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# *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)*



*Edited by*

**Aza Goudriaan & Fred van Lieburg**

*Series Editor:* Wim Janse

BRILL

## Revisiting the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)

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## INTRODUCTION

AZA GOUDRIAAN AND FRED VAN LIEBURG

On 6 and 7 April 2006, an international conference was held in the city of Dordrecht (or Dordt for short), the Netherlands, under the title “Re-examining the Synod of Dordt, 1618–1619.” The conference was organized by the editors of this volume on behalf of the Faculty of Philosophy of Erasmus University Rotterdam and the ReLiC Centre for Dutch Religious History at VU University Amsterdam. More than thirty scholars gathered for two days in Het Hof (The Court), a former Augustinian monastery in the oldest town of the former county of Holland.

This was indeed a historical conference on a historical site. Dating from the thirteenth century, and rebuilt after a fire in the early sixteenth century, the Augustinian monastery was led by the prior Hendrik van Zutphen from 1515 to 1519. He then left Dordrecht for Wittenberg to study with Martin Luther and became an advocate of the Reformation movement in Europe. After several stays in Antwerp and Bremen, Van Zutphen died at the stake in Meldorf in Dithmarschen in 1524.

However, the monastery is known in particular for its role in the Dutch Revolt and the origins of the Dutch Republic or the United Provinces. In 1572, a number of cities opposing the King of Spain held an illegal meeting of the States of Holland under the leadership of Prince William of Orange in this building in Dordrecht, in the former refter (dining room) on the ground floor, now called Hall of the States. Simply put, we can say that the political existence of what is now the Kingdom of the Netherlands began at this site.

In 1574, from 15 to 28 June, the refter was also the location of the first Reformed synod after the Revolt, the so-called Provincial Synod of Holland and Zeeland. It was held under the leadership of Caspar van der Heyden, who had also presided at the Synod of Emden in 1571, the meeting of Dutch Reformed churches in exile. In 1578, from 3 to 18 June, the first national synod in the Netherlands was held in Dordrecht too, in the St. Jorisdoelen, a building in the Steegoversloot, at a short distance from Het Hof. A year earlier, on 25 June 1577, delegates of the

Walloon churches had also held an organizational meeting in Dordrecht, marking the beginning of the separate organization of this denomination of Reformed exiles in the Netherlands.

After the Synod of The Hague in 1586, no further national synods were allowed by the States General, except one: the Synod of Dordrecht in 1618–1619. The long run to this event started in 1602 with a theological dispute between two professors of the university of Leiden, Jacobus Arminius and Franciscus Gomarus, on the doctrine of predestination concerning God's eternal decrees to elect some people to salvation and damn others to punishment. The academic debate soon extended to church life and reached the domain of politics before 1610, when the Arminians (after Arminius's death in 1609) asked the government for freedom to preach and teach their opinions. They summarized five points of their doctrinal position in a Remonstrance to the States of Holland (1610). This was followed by a Contra-Remonstrance of their orthodox Reformed opponents in 1611. The controversial points included divine predestination, the scope of the atonement by the death of Jesus Christ, human depravity and conversion, the efficacy of grace, and perseverance. However, the debates between Remonstrants (Arminians) and Contra-Remonstrants involved more, both theologically and politically, than only the five doctrinal Articles that became dominant during the controversy.

The discussion about the confessional space of the public church touched an open nerve in the society of young Dutch Republic. Was the Reformed church just the re-organized Christian church for all the people, or should the Reformed church consist only of committed church members who faithfully adhered to 'Reformed' doctrine? Furthermore, there was an international dimension because of the war with Spain, which was to be reopened in 1621 following the Twelve Years' Truce of 1609. With eyes on an inevitable clash of the Roman-Catholic and Protestant power blocks in Europe, political unity and religious concord was a life and death matter for the Dutch state as such. On this point there was strong opposition between the Republic's two top leaders—Johan van Oldenbarnevelt as raadpensionaris of Holland and supporter of the Remonstrants, and Prince Maurice as stadholder of several provinces, chief commander of the States army, and supporter of the Contra-Remonstrants.

