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Crisis in the Reformed
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1. The Rise of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

Peter Y. De Jong

That the great Synod of Dort (1618-19) deserves to be remembered as one of the two or three decisive events in the history of the Netherlands has been widely recognized by historians. The subsequent history of neither the Dutch nation nor the Dutch churches can be rightly understood apart from it.

Here the threshold was crossed from the growing pains of adolescence to that maturity which ushered in "the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic" – a period of some fifty years in which a small nation established on mist-enshrouded marshlands enjoyed a living standard second to none in that age, developed a rich culture in which all ranks of society could share, demonstrated military prowess which held at bay mighty monarchs and their armies, and sent ships across the seven seas to establish a colonial empire which survived the vicissitudes of the centuries until most recent times. Not until a scion of the house of Orange, William the Third, who married the daughter of Charles II, became joint-sovereign of Great Britain did the leadership among the nations of northern Europe pass from the Dutch to the English. By this time the temper of the Dutch people had been tested in a series of struggles and successes to become what it has largely remained until today. And in this process Dort also played its role.

This may seem a strange judgment, since ecclesiastical assemblies are usually accounted as of small significance. Especially among more recent historians the role of the church in the evolution of a people and a nation has often been obscured by an excessive preoccupation with economic, political, and sociological factors. Yet important as all these are in the story of the Netherlands, they cannot be correctly

assessed apart from the religious and ecclesiastical development which culminated in Dort.

That synod has been evaluated so differently by so many. Some regard it as little more than a passing phenomenon on the crowded stage of Dutch history. To others it signalizes the triumph for a season of a harsh, iron-clad theological system over the minds of a liberty-loving people, compelling a conformity which threatened to stifle all that is unique in the Dutch national temperament. To still others it remains the crowning act wherein the Lord of all history showed favor to the land by safeguarding both the political unity of the people and the confessional integrity of the church. Dort, indeed, was not a political assembly. It did not even discuss political issues. Yet it could not meet without political sanction, and its decisions could not be implemented without the subsequent approval and action of the State.

This intertwining of ecclesiastical and political concerns makes an inquiry into what Dort did both fascinating and frustrating. In a very real sense church and state grew up together to shape the Dutch nation. Since the synod can be understood only against this background, it becomes essential to trace the rise of the Reformed churches in that land as contemporaneous with the struggle for national independence.

The land and its people

During the late medieval and early modern period the Netherlands did not constitute the relatively homogeneous ethnic and political unit which we know today. By the beginning of the fifteenth century, however, there were signs of that development which was to make it great for a season. [1]

By then these territories lying along the English Channel and the North Sea were with the exception of Renaissance Italy the most influential in all Europe. Older historians have described in glowing terms the industry, intelligence, and prosperity of the people. Agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce were equally lucrative. More than three hundred cities, some of them among the largest on the Continent, were sustained by what flowed into the marketplaces, coffers, and kitchens of the inhabitants. With hinterlands and foreign ports an exciting and expanding trade was conducted to the advantage of the Dutch. And with almost every land- or sea-borne carrier came new ideas. All this stimulated the people. Their

ingenuity was demonstrated in the invention of implements and machines of all kinds, as well as in the acquisition of the new learning which was to shake the foundations of the whole western world.

"God created the world, but the Dutch made Netherlands," so runs the well-worn adage. And in so far as the people had wrested much of the land on which they lived and labored from the ever-encroaching sea, this was true. But in an even deeper sense the sea made the Dutch. Without its trackless paths, restlessly explored and charted and controlled, the story of church and nation would have been quite different. The sea expanded the horizons of the people. It challenged them to meet all odds, no matter how formidable. It put strength and stubbornness in their souls. It compelled them, while clinging tenaciously to an innate love for personal freedom and privilege, to cooperate in seeking an even greater strength in unity. These are among the basic, although elusive and indefinable, ingredients which also go into telling the story of Dort. That assembly, because of its peculiar relationships to the social and cultural and political orders, marks the time when the Dutch began to come of age.

By the time of the Reformation there were ties of several kinds without a corresponding political and religious unity. These territories were linked to both the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire, yet these ties were loose and to a large extent imposed from without. Here, then, was a unity which could be easily shattered into a thousand antagonistic pieces by the individualistic and fiercely independent spirit of a people who refused to submit to imprudent rigor.

What political unity did obtain was of a strange sort. The territory consisted of a large number of provinces, duchies, bishoprics, and quasi-independent cities, each jealous of their rights inherited from the past. Much of the area had belonged to the patrimony of the Burgundian princes. By marriage, purchase and force of arms they had acquired this rich and powerful domain. Ruling over lands so strategically located at the mouths of several large rivers, they possessed peculiar political and military advantages which enabled them to withstand successfully the overweening ambitions of the rulers of France, England, and the neighboring German lands. When the line of Burgundian princes became extinct at the death of Charles the Bold (1433-1477), all these territories were under his control except the duchy of Guelders, the bishopries of Liege and Utrecht,

and some extensive tracts in the remote northeast.

Now the story of the Netherlands becomes intertwined with that of the larger European powers, notably Austria and Spain. This set the stage for the tumultuous and trying events of the sixteenth century.

