficient only for those who repent and believe – this differed from Bezanian Calvinism, which established, in its Aristotelian logic, the idea that Christ died only for the people that God chose in past eternity; (3) that the fall of Adam corrupted all his descendants, so that no human being is exempt from this evil – the original sin – whereby the human race is dead in trespasses and sins and without free will to spiritual decisions, being, therefore, impossible for the natural man, to do any good, especially salvation – at this point, the remonstrants converged with the Calvinists; (4) that the divine *modus operandi* is not *electiocentric* (centered on election), but *charicentric* (centered on grace), for God's grace is the beginning, continuation, and end⁸ of all good – moreover, this grace is not irresistible, unlike what the Calvinists taught; (5) that, by grace, it is possible to persevere in the way of salvation⁹.

Oldenbarnevelt took these articles to the *Staten-Generaal* for broader discussions on the issue of religious tolerance. If the General Counsel was in favor of the remonstrating case, Maurice saw a greater opportunity / opportunism in going in the opposite direction. There were many Calvinist bourgeois, which could help in their military endeavors later on due to funding. Thus, Maurice, who had not been taking a stand in this Arminian/Gomarist, remonstrant/counter-remonstrant quarrel, finally took sides, and opted for the second group.

After setting the whole scene and giving more hegemony to the Calvinists, the long-awaited Synod was scheduled. The 12-Year Truce, which Maurice had opposed years earlier, became important to the synodal achievement and Oldenbarnevelt's backfire. While counter-remonstrants had greater freedom to discuss agendas from Calvinism onwards, Mauricio used

⁸ Although the English version of the fourth article uses the word “end”, this is not the best translation as it gives some ambiguity. The Dutch word is *volbrenginghe*, which means “fulfillment”, “realization”. The Latin version of this article uses the word *complementum*, which is cognate with the English word “complement”. However, as can be seen, the idea is really of the centrality of grace, since it is grace’s initiative (Dutch *beginssel*; Latin, *principium*; continuity (Dutch, *voortganck*; Latin, *progressus*); and realization.

⁹ The five points can be read in Phillip Schaff. *The Creeds of Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990) 3:545-549. The original articles can also be read in Johannes Wtenbogaert. *Kerckeliicke historie, vervatende verscheyden gedenckwaerdige saecken, in de Christenheyt voorgevallen, van het jaer vier hondert af, tot in het jaer sestien hondert ende negentien* (Rotterdam: Joannes Naeranus, 1647) 524–529.

the narrative that the State Attorney's proposal was a disservice to the Reformation, since he would be making political-religious alliances with Spanish enemies, who were Catholics. Accused, therefore, of high treason, as if he were going to return the northern provinces to Spain, Oldenbarnevelt was executed on May 13, 1619¹⁰. His position was extinguished, confirming yet another detail of the *coup d'état* by Mauritius.

The Synod of Dordrecht marked a split in Dutch religion and this unfolded into disputes over visual narratives. On the one hand, counter-remonstrants (the Calvinists) followed a pro-Maurice of Orange narrative, serving as *spin doctors*¹¹, in addition to demonizing and caricatured the religious party they opposed; on the other hand, the Remonstrants (pejoratively called Arminians), reacted to these visual narratives, publishing engravings and pamphlets in order to counterattack the narratives that circulated. Next, we will talk about some of these visual narratives.

2. The Calvinist Visual Narratives of the Synod of Dordrecht

After having a slight notion of the Synod's background, we can begin to glimpse the narratives pointed out by the Calvinists, which, in the case of this essay, are aimed at being visual. Of course, there are a lot more visual narratives than what we're going to present here. However, since space does not allow for such a long approach, I will limit myself to two images that summarize a little how the Calvinists acted in the Synod and how they saw political issues. In the first, we have a portrait of the Synod, and in the second, a satirical critique of the Remonstrants in favor of Maurice of Orange.

¹⁰ Keith D. Stanglin. "The Remonstrant Perspective on the Synod of Dordt." *Calvin Theological Journal* 54, no. 2 (2019):325–52. Of course, this section is just a summary of the background, as the subject is much denser and the events are much more complex than I narrate here. For details on all these developments see Stanglin above.