In 1618, the detention of Oldenbarnevelt and the dismissal of his civil soldiers by the Prince of Orange paved the way for an ecclesias-

tical assembly convened by the States General to seek a resolution of the issues. Although the cities of The Hague and Utrecht were considered as locations for this synod, Dordrecht became the host town. Here the Synod was held from 13 November 1618 until 29 May 1619. The assembly consisted of three groups: the political delegates of the States-General; the Dutch delegates of the theological faculties (Leiden, Groningen, Franeker, Harderwijk, and Middelburg) and nine ecclesiastical bodies (eight provincial synods and the Walloon synod); and the foreign representatives invited by the States General (pastors and professors from Great Britain, the Palatinate, Hesse, Nassau-Wetterau, Bremen, Emden, Geneva, and some Swiss cantons; French delegates were prohibited from going to Dordt by their king).

The deliberations of the Synod included three stages. The 'pro-acta' sessions were devoted to non-doctrinal matters, including catechism instruction, preparation for the ministry, the baptism of slaves, book censorship, and a new Dutch Bible translation from the original languages (resulting in the Statenbijbel of 1637). After the arrival of Remonstrant representatives on 6 December 1618, the main issue of the Synod, the five Remonstrant Articles, came on the agenda. However, a meaningful theological discussion failed as the Remonstrants did not accept being cited before the Synod to have their views examined and judged; they wanted to be given the status of fellow delegates. After weeks of procedural wrangling, they were expelled by the president, Johannes Bogerman, on 14 January 1619. In the following months, the Canons of Dordt, which condemned Arminian teachings, were composed. After the foreign delegates had left, the national Synod continued in 'post-acta' sessions on 13 May 1619, to deal with Dutch ecclesiastical matters, especially church order. In total the Synod comprised 180 half-day sessions.

Regarding the local topography of the Synod, it is noteworthy that both the opening ceremony of the Synod of Dordrecht (13 November 1618) and the public presentation of the Canons (6 May 1619) took place in the Grote Kerk. The Synod meetings themselves were held in the Kloveniersdoelen in de Doelstraat, a side-street of the Steegoversloot, for a period of six and a half months. Special benches for over a hundred delegates were installed on the second floor of this building, which was normally used by a rifle association (schuttersgilde).

Unfortunately, the Kloveniersdoelen in Dordrecht was demolished by the city fathers in 1857 to make room for a new prison (and in 1976 for a new building of the court of justice: at present the corner of the Doelstraat

and the Stek is the site where the Synod took place). Apparently, the nineteenth century was not the best age to observe memorial events on the Synod of Dordt. Liberal opinion was not keen on remembering the severe troubles in the Dutch church and society at the beginning of the Golden Age. After the rise of the Enlightenment and the separation of church and state during the French period in Dutch history, the heritage of the old confessional tradition was only cherished by a minority in Dutch Reformed Protestantism. Since the Secession of 1834 this minority became further fragmented in a number of different denominations. They remained proud of the Synod of Dordt, as is reflected in the Dutch Reformed slogan, “Wij strijden voor de Dordtse leer, omdat die is van God de Heer!” (We fight for the doctrine of Dordt, because it is from God the Lord!).

However, times have changed and during the last decades and years we have seen a growing interest in the Synod of Dordt outside the inner circles of Reformed Christians in the Netherlands. At least in Dordrecht there have been activities of local chauvinism, such as the issue of a special historical coin in 2001, the publication of a popular booklet<sup>1</sup> in 2004, and the organization of a small exposition in Het Hof in the fall of 2005.