Louis IX of France at once seized Burgundy together with Charolais and Artois and attempted to annex by force the prosperous province of Flanders.[2] This was viewed with envious eyes by the English who depended largely on a flourishing wool-trade with the Lowlands. Meanwhile Mary, as heiress of Charles the Bold, married Maximilian I of the house of Hapsburg. Thus was the strong link forged between Austria and the Netherlands which continued for some centuries. Their son in turn married Joanna, daughter of Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. From this union was born Charles V whose name is inextricably bound up with the story of the Dutch church and nation. In his day he was Europe's most powerful ruler.[3]

Control over the Netherlands with its advantageous location on the sea and its vast financial resources enabled him to dominate the political scene and thereby also succor the Roman Catholic Church which was losing its hold on many nations. By the time he bequeathed his far-flung empire to his son Philip II in 1555, all that today belongs to the kingdoms of the Netherlands and Belgium together with some regions of northern France, the dependencies of the bishop of Liege excepted, was politically consolidated. To obtain this he pledged to maintain the rights and privileges which local areas had enjoyed for centuries. Thus a balance was struck between a strongly centralized monarchy and a large measure of lôcal self-government. In the provinces he appointed lieutenants (called "Stadholders") from among the princes. They were to promote the authority of the king as well as to defend the rights of people. So long as both objectives could be reasonably attained, the stability of the political order was assured.

Much of this political consolidation took place when Europe was in ferment because of the rising tide of the Reformation. As devoted son of the Roman Catholic Church and champion of absolute monarchy Charles V took measures early in his reign to stifle every inclination to tolerate or propagate the heresy of Protestantism.[4] This might have had some hope of success among his Austrian or Spanish subjects; it could only end in bitter and protracted opposition among the liberty-loving Netherlanders. To them his

edicts against heresy constituted not only an attack on personal rights; they violated those civic and political privileges which had been solemnly guaranteed to them.

For several reasons no open rebellion leading to independence flared during his reign. Charles was always regarded by many of the people as more a Netherlander than a Spaniard. In addition, many of his edicts were not too strictly enforced.[5] Protestantism during the first years also was not a movement with strong leadership. And the king was not above taking a pragmatic view of the situation from time to time. It cannot be denied that he was always deeply interested in the prosperity of those lands, the more so when his many military involvements required the huge sums which could be raised in the Netherlands. During his time persecutions compelled many to seek refuge in other lands for a season. Yet these were only harbingers of a policy which was to bring these lands to the brink of ruin.

When Philip II took upon himself the government of these territories which had yielded such rich profits, he displayed a much greater reluctance to temporize.[6] Under him foreign troops together with the Spanish Inquisition were introduced, in order to achieve a religious unity which all the placards of his father had failed to secure. Now the majority of the people - irrespective of either social position or ecclesiastical affiliation - rose in rebellion. Thus within ten years after his accession to power the war of independence broke out in eighty years of fury.[7] During the early decades of that struggle the Reformed church was to be organized and recognized as the religion of the land and the Dutch people were to become a free nation among the other nations of the world.

The early years of the Reformation

The rise of Protestantism in the Netherlands distinguishes itself in several respects from that in neighboring lands. Here was no outstanding leader to rally the people around his standard. Much less do we find the Reformation inaugurated or encouraged by political authorities. Instead it developed gradually among the masses who listened to the teaching and preaching of individuals dissatisfied with conditions in the church.

This pattern compelled those inclined to the new way to be content with a day of small beginnings. Rather than accepting Protestantism in one form and by a common act the Netherlanders

specially among the more educated, were thoroughly dissatisfied vith conditions in the church. Among their number was Cornelis loen, attached to the government of Holland, whose reading of the vritings of Wessel Gansfort stimulated him to put his views oncerning the Lord's Supper in print.[14] These were circulated mong such leading reformers as Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, and)ecolampadius by Hinne Rode, rector of a school at Utrecht. In nany places such people met in conventicles to read and interpret he Scriptures and engage in preaching. From among them were lrawn the first evangelical martyrs in the land. At no time, however, lid they organize themselves, with the result that when first Anabaptism and then a decade or two later Calvinism arose, the nfluence of these men was submerged and for a season quite 'orgotten.

Much more significant on the score of winning the Netherlands 'or the Protestant faith was the Anabaptist movement.[15] By 1529 or 1530 Melchior Hoffman sent his emissary into the land to preach an ıpocalyptic message. The people were urged to look forward to a :omplete redemption from all their miseries. since Christ would soon :eturn to make an end of the evils which they had so long endured. But when Hoffman was imprisoned in Strasburg and Trijpmaker was executed in the Hague, this movement fell into the hands of leaders of a more aggressive kind. Large groups now led insurrections against the civil magistrates in several cities. For a time the town of Bloemkamp (Oudeklooster) in Friesland was in their possession. People ran naked through the streets of Amsterdam. When the leaders gained control in Munster, a large fleet filled with sympathizers intent on joining their coreligionists was intercepted at Genemuiden and the pilgrims dispersed. Because of these and similar activities the entire Anabaptist movement was discredited in the eyes of the Lutherans and Calvinists as well as of the Roman Catholics. Nor was this suspicion mitigated, when the antinomianism of David Joris and the antitrinitarianism of Adam Pastor as recognized Anabaptists became known.