¹¹ *Spin Doctors* were specifically hired spokespersons to give a favorable interpretation of events to the media, especially on behalf of some political party. For more information on pro-Mauritius prints and their connection to Spin Doctors, see Vinicius Couto. "O arminianismo pós-dortiano e a formação da Irmandade Remonstrante: os novos rumos nas esferas política e religiosa neerlandesas, 1619-1625." In Couto (Ed.), *(In)tolerâncias religiosas nos Países Baixos: uma história das reformas religiosas ocorridas antes e durante a Era Dourada, 1515-1648* (São Paulo: Reflexão, 2021) 515-542.

Figure 01: *De opening van de nationale synode te Dordrecht, 1618* –
François Schillemans, 1618/19



Source: *Rijksmuseum*, Amsterdam

This figure was published in a logotype format, with texts in both lateral to the image. These texts were cut in this essay so that the reader can better follow the data in the figure. The left side of the document has a Latin poem by Jacob Cats (1577-1660). In addition to being a poet, Cats was a Dutch humorist, jurist and politician. He is famous for many works, of which we highlight *Emblemata or Minnebeelden with Maegdenplicht*, from 1618, which is a book of emblems, which were satirical figures and visual narratives involving political and religious issues. This type of art was very common and popular in those days.

The poem is linked to the primary aim of the figure, which is to portray the Synod of Dordrecht as something divine, organized and orthodox. Therefore, he compares the Synod with two important events in the history of Christianity: (I) the Council of Jerusalem, in which the apostles reproved the Judaizing proposal of the Pharisees; and (II) the Council of Nicea, in which the collegiate anathematized Arianism, which denied the divinity of Christ. In this sense, indirectly and implicitly, Remonstratism is presented as an heresy which the Synod disapproved of, just as the Councils mentioned above did. In this romantic vision, the author describes the Synod as being “the most beautiful flower in all countries not subject to the Pope, the deepest

vision and most solid doctrine, the salt of the earth and the brightest light in the world”¹². On the Other hand, the right side of the document contains a detailed, captioned list of the names of all Synod participants.

The rows are all very symmetrical, with rich details of the structure of the city hall, where the synod meetings took place. The people drawn there are also presented very accurately. A good example of this is the person of Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641), a professor at the Leiden University who debated numerous times with Jacobus Arminius (1559/60-1609). It appears in the lower left corner, in the center of the bench that is leaning against the wall. The details of his face, long beard and the type of hat are designed with very high quality, so that it is possible to identify him easily, in comparison with his available portraits.

We see two tables in the figure. From top to bottom, we find the main one, which is horizontally positioned and belongs to the Synod board, where we identify Ioannes Bergermannus (1576-1637)¹³, the President, standing at the center of the table. Immediately beside him, we identify two men, who are his advisors, respectively, Iacobus Rolandus (1562-1632) and Hermannus Faukelius (1560-1625); the other two men at the table, those who occupy its ends, are the scribes Sebastianus Damman and Festus Hommius.

Below them we find another table, this time positioned vertically. In it, we find the remonstrants who participated in the Synod – although without the right to speak –, Henricus Leo, Bernerus Wezekius, Henricus Hollinger, Simon Episcopius, Ioannes Arnold Corvin, Bernardus Dvinglonius, Eduardus Poppius, Theophilus Rickwaerdius, Philippus Pynackerus, Dominicus Sapma, Thomas Goswinus, Assuerus Matthisius, Carolus Niellius, Isaacus Frederici e Samuel Neraus.

The figure title is *De opening van de nationale synode te Dordrecht* (The opening of the National Synod in Dordrecht). The figure itself does not appear to demonstrate much in favor of the Calvinists. If It was unaccompanied by poetry, It might be able to pass some neutrality. However, by assuming the idea that the synod is holy and that it is comparable to the Councils of Jerusalem and Nicaea, It demonstrates the propagandistic narrative that the Remonstrants are equated with the Judaizers and Aryans. This idea that Arminians are heretics, present in figure 1, is still represented in several pamphlets of the time, such as the *Warminiaen* (Disturbed Arminian), which is the figure of a five-headed monster (each of which represents an article of remonstrance), and the *Den Arminiaensche dreckwaghen* (The Arminian dung cart), in which we see several people being dumped on a cart.¹⁴

¹² Joke Spaans. “Imagining the Synod of Dordt and the Arminian Controversy”. In: Aza Goudriaan; Fred van Lieburg (Eds.). *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2011) 339.