On a national level, we see a revival of interest in general Dutch history as a part of what might be considered an identity crisis of the Dutch trying to redefine their place within worldwide developments and tensions regarding religion, society, and politics. There is an interest in so-called memorial places in the country, and among these the city of Dordrecht is a memorial site of Calvinism. A popular series of magazines about Dutch history was published under the title of ‘The 25 days of the Netherlands,’ and one issue was devoted to 13 November 1618, the opening day of the Synod of Dordt as a climax in the history of the Dutch Eighty Years’ War.<sup>2</sup>

The conference we organized in April 2006 was far from a public commemoration of the Synod of Dordt. We will patiently wait for that until the years 2018–2019. Rather, our international conference should be seen as a scholarly preparation for such a momentous event, leading to

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<sup>1</sup> Fred van Lieburg, *De Dordtse synode 1618–1619* [Verhalen van Dordrecht, 1] (Papendrecht, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> René van Stipriaan, *De 25 dagen van Nederland: beslissende momenten uit de vaderlandse geschiedenis. Deel 10: 13 november 1618: De synode van Dordrecht* (Zwolle, 2005).

a reassessment which seems urgently needed in the historiography of the Synod. In fact, most Dutch scholarship on 'Dordt' is still based on the works of Herman Huber Kuyper and Hendrik Kaajan, who wrote ground-breaking studies about a century ago.<sup>3</sup> We observe with a feeling almost of envy that more has been done in the United States, as can be seen in the unpublished dissertations of Robert Godfrey and Donald Sinnema.<sup>4</sup> When in 1987 a Dutch book on the Synod was published at the occasion of the 350th anniversary of the Statenbijbel, little new research was undertaken with special reference to the Synod.<sup>5</sup> In the meantime several developments occurred in general religious history and historical theology which might also enrich the study of the Dordt Synod, for example, the revival of interest in Reformed scholasticism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a revival that has found such major instigators as Richard A. Muller (Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids) and Willem J. van Asselt (Utrecht University).

In 2005 a major and very welcome contribution to research on the Dordt Synod was made by the British historian Anthony Milton of the University of Sheffield. He produced a critical edition of sources relating to the British delegates at Dordt, preceded by a large and well-documented introduction.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the publication of this book provided the inspiration for this international conference. Aza Goudriaan, who was working on Arminian theology in the research project, 'From Erasmus to Spinoza: Classical and Christian Notions of the Self in Dutch Philosophy, Theology and Letters,' got in touch with Fred van Lieburg, who not only works as a professor of the history of Dutch Protestantism but is also a local citizen of Dordrecht.

We were happy to find a range of scholars working on related topics and willing to come to Dordrecht to participate in an international discussion on current research. We were also grateful to procure financial

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<sup>3</sup> H.H. Kuyper, *De Post-Acta of Nahandelingen van de Nationale Synode van Dordrecht in 1618 en 1619 Gehouden* (Amsterdam, [1899]); H. Kaajan, *De pro-acta der Dordtsche Synode in 1618* (Rotterdam, 1914); H. Kaajan, *De groote synode van Dordrecht in 1618–1619* (Amsterdam, [1918]).

<sup>4</sup> W. Robert Godfrey, 'Tensions Within International Calvinism: The Debate on the Atonement at the Synod of Dort, 1618–1618,' Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1974; Donald Sinnema, 'The Issue of Reprobation at the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) in Light of the History of this Doctrine,' unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of St. Michael's College, Toronto, 1985.

<sup>5</sup> W. van 't Spijker et al., *De Synode van Dordrecht in 1618 en 1619* (Houten, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Milton, ed., *The British Delegation and the Synod of Dort (1618–1619)* (Woodbridge, 2005).

resources to organize this conference in an inspiring ambiance. Acknowledgements are due to Erasmus University Rotterdam (the Vernieuwingsimpuls project and the Trust Fund) and VU University Amsterdam (the Vereniging VU-Windesheim) for their substantial support of the conference. The municipality of Dordrecht offered a fine dinner to the conference speakers just as the city fathers did to the delegates to the Synod in 1619.

Invitations to speakers were not preceded by a call for papers or any systematic stock-taking of topics and research gaps in the historiography of the Synod of Dordt. A range of scholars in the field, brought together for this occasion, presented a cross-section of current research with a view to creating new contacts and stimulating further investigation. The papers have been revised for publication in this collection. Some scholars who offered papers but were unable to attend the conference have written articles that are also included in this volume. As a result, this mixture of case-studies reflects a balance of interdisciplinary work, ranging from historical theology and philosophy to cultural history, from philological to pictorial perspectives, from basic archival research to an assessment of the historiography. We trust this book will be welcomed by all those interested in early modern history and the tradition of Reformed theology and practice.