Meanwhile the movement had made itself strong by providing the people with a simple ecclesiastical organization which appealed directly to Scripture for support. It sought to establish a "pure" church with room only for the regenerate. Discipline was strictly and even rigorously enforced. But when early disciples disagreed with each other on the true meaning of Scripture, the movement suffered

from innumerable quarrels and dissensions and schisms. Soon large numbers were thoroughly disenchanted, so that when Calvinism appeared on the scene after 1540 even the new approach of Menno Simons could not prevent many from embracing the Reformed faith. As a result the organized Anabaptists remained a relatively small group in the land. Their indirect influence through numerous accessions to the Reformed church, however, should not be discounted.

Calvinism was the last of the reformatory movements to gain a foothold in the Netherlands. Its appearance in organized form can hardly be said to antedate the year 1544.

Usually its introduction has been traced to influences which spread from Geneva through France to the southern provinces where the French language was widely spoken. Indeed, here the churches were first organized. Yet its coming was a far more complex phenomenon.[16] By at least three avenues it found its way into the lives of the Netherlanders. At an early date the writings of Calvin as well as those of Zwingli, Oecolampadius, and Bullinger were read by Dutchmen interested in reforming the church. Many of the leaders also found themselves in exile from time to time. Some went to Geneva. Others, and this group was far more numerous, fled as merchants with their families or as students to places where Reformed churches in exile were being organized. This accounts for the powerful influence exerted by such congregations as Emden, Wesel, London, Frankfort-on-the-Main, and especially Heidelberg on the development of the ecclesiastical life in the Netherlands after 1550.[17] The third method by which Calvinism infiltrated the land is to be sought in the vigorous labors of those who returned to the southern provinces to organize and lead Reformed congregations. Thus what today is Belgium became the cradle of Dutch Calvinism. Here its confession was composed, officially adopted, and widely disseminated. Here its first congregations were duly organized, and its first synods convened in great secrecy. Here it suffered its severest persecutions, but here it also registered for a small season some of its greatest triumphs. Only the changing political scene which within two decades rent the southern provinces from the north compelled Calvinism to seek support and strength almost exclusively in the north.

What was there about the Calvinistic faith which appealed to such large numbers in that land?

Several answers can be given. None, however, can be correctly assessed apart from the political and ecclesiastical oppressions of Spain and the disillusionment of the people with the Anabaptist movement.

The Reformed faith appealed to the intelligent and thoughtful layman who knew the need of thoroughgoing reform of the church. Here was a Biblical system of doctrine which set forth in all its glory the evangelical faith. Its stress on divine sovereignty provided strength in the struggles of life and encouragement in the face of death. It was deeply concerned with the issue of true liberty. Its emphasis on a well-ordered discipline for the church and its membership appealed to many who, while convinced that sound doctrine must result in a godly life, had been disappointed with the irregularities and rigors of Anabaptism. And while under Menno Simons this movement had become orderly, its quietistic acceptance of tyranny could not win the hearts of the liberty-loving Netherlanders. When, then, Calvin in his writings defended the rights of the people under their magistrates to oppose the tyranny of kings and emperors, his views were embraced eagerly by those Dutchmen who saw in their struggle for freedom not only political but also religious dimensions.[18] For them the war against Spain became increasingly a profoundly spiritual issue. On the basis of Scripture they believed they could defend themselves before God as well as man. This assurance that God approved of their resistance to a tyranny not only cruelly but especially illegally inflicted upon them strengthened their hearts. From the beginning humanists and Roman Catholics joined in the war of independence. However, it was brought to a successful conclusion only through the dogged persistence of the Calvinists. The humanists wrote much but fought little. And when the nobility of the southern provinces drew away from the leadership of William of Orange, the Calvinists found themselves within less than ten years standing quite alone. In the years which followed, the union between the Dutch church and state was fused without which the Arminian controversy could never have assumed the proportions which it did.

The organizational development of the Reformed churches

Philip II upon his accession to sovereignty pursued the same policy which had guided his father but with unparalleled rigor. Fisher writes of him,

> Political and religious absolutism was the main article of Philip's creed. His ideas were few in number, but he clung to them with the more unyielding tenacity. The liberties of Spain had been destroyed at the beginning of Charles' reign; and the absolute system that was established there Philip considered to be the only true or tolerable form of government.[19]

He repelled the people by his aloofness and arrogance. When he spoke, it was always in a foreign tongue. Instead of appointing a regent from among the nobles, he preferred his sister, Margaret of Parma. At her side he placed Granvelle, the bishop of Arras, thus betraying suspicion of his own appointees which marred all his dealings with others. Both were accomplished in the art of dissimulation and succeeded in arousing the king's jealousy of the nobles, especially of William of Orange. Soon all control devolved on Granvelle. This set the stage for striking fear and terror into the hearts of the people.

In violation of the rights of the provinces several regiments of Spanish soldiers were retained in the land. Philip's pledge to withdraw them within a few months was broken. When the church was reorganized in 1559 with the creation of many new bishoprics, each bishop clothed with inquistorial powers to enforce discipline and exterminate heresy, the plans of Philip became transparent. All the edicts of Charles V were renewed. Men were forbidden to own a heretical book, to read the Scriptures, or to attend any conventicle where points of doctrine were discussed. Failure to inform against persons suspected of heresy made one guilty of treason. The goods of those convicted of heresy were confiscated, a share assigned to the accusers. Severe penalties were prescribed for all who in any way pleaded their cause.