¹³ He is better known as Johannes Bogerman.

¹⁴ For an analysis of the engraving on the *Warminiaen*, see; Couto, *Iconografia Dortiana*, pp. 471-473. For the engraving *Den Arminiaensche dreckwaghen*, see Helmut Renders; Vinicius Couto. “O ‘Carro triunfal arminiano’: uma sátira dortiana de Arminio e dos Remonstrantes”. *Revista Brasileira de História das Religiões* 14, no. 41 (2021):169-203.

Figure 02: *Maurits scheidt het kaf van de koren* – Anônimo, 1618



Source: *Rijksmuseum*, Amsterdam

In addition to linking the Remonstrants to heresy, another predominant narrative in Calvinist iconographies was the one that favored the idea of exile (expulsion) of the Remonstrants, as can be found in *D'Arminiaensche uytvaert* (The Arminian exilium), from 1619; *Het Arminiaans Kaproen* (The Arminian hat), 1620; and the aforementioned *De Arminiaensche dreckwaghen*. Figure 02 walks in the same direction. It's title is *Maurits scheidt het kaf van de koren* (Maurice separates the chaff from the wheat). We find right in the middle of it, the figure of Maurice of Orange carrying a basket with several Remonstrants inside. The basket does not convey the idea that it is in the process of separating the chaff. This has already been done. The position of Maurice's feet (as if he were walking), together with the way he holds the basket (holding it crookedly, close to his thighs, to support the weight), give the impression that he is in motion. So he's just discarding that tares.

Ahead of him, we have some people already discarded. Two of them get mixed up on the floor, as if they've already been thrown off. One of them is even falling from the basket, giving the impression of an act that is being performed. Two men are standing. They seem to run away. Another man, who looks a lot like Oldenbarnevelt, is on his knees with his hands together, as if he were praying. Its position is similar to its execution¹⁵. The figure also depicts statesman Gilles van Ledenberg (ca. 1550-1618). He is pictured falling, arms outstretched. This is because he was

¹⁵ See the picture of Oldenbarnevelt's execution in Joost van den Vondel. *Palamedes* (Amsterdam: Jacob Aerts. Calom, Boeckvercooper opt water, inde vyerige Calom., 1626). The book can be consulted on the Leiden University website: <http://www.let.leidenuniv.nl/Dutch/Ceneton/VondelPalamedes1626.html>.

arrested and charged with high treason along with Oldenbarnevelt. In order to avoid some political disturbances and seeing that he would be executed, as would be the future of the State Attorney, he committed suicide on September 28, 1618. Even so, he was sentenced to death and executed posthumously, symbolically, of course.

Behind Maurice are Counter-remonstrants and other political authorities such as Count Willem Lodewijk (1560-1620) and Frederick Henry (1584-1647), who later succeeded Maurice as Stadholder. In the background, we still find an angelic allegory typical of the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt 13:24ff), because Jesus said that the angels would do this work of separation, in the end, throwing the tares into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:41-42). The angels with the trumpets point to the parallel of angelic work in Matthew 24:31, 40-42, where we find angels in God's service taking some to the judgment seat of Christ and leaving others for the final judgment, the lake of fire and sulfur. The visual narrative here, however, shows Maurice moving this work forward to God, establishing the remonstrants as tares, a specimen of plague, or weed, which in Jesus' parable had been planted by the Devil. Indirectly, therefore, we have the charge that the Arminius-Remonstrant doctrine is satanic, diabolical, heterodox, heretical. As a *subscriptio*, the figure still has an archaic German caption: “*Laest Nassou vri wannen es kan nichts schaden / Dan das wannen, lst ihm gaer wol geraten*” (Let Nassau put it in the basket, it won't do [any] harm / And on that withdraw / he did very well).