GISBERTUS SAMUELS, A REFORMED MINISTER  
SENTENCED BY THE SYNOD OF ZEELAND IN  
1591 FOR HIS OPINIONS ON PREDESTINATION

FRED VAN LIEBURG

The Synod of Dordt of 1618–1619 is well known as the international meeting of Reformed theologians where the views of Jacobus Arminius and his followers were condemned. It established the *Canones* against the Five Articles of the Remonstrants, as these adherents were known after their protest (or “remonstrance”) to the States of Holland in 1610. For many years, the Contra-Remonstrants had called for a national synod in order to end the controversy, which had been injurious to the unity of church and state. Political approval from the States General was not received before 1618 and would never again be granted, out of fear of a lasting ecclesiastical schism. Only in 1816, when the church of the old Republic of the United Provinces was reorganised into a national church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, was a general synod held again, this time in a spirit of indifference toward matters of dogmatic theology.

Despite the great significance of the Dordt synod as the delimiter and guardian of Reformed truth, the fact remains that ecclesiastical decisions concerning the doctrine of predestination had already been made earlier in Dutch Reformed history. From the beginning, the standard for orthodoxy on this issue was article sixteen of the Dutch (or “Belgic”) Confession (*Confessio Belgica*) of 1561—the article that deals with God’s eternal election of believers. At the national synods, held by the Dutch Reformed churches in 1578 (Dordrecht), 1581 (Middelburg) and 1586 (The Hague), it was decided that all ministers should sign the Confession, in an effort to achieve greater ecclesiastical and clerical unity, with the addition in 1586 that every minister who refused to sign would be deposed.<sup>1</sup>

Some ministers objected to subscribing to the Confession, especially with regard to article sixteen. In the Classis of Leiden, two ministers expressed reservations by submitting a written statement on the doctrine of predestination. In general, however, the Confession was signed by

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<sup>1</sup> F.L. Rutgers, ed., *Acta van de Nederlandsche synoden der zestiende eeuw* (The Hague, 1899; reprint Dordrecht, 1980), pp. 247, 390, and 498.



all ministers irrespective of their own private leanings, including those who later sided with the Remonstrant faction. Arminius himself had subscribed to the Confession in the Classis of Amsterdam in 1588. Afterwards, however, he stated that his erstwhile agreement pertained only to the words of the Confession, claiming the right to interpret the article for himself. It was for that reason that, after 1608, some classes specifically required candidates for the ministry to approve both the words and the accepted meaning of the Reformed creed.

When the National Synod of The Hague met in 1586, it had to contend with the controversial ideas of Herman Herberts regarding, among other points, his view on the doctrine of predestination. Herberts had been a minister in Dordrecht, but had been deposed because of his refusal to preach from the Heidelberg Catechism. He found a new pulpit in the city of Gouda, at the time already known as “a gathering place of heretics.” At the 1586 synod, Herberts admitted that he was not in full agreement with the doctrinal standards of the church, expressing reservations about article sixteen of the Confession in particular. An agreement between Herberts and church authorities was only established in 1593, after a series of conferences with delegates from the provincial synod of South Holland. A declaration of reconciliation was read in the churches of Gouda, Dordrecht, Rotterdam, and Schoonhoven, an indication of the relevance of the topic to people in those communities.<sup>2</sup>

In this article I demonstrate that as early as 1591, the provincial synod of Zeeland had already been confronted with a minister who objected to the sixteenth article of the Dutch Confession. The reason why this story has been overlooked in the literature until now is that the full acts of this synod were not recorded. We have only the final product, published as the Church Order of Zeeland, which regulated church life in this Dutch province for two centuries.<sup>3</sup> The acts of the four classes of Zeeland make it clear, however, that there had been more under discussion at the 1591 Synod of Zeeland than just the issues addressed in its published product. I have traced one such matter—which occasioned significant controversy—through the acts of the Classis of Tholen. It concerned

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<sup>2</sup> Rutgers, ed., *Acta van de Nederlandsche synoden der zestiende eeuw* (see above, n. 1), pp. 558–559; J. Reitsma and S.D. van Veen, eds., *Acta der provinciale en particuliere synoden, gehouden in de Noordelijke Nederlanden gedurende de jaren 1572–1620*, 8 vols. (The Hague, 1892–1899), 3: 6 and 15–16.