To carry out such a program Charles V had already established an Inquisition independent of the clergy. To it all inhabitants were answerable. Although it lacked some of the more barbarous features of the Holy Office in Spain, it aroused the hostility of the people and the princes even when loyal to the Roman Catholic Church. Especially Granvelle, who in all things was unswervingly loyal to his sovereign, was blamed when persecution increased in thoroughness and intensity. But when the king removed him from office, this did not ameliorate the sufferings. The Inquisition proceeded with even greater vigor in burning and burying its victims alive. Even those suspected of heresy were put to death. At last the Prince of Orange broke his reserve and in a bold, powerful speech warned the council

of the consequences of Philip's determination to carry out the decrees of the Council of Trent. Count Egmont was sent to Madrid to plead with the king. But with duplicity the old policy was not merely continued but strengthened. Merchants in large numbers fled the land. Others deprived of their livelihood soon followed. Agriculture as well as commerce ground to a halt. The cost of living soared. The population of cities and villages dropped dangerously. The once prosperous lands were on the verge of total economic collapse. [19]

In the summer of 1565 events moved swiftly. More than three hundred of the gentry supported by the burghers signed the "Compromise," in which they pledged to assist each other, restore wherever possible the rights of the people, and resist the Inquisition. The nobles, led by William of Orange, stood aloof. They realized that little could be done with a government which ruled with duplicity. Soon severer oppressions were inflicted. Large numbers of the people assembled outside of the city walls to listen to evangelical preaching, a practice to which the Regent acquiesced. Philip, however, refused all requests for moderating his policies. The next summer the storm of iconoclasm broke over the land. In many church buildings statues, paintings, and even windows were destroyed. [21] Now the regent was compelled to make a truce with the nobles who promised to quell the disturbances in exchange for toleration of the Protestant faith. However, when German troops were engaged to punish several of the cities and the Catholic nobility rallied around the government, William of Orange regretfully withdrew to his ancestral possessions in Nassau to prepare for the conflict which he realized was inevitable.

Enraged at what had happened, Philip sent the Duke of Alva with a large, well-trained Spanish army into the land. Now the Regent was divested of her powers. A fearful tribunal, called the "Council of Blood" by the people, was organized. In less than three months some two thousand including many from among the wealthy and the nobility were tortured and put to death. [22] Crowds of refugees fled the land. By February of 1568 all the inhabitants of the Netherlands with the exception of those specifically named were condemned to death for heresy.

During this year the Prince of Orange began to strike back. His brother defeated a large Spanish army at Heiligerlee only to suffer defeat a few months later. To strike terror into all hearts Alva retaliated by having the Catholic nobles Egmont and Hoorn with

twenty others executed without due process of law. Exorbitant taxes were imposed, which led to the closing of all shops for a season. The Inquisition accelerated its murderous work, so that within three years more than eighteen thousand were put to death. War raged throughout the land. The zenith of revolt was reached, when all parts of the country joined in the "Pacification of Ghent" in 1576 shortly after Antwerp was sacked with barbarous ferocity. But when the Catholic nobility less than two years later repudiated William of Orange as leader and entered into secret negotiations with archduke Matthias, the unity was broken. The result was the league of Arras, in which the south promised to defend the Catholic religion and support the king subject to his observance of certain political stipulations. The north replied with its Union of Utrecht in January, 1579, in which Holland, Zeeland, and five other provinces entered a confederacy for common defense.[23] Two years later they declared their complete independence from Spain.

In these turbulent years the Reformed church of the Netherlands grew up.

Its first general assemblies had already been held in great secrecy in the south. With the spread of the new faith leaders felt the need for greater consolidation and organization. A number of ministers, elders and other members met in the German town of Wesel to draw up a series of proposed regulations for ecclesiastical life and order. Three years later, while persecution and war and economic distress ravaged the land, elected representatives of the churches adopted the first official *Church Order.*[24]

From its inception the church was constituted on the basis of the *Belgic Confession.* This had already been proposed by the "Convent of Wesel." which demonstrated its conviction that without sound preaching on the basis of a common confession the churches could not live together in unity. All ministers and teachers were to subscribe to the articles of the *Belgic Confession,* promising to teach nothing contrary to what was therein set forth. The churches regarded themselves as completely sovereign to manage all their ecclesiastical affairs, electing their own officiary and exercising discipline in matters of doctrine and conduct over the members as well as the ministers. But when succeeding synods met on Dutch soil at Dordrecht (1574), Dordrecht (1578), Middelburg (1581) and The Hague (1586) concessions were made to the magistrates. This allowed the state a large measure of control over the churches, so

that, greatly to the advantage of the Arminian party, no national synod could be held for thirty years.