Both figures 01 and 02 are dated 1618, the year the Synod of Dordrecht began. Although, only at the end of the Synod, the resolutions concerning the alternatives of the Remonstrants were issued, the figures favor the third of them. They had three options at the end of the Synod: (I) subscribe to the Canons of Dordrecht, but this was contrary to conscience, since this document reinforced the rigid Calvinist doctrine; (II) sign the Renunciation Act, a document by which they gave up their pastoral office, being prevented from preaching, visiting the sick, writing books and teaching privately or publicly anything related to religion and theology; or (III) go into exile immediately, having their assets confiscated and salaries cut. Note that figures 01 and 02 value this exile, expulsion.

3. The Remonstrating Visual Narratives of the Synod of Dordrecht

The Synod of Dordrecht, however, did not follow a purely theological analysis in its sessions. There was a strong amalgamation of politics on the issue. The remonstrants were aware of this, so we find reactions from them in other visual narratives. In this section, we'll look at two such narratives. The first (fig. 03) involves a direct criticism of this system, especially its political content; the second (fig. 04) directly satirizes the Synod itself, accusing of occult/superstitious actions, in addition to criticizing the synodal action of being under malignant influence. Let's see, below, a little of the remonstrating reaction:

Figure 03: *Op de Jonghste Hollantsche Transformatie – Salomon Savery, c. 1618*



Source: *Rijksmuseum*, Amsterdam

The title of figure 03 is *Op by Jonghste Hollantsche Transformatie* (The latest changes in the Netherlands). It was made by Salomon Savery (1594-1683), who had been an artist from a traditional family of artists in the city of Flanders. His father was the painter Jacob Maertensz Savery (1566-1603). At that time, it was common for art to be commissioned by other people. We don't know if this happened to the figure in question. However, it is very informative when it comes to the religious quarrels of the Remonstrants and Counter-remonstrants.

The three men seated at the top seem to represent the President of the Synod and his secretaries, Ioannes Bergermannus, Iacobus Rolandus and Hermannus Faulkelius¹⁶. Below them are Gomaro (on our left) and Arminius (on our right). A curious fact is that we rarely see Arminius wearing a hat in iconographies and portraits. Below Arminius, there are three men,

¹⁶ According to Ellis, one of those who sits on this higher platform is “James I (1566-1625), the King of England and a key proponent of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination”, who “looking on approvingly” (cf. James W. Ellis. “The Arminian Controversy: History, Theology, and Art”. *Journal of Social and Political Sciences* 3, no. 1 (2020):196-213, esp. 203). However, we are not sure about this. There is no caption that gives this impression and not even a trace of royal attire that leads us to such a conclusion. The absence of mention of this king in the poem (below) also makes us suspicious of this proposal. As this engraving is a satire on the Synod of Dort, it is more sensible and likely that those three represent the president and advisers of the Synod, namely, Ioannes Bergermannus, Iacobus Rolandus and Hermannus Faulkelius.

Remonstrants, but we have no way of knowing the exact identity. On the other side are Maurice of Orange, in the lower left corner, and armed soldiers. Among all these men, there is a scale, which on the Remonstrants' side contains magistrates' clothes (a typical Attorney General's blouse), pillows and a set of texts (probably works and letters by Arminius); on Maurice's side, the scale contains a set of books by Calvin (the first being the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*), Theodore Beza and a sword.

The poem explains the figure. In it, we read the following:

Gomarus and Arminius will be judged / For their religious conflict. / On the judging scales, / Each proposed argument was placed. / Dr. Gomarus seemed at first, / A poor man, who would do worse. / Once the clever and shrewd Arminius / Against Beza and Calvin / Put on the mantle of the “lawyer”, / Magistrate's pillows, / And the brain, the source and the fountainhead / Of some solid reasoning; / Letters, too, through which they were shown / The due rights of all cities. / Gomarus's eyes searched everywhere / Till our prince came to his side / And on the highest scale of Gomaro / He placed his blade to such advantage / That all other things turned out light / By the heavy power of the good sword. / Gomarus's image was then praised. / And Arminius of the scene was chased.