<sup>3</sup> Reitsma and Van Veen, eds., *Acta der provinciale en particuliere synoden* (see above, n. 2), 5: 15–32.

a minister named Gisbertus Samuels (Gisbert Zammels or Gisbrecht Samuels).<sup>4</sup> His case might, on the surface, appear to be an unimportant aberration, yet a reconstruction of his career casts light upon the diversity of theological thought among Dutch Reformed clergy around 1590, as well as on the context in which Arminius began his career as a minister, a career which had so many repercussions for the church and its theology.

### *Background and Career*

The first time Gisbertus Samuels comes into view in the documents is when he appeared with three fellow ministers in the Classis of Brielle in April 1584. They came from the Southern Netherlands and presented their ecclesiastical credentials. The documents Samuels carried came from both the church of Aalst and from the Classis of Dendermonde in Flanders. These four men were admitted by the assembly in Brielle as “qualified instruments to build up the house of the Lord in their communities and to show a good example in faith and love to others.”<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, we have no further information regarding the background of Samuels. Given the fact that he had a son who was a student in 1590, he must have been married around 1570 and was probably born in the 1540s. Just like many clandestine adherents of Calvinism in Flanders at that time, he may have worked as an artisan while studying the new doctrines, as an aspirant to the ministry of the Word. Living in the town of Aalst, which fell into Protestant hands in April 1582, he witnessed its re-conquest by Parma in November 1583 and fled to the northern regions as did so many of the Protestants of the Southern Netherlands.<sup>6</sup>

In the Classis of Brielle, Samuels found a Reformed pulpit in the village of Oude Tonge, where he appears in the records as a pastor in May 1585. Although a minister had served in that church for six years, the

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<sup>4</sup> Middelburg, Provincial Archives, acta Classis Tholen/Bergen op Zoom (hereafter: Acta Classis Tholen). In cooperation with archivist Huib Uil, I am preparing an edition of the acta of both the Classis of Schouwen-Duiveland and that of Tholen/Bergen op Zoom to 1621. This volume will be a counterpart to the edition by J. Bouterse, *Classicale acta, 1573–1620, IV: Provinciale synode Zeeland: Classis Walcheren 1602–1620, Classis Zuid-Beveland 1579–1591* [Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, Kleine serie 79] (The Hague, 1995). I am grateful to Huib Uil for his assistance to me in the research for this essay.

<sup>5</sup> Brielle, Municipal Archives, Acta Classis Brielle, 9 April 1584, art. 1. The other ministers were Adriaen Jonckheere (Classis Waas), Pieter de Gietere (Classis Eeklo), and Aerent Timmerman (Classis Waas).

<sup>6</sup> H.Q. Janssen, *De kerkhervorming in Vlaanderen, historisch geschetst meest naar onuitgegeven bescheiden*, vol. 1 (Arnhem, 1868), pp. 35–38.

congregation was said to be in decline. Samuels was expected to rebuild the community in cooperation with the schoolmaster and the consistory members, and with the financial support of the magistrate. The results were, however, poor, as many conflicts soon arose and the classis failed to resolve the problems. Samuels wanted to leave but was persuaded to stay for six months.<sup>7</sup> Then, on 14 April 1586, he asked for a letter of dismissal from his classis, pretending he was unable to attend the session because of illness.<sup>8</sup> In fact, however, he was looking for another ministerial post, which he found just a week later on the neighbouring island of Tholen in the province of Zeeland. The Classis of Brielle was not willing to issue a testimonial before conducting an interview regarding the problems in Oude Tonge.<sup>9</sup>