When the Netherlands attained independence, the Reformed religion was officially recognized as the religion of the land.[25]

The force of this must not be minunderstood. Here was no attempt to suppress the conscience of those who refused to express agreement with Calvinistic teaching. Lutherans, Anabaptists, and even Roman Catholics were tolerated in the land. However, these groups were at a decided disadvantage. They could worship together only in private dwellings. All church edifices were allotted to the Reformed. Funds necessary for the maintenance of ecclesiastical life were provided by the government out of vast holdings confiscated from the Roman Catholic Church at the time of independence. Meanwhile the churches agreed to allow civil representatives to attend their assemblies, lest the latter meddle in matters which were political. Not only the church orders, modified from time to time, but also the persons of those elected to office in the churches were subject to the approval of the authorities. The church's struggle to maintain its right to internal managing of its affairs reached a climax at the time of the synod of The Hague (1586).[26] Fearing the growing power of the Reformed church throughout the land, the States General thereafter refused permission for a national synod until 1618. Thus the church, while officially recognized, was fettered by the opposition of the very government which recognized and owed so much to it. This opposition centered expecially in the political authorities led by Johan van Oldenbarnevelt.[27]

The ideal had been a free church in a free land.

What made the ideal unattainable were these complex relationships of church and state. At no time had the Reformed faith won over the majority of the inhabitants. Yet leadership in the struggle for independence had been increasingly assumed by avowed Calvinists. For them religious and political liberties were bound up together. Even the political authorities recognized that the will to resist came largely from this group. During the opening years of the struggle the Inquisition which intended to maintain Spanish rule was greatly aided by bishops and priests. Large numbers of Jesuits managed to enter the northern provinces, attempting to keep the people loyal to both the king and the Roman Catholic Church. Thus although the Reformed never totalled more than ten percent of the population, the Netherlands could never have waged the war

successfully without them. In consequence those who aspired to political office or desired to teach in the schools had to be members of this church. But this policy which aimed at unifying the nation weakened the church from within.

Large numbers with sacramentarian or Anabaptist roots and those with pronouncedly humanistic leanings joined. Criticism may easily be levelled against the States General for promoting the policy of recognizing the Reformed religion, thus curtailing some of the ideals of William of Orange concerning liberty, as well as against the church for accepting this privileged position. But in the face of the withdrawal of the southern nobility from the war, the activities of the Jesuits and others, and the fearful reverses sustained from time to time in the war, nothing but the closest relations between church and state seemed to offer any hope. In such a confusing situation for the Reformed churches the Arminian controversy arose.

As far as the church was concerned two issues were at stake.

The first concerned itself with matters of doctrine. Were Arminius and those who embraced his teachings in accord with the *Belgic Confession* and the *Heidelberg Catechism?* To these they as well as all other officiaries in the church had solemnly pledged their agreement.

The second concerned itself with matters of church polity and government. Did this confessional Reformed church have the right to depose from office, especially the ministry of the Word and sacraments, those whose teachings were in conflict with the creeds?

Although the government in theory had acknowledged this right by approving the church orders, it could nullify it in two ways.

The local magistrates, to whom belonged a measure of supervision over the churches in their respective areas, maintained in office several men whom the churches in their classes and provincial synods had judged worthy of deposition. Thus in the period between Middelburg (1586) and Dort (1618-19) a growing number of ministers was upheld contrary to the desires of the congregations and the decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies. Especially after 1610 this produced friction and even schism. Many congregations refused to listen to the preaching of those who inclined to Arminianism. Often such people assembled for worship in warehouses, private dwellings and fields. And when the civil magistrates attempted to halt such activities by force, the nation was faced with the specter of civil war. Those who had fought for their liberties refused to submit callowly

to the erosion of their rights and the confessional emasculation of their churches.

The only hope for a fruitful resolving of the doctrinal conflict lay in convening a national synod. Here representatives from the churches of all the provinces could act in concert. But permission for such an assembly had to be granted by the States General. Time and again this was urged, only to meet the resistance of the province of Holland under the strong leadership of van Oldenbarnevelt. At long last Prince Maurice, counselled by his cousin the stadholder of Friesland, cast in his lot with the churches. Only in this way could he save the unity of a threatened nation. Under pressure from him the States General decided to convene a synod. To this the States of Holland refused to agree. They passed a resolution which asserted the principle of provincial independence which threatened the unity of the nation, allowed levies of local militia ("waardgelders") to enforce their will, and instructed the army that it owed no allegiance to the "generality." The Prince together with the States General took swift reprisals to preserve national unity. Leaders of the opposition were removed from their positions, the army rallied to the support of the States General, and van Oldenbarnevelt was imprisoned, tried, and later executed.

Arminius, who had been professor at Leiden, passed away before the controversy within the churches reached its climax. At the beginning he had been willing to have the matter which concerned him discussed at a national synod. He and especially in later times his followers, however, increasingly embraced a view of the government of the church which favored a large measure of control by the state. Even more devastating for the welfare of the church according to the Calvinists was their repeated insistence on greater toleration in matters of doctrine. Many of their opinions were ambiguously presented and championed, so that the Calvinists rightly feared that any yielding on their part would open the way to even more radical departures from the creeds. No attempt on the part of the state to mediate in the controversy, which was far more extensive than a dispute between a few professors of theology as has at times been claimed, proved fruitful. When by 1610 the Arminians clearly saw that the majority within the church adamantly opposed any weakening of the Calvinistic position, they began to fear nothing so much as a national synod.