About this figure, Spaans claims that “the defeated party hijacked this picture” which is “accompanied by a poem from Vondel it became a memorial to the aged *Landsadvocaat* and Arminian theology, against brute military power and the stricter orthodoxy of Calvin and Beza”¹⁷. He even reinforced that “the sword that the Stadholder puts into the scales is not the symbol of violence, but of authority— authority by which further violence is prevented”¹⁸. In that case, I don't disagree with him. The sword is not a symbol of violence in an immediate sense in the figure. In fact, the weight the sword gives is one of authority. Without it, the Counter-remonstrants would not have the same success, according to the visual and textual narrative of the figure. Therefore, his suggestion that the figure's author's primary objective in highlighting Maurice putting his sword in the balance was a hint of violence and even Oldenbarnevelt's execution is inconsistent. The *subscriptio* text takes care of undoing Spaans' proposal. As he does not go into details about the *subscriptio* text, it is doubtful whether he read it, because from the text we cannot reach the conclusion he proposes.

The following excerpt is also quite flawed in the analysis of both the figure and the episodes linked to the Synod: “It is again propaganda: the sword of Maurice has done its work, defending Reformed theology. This was as it should be for seventeenth-century sensibilities: religious orthodoxy maintained and defended by the power of the state”¹⁹. However, this argument fails because he takes not into account Mauritius' *coup d'etat*, Oldenbarnevelt's execution, the exclusion of *Landsadvocaat's* office, the inhuman exile of the Remonstrants, post-Synod censorship, and the *spin doctor* arts of pro-Maurice engravers. Clearly, Spaans makes his interpretation of the iconography divorced from the poem in *Sunscriptio* and this penalizes his approach. Next, I connect both narratives (visual and textual) of the figure in question.

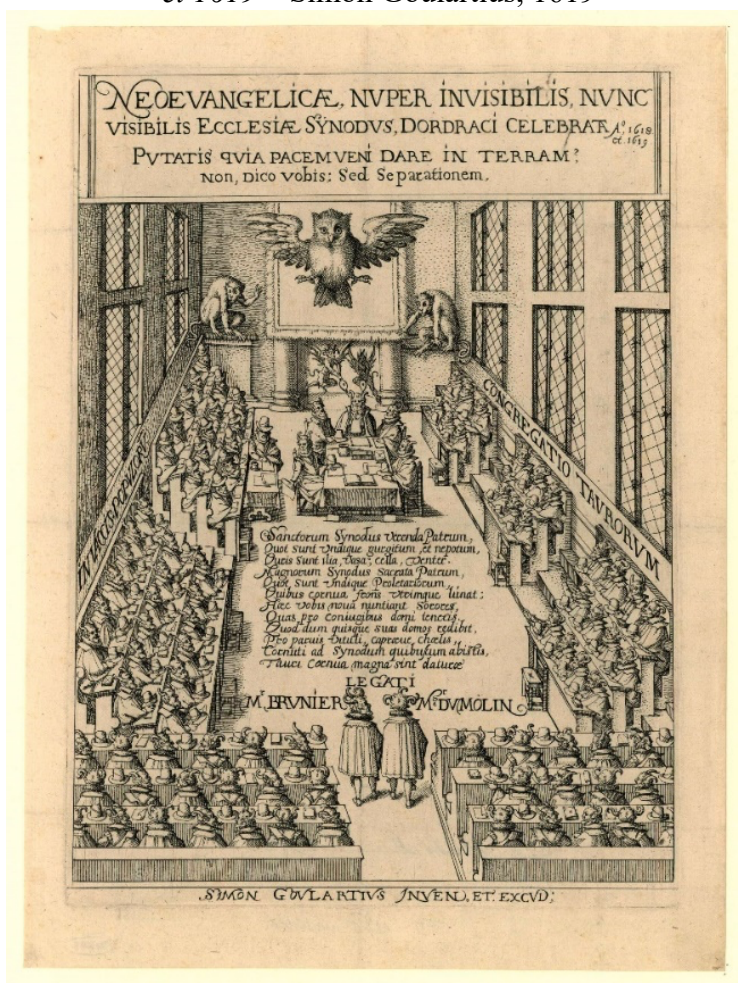
¹⁷ Spaans, “Imagining the Synod of Dordt and the Arminian controversy”, 357.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Arminius had the advantage over Gomarus in his arguments. The Remonstrants, with the support of Oldenbarnevelt, seemed to enshrine this path to Arminian supremacy. We know that this occurred when the State Attorney took the articles of the remonstrance to the States General. The letters from Arminius to Wittenbogaert and from the latter to Oldenbarnevelt gave strength to this religious quarrel once again. Gomarus felt lonely. He didn't have the strength to refute Arminius and impede the advance of the demonstrative ideas. However, according to the poem's author, that changed when the Prince Maurice took sides and allied with the Gomarists (Counter-remonstrants). The balance would be in favor of the Remonstrants. Calvin's *Institutes* and other works would not be able to stop the Arminian advance. However, when Maurice's sword was brought in, the course of the discussion changed. Arminius (already dead at the time of the Synod of Dordrecht), who had a clear advantage, was pursued through the Remonstrants; and Gomarus, who was at an obtuse disadvantage, came to be revered. The figure and poem show that political interference was what defined the controversy. And it leaves in the air the injustice of a purer theological discussion. This is how the remonstrants raise another discussion about:

Figure 04: *Neoevangelicae, nuper invisibilis, nunc visibilis Ecclesiae Synodus, Dordraci celebrata Ao. 1618 et 1619* – Simon Goulartius, 1619



Source: *Rijksmuseum*, Amsterdam

This figure was made by a Remonstrant, Simon Goulartius (1575-1628), a minister of the Walloon Church in Amsterdam. He did not agree with the rigid view of predestination held by the Calvinists. On September 13, 1615, he criticized the sermon of Amtsgeossen Maurois, who advocated predestinationism, and this triggered the resignation of the remonstrant minister the following year by the consistory.²⁰ Simon, however, claimed that he could not just remain silent and go against his conscience. However, this position cost him some ecclesiastical benefits.

The figure was titled *Neoevangelicae, nuper invisibilis, nunc visibilis Ecclesiae Synodus, Dordraci celebrata Ao. 1618 et 1619* (New gospel recently invisible, now visible at the Synod conducted by the Church in Dordrecht between 1618 and 1619). The figure seems to be a satirical and polemical criticism of the portraits of the Synod of Dordrecht (compare fig. 04 with fig. 01). This polemicist bias can be seen in the title itself, which, in Latin, calls Calvinism the “new gospel” (would it be an indirect allusion to Galatians 1:8?). The title also points to the idea that this novelty was invisible, hidden, but which became manifest at the Synod of Dordrecht.

On the side, to our right, we find the expression *congregatio taurorum* (congregation of bulls). It is not possible to know exactly what is written on the opposite side, but only part of the sentence, which is *populoru* (all nations). The figure depicts the Synod leaders' table, with five people, certainly the same as in figure 01. Above the President, Ioannes Berghmannus, are two macabre angelic beings; they are winged, with pointed wings, tails and horns. They hold something in their hands and blow into Berghmannus' ears. At the top of the figure, we find a very large owl and two monkeys on either side. Finally, the place on the table where the remonstrants were is empty. Instead of the table, we found a poem, which we review below:

Holy Synod, venerable of the Father / How many of them everywhere are wasteful and lecherous / Somehow bend their utensils: barns, stomach / Excellent Synod, holy of the Father / How many of them everywhere have seen the workers? / Therefore they have horns curved on both sides on their foreheads / These news you foolishly announce / Likewise in the presence of those closest, mingled with horrible darkness / Since they tame anything / Even the petty hair of goats / Horns who somehow want to go to the Synod / Bull's horns (big enough)

The poem, as it turns out, is a polemic denunciation. He explains the idea of the horns too present in the figure. Men are all horned in the visual narrative. This is because the word *kalf*, which means calf in Dutch, purposely makes a pun on Johannes Calvijn, the name of the Geneva reformer, in Dutch. The phonetics of *kalf* and *Calvijn* are identical. This same idea of the phonetic pun can be seen in another figure, *Satire op de Synode van Dordrecht* (Satire on the Synod of Dordrecht), published in 1621 by Cornelis Saftleven (1607-1681). In the case of the

²⁰ Erik A. de Boer. “‘O, ye Women, Think of Thy Innocent Children, When They Die Young!’ The Canons of Dordt (First Head, Article Seventeen) between Polemic and Pastoral Theology”. In: Aza Goudriaan; Fred van Lieburg (Ed.). *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)* (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2011) 270.

present figure (04), we have an accusation that the Synod had only Calvinists as delegates, so that the final result could not be impartial.