The next congregation Samuels served was in the village of Scherpenisse, a church which had also experienced difficulties. The former minister, Gerardus Pauli, had been deposed by the Classis of Tholen because of his (im)moral conduct. In this difficult situation, the consistory of Scherpenisse took matters into their own hands. On 25 April 1586, they asked Samuels to become their minister; he accepted immediately. The classis could only stand idly by. Scherpenisse did, however, require a favourable testimonial from the Classis of Brielle, which was never granted. The classis deemed it best to make an end to the arrangement between Samuels and Scherpenisse, which—absent the required letter from Brielle—had remained provisional. In November 1586, Samuels was no longer recognised as a member of the classis.<sup>10</sup> In taking this action, church authorities, the members of the classis, were in agreement with the political authorities of the village, represented by Maria van Nassau, Countess of Buren. She was a daughter of the late Prince William of Orange, and lived at the time in the city of Delft in what was known as the “Prinsenhof.” As the Lady of Scherpenisse, she had Samuels’s salary suspended in the meantime.<sup>11</sup>

This alliance was soon reversed, however. Samuels asked the Classis of Tholen for a personal examination and this church body reached a favorable conclusion. The classis did not find any malice or false doctrine in him. Samuels was even willing to subscribe to the Dutch Confession.

<sup>7</sup> Acta Classis Brielle (see above, n. 5), 20 May 1585; 15 July 1585; 2 September 1585.

<sup>8</sup> Acta Classis Brielle (see above, n. 5), 14 April 1586.

<sup>9</sup> Acta Classis Brielle (see above, n. 5), 18 August 1586; acta Classis Tholen, 1 June 1587.

<sup>10</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 6 May and 9 June 1586.

<sup>11</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 29 July, 1 September, and 27 November 1586.

A letter was written to the Countess of Buren asking for the prolongation of his ministry until a provincial synod could consider and adjudicate the matter.<sup>12</sup> Now the countess opposed the classis, possibly influenced by a visit Samuels had made to Delft in which he had tried to justify his actions. In the meantime, the classis heard more and more reports of conflict incited by Samuels in the village of Scherpenisse.<sup>13</sup> In the end, the church decided to dismiss him from his post in September 1587, but many epistles were exchanged between Delft and Tholen before the Countess of Buren consented to his dismissal.<sup>14</sup>

Samuels emerged from the difficulties in Scherpenisse with a carefully formulated testimonial from the Classis of Tholen which enabled him to seek a new position in the Dutch Republic.<sup>15</sup> Soon the classis regretted this clemency; Samuels later reproached and vilified his former colleagues. In the summer of 1588, a synodical meeting was convened in Middelburg by the four classes of Zeeland.<sup>16</sup> Initially, Samuels was not in attendance. He did, however, finally appear before the assembly which, after ample deliberation, made a twofold judgment. On the one hand, the assembly declared that Samuels had been correctly deposed on the charge of false opinions. On the other hand, the Classis of Tholen was censured for tolerating him as a provisional minister on the basis of a dubious testimonial. The classis was forced to admit to the Scherpenisse church and to the Countess of Buren that it had been wrong.<sup>17</sup> The case now seemed to have been resolved, and the classis searched for a successor for the congregation in Scherpenisse. Samuels, despite an unpromising track record, was free to try his luck on the pastoral market of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands.

### *Attempts at Reconciliation*

With the synodical decision of 1588, an interesting episode commenced in Samuels's life, as he remained in Amsterdam for a number of months

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<sup>12</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 20 January 1587. The minister, Ephraim Dierckens, protested against this decision, but eventually withdrew his charge of false teachings and reconciled with Gisbertus Samuels. See Acta Classis Tholen, 2 and 3 March 1587.

<sup>13</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 20 July and 21 September 1587.

<sup>14</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 28 September and 7 December 1587; 18 January 1588.

<sup>15</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 12 and 26 October 1587.

<sup>16</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 9 May and 7 June 1588.