When, finally the synod was convened, the Arminians refused to

acknowledge its synodical character in accordance with the specific declarations on this point of the church order. At best they were willing to discuss as equal partners. Already at the opening sessions it became clear that a frank and full declaration of their views would not be forthcoming. By several means they tried to pursue the dialogue in their own fashion in the hope of preventing a clear-cut decision which they realized would go against them. Thereupon they were publicly rebuked by the representatives of the States General for obstructing the course of business for which the synod had been convened. No other alternative seemed open than that of dismissing them and deciding their case from their own writings but in their absence. For this procedure neither the ecclesiastical delegates nor the representatives of the government were to blame but the Arminians themselves.

Dort marks the close of the first period in the history of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands.

Its significance in this respect can hardly be overrated. Even the well-known historian Philip Schaff, who does not disguise the fact that he was out of sympathy with its doctrinal decisions and does not hesitate to aver that the Remonstrants "had no fair hearing," affirmed,

> It was undoubtedly an imposing assembly; and, for learning and piety, as respectable as any ever held since the days of the Apostles. Breitinger, a great light of the Swiss Churches, was astonished at the amount of knowledge and talent displayed by the Dutch delegates, and says that if ever the Holy Spirit were present in a Council, he was present at Dort. Scultetus, of the Palatinate, thanked God that he was a member of that Synod, and placed it high above similar assemblies. Meyer, a delegate of Basle, whenever afterwards he spoke of this Synod, uncovered his head and exclaimed *'Sacrosancta Synodus!'* Even Paolo Sarpi, the liberal Catholic historian, in a letter to Heinsius, spoke very highly of it. A century later, the celebrated Dutch divine, Campegius Vitringa, said: 'So much learning was never before assembled in one place, not even at Trent.'[28]

At this assembly the pattern early adopted by the churches was firmly fixed. Matters pertaining to the confessions and the church order, to preaching and catechesis for the children of the church, to the training of ministers and Bible translation and missions were thoroughly discussed and decided. And although the churches would still remain bound to the state in several respects so that for another two centuries no national Reformed synod would be convened, their passionate concern to remain confessionally Reformed triumphed. The church could be in practice what it claimed to be. For that faith

tens of thousands had been put to death, and more than ten times that number had suffered the ravages of persecution, torture, and war together with the hardships of exile. But their blood and tears had not been spilled in vain. Dort secured that for which they had suffered. For on the soil of the Netherlands there now flourished for a season a strong confessing church, one whose influence increased among all ranks of society, to whose schools students came from all corners of Europe, and through whose missionary efforts the gospel of Jesus Christ was propagated for a time in all parts of the world.

NOTES

1. Conditions in the Netherlands at the beginning of the 15th century are described esp. by P. J. Blok: *A History of the People of the Netherlands,* 3 vol. (New York: 1899-1900) and the well-known work of John L. Motley: *The Rise of the Dutch Republic,* 3 vol. (London-New York: 1856), on which accounts many church historians have leaned heavily. Cf. also J. Reitsma: *Geschiedenis van de Hervorming en de Hervormde Kerk der Nederlanden,* 4th ed. (Utrecht, 1933), pp. 1-72 on the social, educational and religious conditions of the people.

2. On the aspirations of the French kings to control the Dutch ports, cf. Henry S. Lucas; *The Renaissance and the Reformation* (New York, 1934), pp. 461-464.

3. On the significant role played by Charles V, cf. G. R. Elton: *Reformation Europe 1517-1559,* pp. 35-52, 239-267.

4. From the beginning of his reign Charles V was determined to stamp out heresy. However, as Preserved Smith relates in his *The Age of the Reformation* (New York, 1920), pp. 242, 243, many people "kept Luther's opinions" but without openly breaking with the Roman Catholic Church and organizing themselves as Protestant churches. The first edict against heresy dates from 1520, published the next year.

5. This is true even of the formidable Edict of 1550, which besides forbidding the reading and possessing of religious books not approved, the holding of services outside of the church, etc., went so far as to decree:

> Moreover we forbid all lay persons to converse or dispute concerning the Holy Scriptures, openly or secretly, especially on any doubtful or difficult matters, or to read, teach, or expound the Scriptures, unless they have duly studied theology and been approved by some renowned university . . .
>
> That such pertubators of the general quiet are to be executed, to wit: the men with the sword and the women to be buried alive, if they do not persist in their errors; if they do persist in them, then they are to be executed with fire; all their property in both cases being confiscated to the crown.

quoted by Raymond P. Stearns; *Pageant of Europe: Sources and Selections from the Renaissance to the Present Day* (New York, 1947), p. 166. This was the Edict, however, which was renewed and vigorously enforced by Philip II five years later.

6. On Philip II cf. Wm. H. Prescott: *History of the Reign of Philip II,* 3 vol. (New York, 1855-1858), esp. vol II, bk. 2; also Motley, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 422, 531, on Philip's duplicity in dealing with the Netherlands and the documentary evidence for this which is found in his letter to the papal nuncio.

7. The dates of this war, often called the Dutch Revolt, are 1568 to 1648, when the Peace of Westphalia achieved a balance of power in Europe and marked the end of the fierce wars of religion which had devastated the continent for more than a century. A twelve year truce between Spain and the Netherlands was signed in 1609, but this peace was an uneasy one. During that period the Arminian controversy reached its crisis and was resolved at the Synod of Dort. For the first period of this war cf. Pieter Geyl: *The Revolt in the Netherlands 1559-1609,* (London, 1932).