We find typically superstitious and macabre elements in the figure. We start with the winged beings, which represent demons, which blow into Bergermannus' ears. There we have an accusation that the Synod was not directed by the Holy Spirit, but by deceiving spirits. This reminds us of some biblical texts, such as 1 Timothy 4:1 and even Galatians 1:8 (which is linked to the title). If, on the one hand, these biblical texts are not explicitly cited, on the other hand, we see more accusations of superstition / occultism in the figures of the apes and the owl. Owls were typical representations of mysticism, of something dark; in other cases, they were linked with the underworld and/or the occult, witchcraft and sorcery²¹. Monkeys follow the same iconographic premise: they were represented in various ways, as a zoomorphism for carnal practices – lust, greed, confusion and mess – and/or as a representation of the Devil. My opinion is that there is a mix of the two, if we take into account a combination of demons, owls and the poem (which speaks of debauchery)²².

Finally, we have two men entering the city hall space. According to the legend, they are M. Brunier and M. Du Molin, who were French delegates to the Synod. Since the author of the figure was pastor of the Walloon community in Amsterdam, perhaps we have the explanation of the prominence given to them. These two French ministries tried to bring the Dordrecht canons to France, with the aim of having them adopted there. Even a year later, in 1620, these two characters acted as moderators of the National Synod of Alais, in France²³. The strength of the figure, however, lies more in the fact that the Synod was directed only by Calvinists and that it was influenced by evil forces.

Conclusion

Figure 04, as we can see, reacts to the narrative of such an organized, holy and fair Synod, presented by Figure 01. It criticizes the contempt for the demonstrators. The absence of the table demonstrates that they were not important in the meetings, after all, they were already judged. This Synod, according to figure 04, cannot be equated with the Council of Jerusalem. In this Council, the decisions *seemed good to the Holy Spirit* (cf. Acts 15:28), but, in the Synod of Dordrecht, the artist seems to contradict the poetic and textual narrative of figure 01. In Dordrecht, it only *seemed good to the Calvinists*, who, by in turn, they were inspired not by God but by deceiving spirits. Despite Goulartius's heavy accusation, in fact, the Holy Spirit would not

²¹ Cf. Joke Spaans. Face of the Reformation. *Church History and Religious Culture* 97, no 1 (2017):426; Mia Korpiola; Anu Lahtinen. “Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: An Introduction”. In: Mia Korpiola; Anu Lahtinen (Eds.). *Cultures of Death and Dying in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2015) 13. See mainly Renders and Couto, “O ‘Carro triunfal arminiano’”.

²² Albrecht Dürer's. “Monkey and artists,” in Desmond Morris, *Monkey* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013) 105-109. Morris explains this variety by presenting a discussion of the painting *The Virgin with the Monkey*, dated 1498 by the German artist.

²³ Joel R. Beeke; Martin I. Klauber (Eds.). *The Synod of Dort: Historical, Theological, and Experiential Perspectives* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020) 32-33.

inspire unjust executions, persecutions, expulsions and so many wrong things that the Counter-remonstrants did in the name of God and the States General²⁴.

The sum of figures 03 and 04 forms a set of political and religious criticisms, showing the fact that, if did not occur the orangist interventions and the hegemonic presence of Calvinists in the Synod – not to say monopolist –, the result could have been different. The marginalization of Remonstrantism was due to false narratives that highlighted Maurice's actions as good and necessary. His intervention is presented as part of divine providence (fig. 02), which uses the Prince to separate the chaff (Remonstrants) from the wheat (Counter-remonstrants). The artist just forgot that Jesus did not give authority for any human being to remove chaffs. This is God's work, which He will perform through His angels. Anyone who tries to take God's place will run the risk of damaging the wheat, as Jesus speaks. So, as much as the Remonstrants really were