<sup>17</sup> Acta Synod of Zeeland, 5 July and 9 August 1588; cf. Reitsma and Van Veen, ed., *Acta der provinciale en particuliere synoden* (see above, n. 2), 5: 13–14.

between August 1588 and March 1589. This is evident from the records of the Classis of Tholen. This body received a letter from the consistory of Amsterdam declaring itself to be “united” with Samuels and insisting upon a reassessment of his case by the Synod of Zeeland.<sup>18</sup> In a later report, Samuels is said to have travelled to Amsterdam “out of desire for dispute” after he had been removed from his ecclesiastical post the year before.<sup>19</sup> Apart from a letter of the consistory to the Classis of Tholen, the church records of Amsterdam do not reveal anything about discussions with Samuels. The contacts, therefore, must have been informal. Nonetheless, the reference to “disputes” is particularly important in light of later problems, as it became clear that his former “false opinions” had to do with the doctrine of predestination. It was precisely in this context—in Amsterdam in the summer of 1588, with this issue at the fore—in which Arminius began his ministerial career. It is important, however, in order to avoid any projection of later history into this early period, that we closely examine the associated facts and developments.<sup>20</sup>

In 1589, two ministers in Delft—Arent Cornelisz. and Reynier Dontelock—published a treatise in Latin; it was a reply to an explanation by John Calvin and Theodorus Beza of the Epistle to the Romans regarding predestination.<sup>21</sup> Opposing the supralapsarian views of these authoritative Reformed theologians, the Dutch authors defended an infralapsarian position. The book was addressed to the Franeker professor Martinus Lydius, who asked Arminius to write a defence of supralapsarianism. At that time Arminius was known as a learned man who had completed his studies at the Genevan Academy and returned to Amsterdam with a positive testimonial from Beza himself. Arminius accepted the task, but—while reflecting on some of the assumptions underpinning the doctrine of predestination—began questioning some of the theological principles he had earlier accepted. He abandoned the plan to write the essay, but his new thoughts were revealed in sermons he delivered in 1592. These were criticised by his colleagues. What happened thereafter is well known, but not relevant to our examination of Samuels.

Since Samuels was evidently eager to engage in debates about Reformed dogma, he must have been keenly interested in these early polem-

<sup>18</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 20 February 1589.

<sup>19</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, letter to Gisbertus Samuels, November 1589.

<sup>20</sup> Th. Marius van Leeuwen, Keith D. Stanglin & Marijke Tolsma, eds., *Arminius, Arminianism, and Europe. Jacobus Arminius (1559/60–1609)* (Leiden, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> See A.Ph.F. Wouters & P.H.A.M. Abels, *Nieuw en ongezien. Kerk en samenleving in de classis Delft en Delfland, 1572–1621, vol. 1: De nieuwe kerk* (Delft, 1994), pp. 149–150.

ics regarding predestination. From his earlier contacts in Delft, he might well have been acquainted with the pastors involved. During his stay in Amsterdam he could have been in touch with Arminius, although evidence therefor is lacking. Curiously, the church records do reveal that Arminius met the minister who preceded Samuels in Scherpenisse, Gerardus Pauli, who was subsequently deposed from the ministry yet again by the Classis of Amsterdam. Pauli had settled in Utrecht, where Arminius had frequent contacts with the local ministers. They reported to him with their observations regarding the personal activities of the wandering Pauli. It is not irrelevant to note that Pauli was, like Samuels, very keen to provoke public discussions about issues concerning the Christian faith. He entered into disputes with “Papists,” for example, arguing for “the old tradition,” by which he meant the teachings of the Apostles and church fathers, rather than medieval theology.<sup>22</sup>

Intriguing, finally, are the debates that were organised in Amsterdam between Calvinists and Mennonites in the winter of 1588–1589. The consistory records inform us of a series of meetings between members of the Reformed and the Flemish Mennonite congregations. The issue of predestination came up in the first meeting in December 1588 and was further discussed in a second meeting in January 1589.<sup>23</sup> Several months later, the Mennonites agreed to continue the debate on Sunday 18 June 1589. Two Reformed laymen reported to the Amsterdam consistory that the dispute had no clear conclusion, claiming that “many words were used but our arguments were in no case disproved.”<sup>24</sup> During the latter debate Samuels had already returned to Zeeland, but he could have been involved in the winter meetings, as he, too, was a Protestant refugee from Flanders interested in these matters.