8. Reitsma, op. cit., pp. 17, 18 raises the question concerning Waldensian influences in the Netherlands. Mention is made of "Vaudois" in a few records; also of those who follow Wycliffe and Hus.

9., Reitsma, op. cit., pp. 29-54; Maurice G. Hansen: *The Reformed Church in the Netherlands* (New York, 1884), pp. 17-22; Albert Hyma: *The Christian Renaissance: A History of the Devotio Moderna* (Grand Rapids, 1924) and *The Brethren of the Common Life* (Grand Rapids)

10. On Ruysbroec, cf. Reitsma, op. cit., pp. 22-25.

11. D. H. Kromminga: *The Christian Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids, 1943), p. 7

12. That reorganization of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the Netherlands was greeted with fear and rage has been widely acknowledged. Stearns, op. cit., p. 166, stresses fear of the inquisition, since

> . . . by a bull of May 18, 1559, Paul IV created three new archbishoprics, fifteen new bishops, and nine prebends *to each* new bishop, 'who were to assist him in the matter of inquisition throughout his bishopric, two of whom were themselves to be inquisitors.' This clerical force, backed by Spanish soldiers, was an efficient body to root out heresy. . . .

Smith, op. cit. p. 252, takes the position that this was also intended as "the nationalization of the church," to which Reitsma, op. cit., pp. 135-138, adds that the common people and nobility alike saw in this a violation of their ancient privileges and rights as well as an economic threat. The clergy selected were men of poor spiritual caliber, spending more time on finances than on revitalizing the faith.

13. On the significance of the many Bible translations published in the Netherlands in these first years, cf. De Hoop Scheffer: *Geschiedenis der Kerkhervorming* pp. 256-282. The first English translation of the New Testament by William Tyndale was also published at Antwerp, for which the translator was burned at the stake in Vilvoorde in 1536.

14. A Eekhof: *De Avondmaalsbrief van Cornelis Hoen (1528),* (The Hague, 1917)

15. All historians agree on the immense influence of the early Anabaptists in the Netherlands. On whether the movement was *inherently* revolutionary and violent, however, there is wide disagreement. A sympathetic and admittedly biased view is presented by L. Verduin; *The Reformers and their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids, 1964). Elton, op. cit., p. 103, presents as his evaluation in the light of the facts cited,

> During the heyday of Anabaptism it appeared to contemporaries that there were now three religions to choose from: the popish, the reformed, and the sectarian. It has sometimes been argued that the effective elimination of that third choice wrecked the prospects of early toleration and liberty for the private conscience. This is to mistake the true nature of Anabaptism. Since it always embodied a conviction of sole salvation for a particular group of believers, and often also the chiliastic dreams of salvation realized in the destruction of the wicked with the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth, it was in its essence markedly more intolerant than the institutional Church. Its victory, where it occurred, led to terror; and that was in the nature of things . . . The Anabaptism of the early Reformation – no matter what pious and respectable sects may look back upon it as an ancestor – was a violent phenomonen born out of irrational and psychologically unbalanced dreams, resting on the denial of reason and the elevation of that belief in direct inspiration which enables men to do as they please . .

A balanced but thorough evaluation is given by J. J. Westerbeek van Eerten in his popularly written *Anabaptisme en Calvinisme* (Kampen, 1905), esp. pp. 104-108.

16. The question of Calvin's influence in the Netherlands is by no means a purely academic one. Many historians who sympathized with the ideals and ideas of the Arminians have vigorously propounded the notion that the Dutch reformation was of a unique kind, represented by Erasmus and especially the "sacramentarians" whose influence was throttled by disciples of Calvin after 1560. If this is true, then the Reformed faith was superimposed from without and at a late date. The proponents of this theory insist that Bullinger and not Calvin was the theologian early appealed to. However, on all major points these two were agreed and had close contact with each other. Calvin also signed the *Consensus Tigurinis* (1549) which he helped to prepare with Bullinger. Cf. Westerbeek van Eerten, op cit., p. 201. Note also Pierre Brully's work in southern Netherlands as early as 1544, Reitsma, op. cit , p. 119f.

17. A. A. van Schelven: *De Nederduitsche Vluchtelingen-kerken der 16de Eeuw* (The Hague, 1909), which deals with the several emigrations from 1544 through 1576 in great detail, also on Calvin's influence and his relation to Bullinger and a Lasco, p. 316f.

18. On Calvin's view cf. *Institutes,* 2 vol. (Grand Rapids, 1949) Bk IV ch. 20, esp. xxxi, vol. 1, p. 804, which does not allow for opposition to tyrants by private persons but appeals to the lesser magistrates "appointed for the protection of the people and the moderation of the power of kings." His views were much expanded by Francois Hotman (1524-1590): *Franco-gallia* (1573); Theodore Beza; *On the Right of the Magistrates on their subjects* (1574) which defended the position that even tyrannicide was justifiable when all other means of restraint had been tried in vain; and esp. the influential tract by the anonymous "Brutus" entitled, *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* (1579) which has been ascribed to either Hubert Languet (1518-1582) or Phillip du Plessis Mornay (1549-1623), both influential French Huguenots.