²⁴ With the conclusion of the Synod of Dordrecht, the Remonstrants had three options: (1) to subscribe to the canons of Dordrecht and abandon the Remonstrants' opinions; (2) sign an Act of Renunciation, in which they abandoned any pastoral practices, such as teaching publicly and privately, visiting the sick, preaching, etc.; (3) be exiled immediately. At the time the Synod took place, there were about 200 Remonstrant ministers in the Dutch Reformed Church. Approximately 40 of them (20%) subscribed to the canons of Dort, while about 70 (35%) signed the Act of Renunciation and the rest (45%) surrendered to exile (cf. Bert Dicou. “Eerste dagen. De geboorte van een kerkgenootschap”. In: August Den Hollander (Ed.). *Remonstranten in Antwerpen 1619-2019: 400 jaar Remonstrantse Broederschap* (Amsterdam: Uitgegeven door het Arminius Instituut, 2020), 16). The first option was an offense against freedom of conscience; the second option allowed them to continue to live in the Dutch provinces, but prevented them from exercising their vocations. The latter option was even more violent, as the Remonstrants were not given much time to go into exile. In addition to having to leave immediately, they had property confiscated and were escorted by soldiers, as the figure *D'Arminiaensche uytvaert* helps to illustrate. Remonstrants who were expelled also received an amount of 50 florins in cash to continue their journey (Ibid, p. 15). It is worth mentioning that an average pastoral salary at that time was 200 florins per year (Guido Marnef. “Antwerpen als stichtingsplaats van de Remonstrantse Broederschap: Mogelijkheden en hindernissen van de protestantse gemeenschap in een veranderende context (1585-1621)”. In: August Den Hollander (Ed.). *Remonstranten in Antwerpen 1619-2019: 400 jaar Remonstrantse Broederschap* (Amsterdam: Uitgegeven door het Arminius Instituut, 2020), p. 10), that is, they received 25% of an annual prebend base, the equivalent of three months. Recently, at an event commemorating the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordrecht, the Rev. Rene de Reuver, scribe of the General Synod of the Reformed Church of the Netherlands in 2019, commented that Dordrecht in 1518-1519 was “a painful moment, especially for the Remonstrants” (*een pijnlijk moment, in het bijzonder voor de remonstranten*). He further added that “the banning of Remonstrant pastors and the professional bans for countless Remonstrant administrators touched them deeply and destroyed them greatly” (*de verbanning van remonstrantse predikanten en de beroepsverboden voor talloze remonstrantse bestuurders hebben hen diep geraakt en veel stuk gemaakt*), recognizing the negative effects of the Synod and calling for a more productive dialogue in the 21st century. To read the full article, see Rene de Reuver. *Zeven is voldoende: vijf en twee. Protestantse Kerk* (Amsterdam, 2019). Disponible in: <https://www.protestantsekerk.nl/verdieping/zeven-is-voldoende-vijf-en-twee/>.

chaffs – which we do not believe, since we find this theology today among Methodists, Nazarenes, Holiness Pentecostals, Classical Pentecostals, Baptists and others, in addition to being more in line with pre-Nicene patristics –, pulling them out by force, would be contrary to Jesus' instructions.

It is true that there was a *zeitgeist* of intolerance in those days²⁵. However, it is not necessary to justify these acts based on this “spirit of the time”, since, on the other hand, there were also Christian humanists who defended dialogue, tolerance and freedom of conscience. We find such thoughts in Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536), Sébastien Castellio (1515-1563), Dirk Volckertszoon Coornhert (1522-1590), Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), and so many others. These seventeenth-century quarrels in the Netherlands teach us about the importance of valuing virtues such as piety, tolerance, love of neighbor, respect, freedom, non-absolutist form of government, and many other points. We can look to the past and draw lessons.

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²⁵ Some scholars in the Calvinist tradition confirm the authoritarian and intolerant behavior that leaders at the time of the Synod of Dordrecht had. However, they minimize these actions with the discourse that this was part of that *zeitgeist*. Cf. Gerson Leite de Moraes. “O calvinismo pré-dortiano nos Países Baixos e a organização da Igreja Reformada Holandesa,” in Couto. (Ed.), *(In)tolerâncias religiosas nos Países Baixos: uma história das reformas religiosas ocorridas antes e durante a Era Dourada, 1515-1648* (São Paulo: Reflexão, 2021), 303-330 esp. 328, where he says that “despite the excesses and intolerance [of the Calvinists at the Synod of Dort], it is worth noting that this reflects more than a Calvinist spirit, it reflects the spirit of an age”.

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