19. George P. Fisher; *The History of the Reformation,* (New York, 1873) p. 289

20. On the economic distress which stimulated the early emigrations of 1540 to 1546, cf. van Schelven, op. cit., pp. 13-16, who mentions that in seven parishes of Bruges there were no less than 7696 poor, and the later and even larger emigrations of 1566-1570 under Alva, op. cit., p. 25f.

21. The inconoclastic movement of 1566 was not entirely a Protestant movement, although it resulted in a hardening of the division between Roman Catholic and Protestant. Nearly all the Protestant clergy had earlier warned stringently against the "chanteries", realizing that these might lead to inciting the people to violence and bring upon their heads the vengeance of the king and his soldiers. In the movement of Aug. 1566 the mobs, however, did not loot in the hope of personal gain. An eyewitness account of what took place in the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Brussels is provided by the letter of Richard Clough, English representative in that city, to Sir Thomas Gresham, dated Aug. 21, 1566. After commenting that it began with a few "boys and rascals." he adds how thousands continued the work.

> So that, after I saw that all should be quiet, I, with above 10 thousand more, went into the churches to see what stir was there; and coming into our Lady Church, it looked like a hell, where were 1000 torches burning, and such a noise! as if heaven and earth had gone together, with falling of Images and beating down of costly works; in such sort, that the spoil was so great that a man could not well pass through the church . . . Yet they that this did, never looked towards any spoil, but broke all in pieces, and let it lie under foor . . . and before it was 3 of the clock in the morning, they had done their work, and all (were)home again, as if there had been nothing done: so that they spoiled this night between 25 and 30 churches.

quoted by Stearns, op. cit., p. 167.

22. On the number of Protestant martyrs in the Netherlands estimates vary widely. Grotius, writing less than a century later, puts this at 100,000; Edward Gibbon asserts that "the number of Protestants who were excuted by the Spaniards in a single province and a single reign, far exceeded that of the primitive martyrs in the space of three centuries and of the Roman empire." Motley, op. cit., vol. II, p. 504, also puts the number high. Reitsma, op. cit., p. 160 considers all these estimates much too high, even 18,000 under Alva as too high, mentioning that contemporaries speak of six to eight thousand cruelly executed during Alva's few years. But besides those publicly tried and executed for heresy, there were thousands put to death by the soldiery who at the instigation of king and inquisition sought to suppress the Reformed faith which during these years swept the entire southern Netherlands.

23. For the significance of the Union of Utrecht in the light of William of Orange's policy of religious toleration for all, as well as for the consequences of the League of Arras for the future of Calvinism in southern Netherlands, cf. Lucas, op. cit., pp. 681, 682.

24. Biesterveld, P., and Kuyper, H. H.: *Kerkelijk Handboekje* (Kampen, 1905) contains all the church orders in effect from 1568 (Wesel) through Dordrecht (1618-19) with an introductory essay and supplementary decisions of the synods. This material is invaluable for an understanding of the confessional commitment of the Reformed churches as well as for their devotion from the beginning to the presbyterian-synodical polity against which the Arminians early began to agitate.

25. It is uncertain when the public worship of the Roman Catholics was prohibited. At

the first assembly of the States of Holland, 1572, William of Orange through Marnix proposed that both Reformed and Roman Catholics should receive the right to worship publicly. Before the synod of Dort met in 1574, however, this right was withdrawn from the Roman Catholics by the government largely for political and military reasons. cf. Reitsma, op. cit., p. 170 f. Meanwhile the government insisted on a measure of direct control in the ecclesiastical affairs of the Reformed, which is reflected in the church order adopted at Dort in 1574. This entangling alliance is defended by Reitsma and others who incline to defend the right of the Arminians in later decades to remain in the Reformed churches. It cannot be denied, however, that the concessions made in that and later church orders were forced by the government and always were protested by eccleslastical leaders.

26. The church order adopted by this synod was highly favorable to the Reformed who insisted on the church's right and duty to manage its own internal affairs. That it received approval at first from the States of Holland and could be widely introduced in the land must be ascribed in large measure to the favor which Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (1531-1588), showed to the Reformed when he was invested for a brief season with the government of the country. On Leicester, cf. *Encyclopedia Britannica* 14th ed., vol. 13, pp. 888-889; also article by Sidney Lee in *Dictionary of National Biography* (1888) After his fall from power, the States General revoked their earlier approval, again fearing that the churches had too much independent power, and attempted to foist on them a church order prepared by a committee appointed by the government in 1591. Because of ecclesiastical opposition this could not be introduced. cf. Reitsma, op. cit., pp. 205-211.

27. Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, Holland's greatest statesman during the thirty years after 1586 and "raadspensionaris" of the States of Holland, played a significant role in the events leading up to Dort. He championed "states' rights" against a strongly centralized government under the Prince of Orange and authorized the "Scherpe Resolutie" of 1617 which pushed the nation to the brink of civil war and for which he was tried for treason and executed. A generally sympathetic description of him and his position is given by Reitsma, op. cit., p. 245, 259, 271-279. For a detailed study cf. G. Groen van Prinsterer: *Maurice en Oldenbarnevelt* (Utrecht, 1875)

28. Philip Schaff, op. cit., vol. I, pp. 514, 515.