As observed above, the Classis of Tholen received a letter from Amsterdam in February 1589 requesting a special synodical meeting about Samuels’s case. The Tholen reply was that the classis felt itself unable to

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<sup>22</sup> Amsterdam, Municipal Archives, Acta Classis Amsterdam, 1 August and 5 September 1588. A letter which the classis had expected from Utrecht never arrived; ultimately, Pauli’s place of residence was listed as unknown; see Acta Classis Amsterdam, 3 October 1588, art. 5, and 17 April 1589, art. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Amsterdam, Municipal Archives, Acta Consistory of Amsterdam, 22 December 1588, and 12 January 1589. The acta mention the participants Willem Barentsz, Barent Geeraertsz, Cornelis Jansen, and Walech Symerts.

<sup>24</sup> Acta Consistory of Amsterdam (see previous note), 8 and 22 June 1589 (the latter acta refer to Flemish Mennonites).

organise such a meeting and that the Amsterdam ministers had better beware of the dangerous ex-minister. Samuels himself again made an attempt to come to terms with the classis. This resulted in a meeting with several classical deputies in March 1589.<sup>25</sup> Subsequently, he also started negotiations with the Classis of Walcheren, the main classis in Zeeland, which was more willing to find a way to rehabilitate him. This classis, too, wanted to ask the Classis of Tholen to reexamine Samuels to determine whether he was likely to better himself.<sup>26</sup> In May 1589, Samuels personally sought contact with his former classis. Tholen continued to refuse to write to the other classes. From the moment it had received the reprimand from the synod for prematurely accepting Samuels into its membership, Tholen had considered itself a party in the dispute.<sup>27</sup>

In the following months there were several occasional and private meetings between Samuels and Reformed ministers in various towns in Zeeland. Throughout, he sought on the one hand to be reconciled with the church, and on the other to debate Reformed theology. Though he continued to seek a regular position as minister in a local congregation, he was himself an obstacle to such a restoration of his ecclesiastical standing. For example, he accused the ministers of the town of Tholen of having frustrated the appointment of his son as a teacher in the Latin school, an accusation that was denied by the school's headmaster. Nevertheless, the Reformed ministers continued to make themselves available for theological debate. When Samuels requested an interview with two ministers to talk about reconciliation, the classis agreed, on the condition that witnesses be appointed to keep notes of what was argued by both parties. At the same time, the classis issued a sharp epistle, pouring out the vials of wrath upon him for his inconstancy:<sup>28</sup>

You insist on being promoted as a pastor of the sheep of Christ, but you do nothing but divide and harm them by slandering, spreading false opinions, sowing dispute and discord . . . Your promises are not reliable. You made a profession of faith everywhere before you became a minister, but you turned out to be unfaithful in Oude Tonge. You signed the Dutch Confession and displayed purity of doctrine in our classis, but the ideas you continued to harbor became clear in your teachings and examination in St. Maartensdijk in August 1588. Then you travelled to Amsterdam,

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<sup>25</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 20 February 1589.

<sup>26</sup> Acta Classis Walcheren, 10 April 1589; Bouterse, *Acta classis* (see above, n. 4), p. 435.

<sup>27</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 1 May 1589.

<sup>28</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 20 November 1589.

motivated by a desire for dispute, but your [true] leanings were revealed on 11 August 1589 in Bergen op Zoom. Finally, you professed again to have no disagreement with [established] doctrine when you talked with the ministers of Zuid-Beveland at the Scherpenisse market on 21 August but the way you maintained this opinion was revealed in the presence of several reliable witnesses in Tholen on 11 November.

Eventually, a meeting was held on 22 January 1590, after Samuels had sent the classis another request for a friendly discussion. On that day, six ministers went to a private house in St. Maartensdijk to resume discussions with Samuels. The conditions established for the previous conference notwithstanding, we do not read of witnesses or people taking notes at this gathering. The talks resulted in an intense theological dispute focusing on the issue of predestination. Samuels persisted in his opposition to the ministers and no agreement was reached. In a single but significant phrase, Samuels said “that he would believe the sixteenth article of the Dutch Confession nevermore, and that no ministers could bring him to do so.”<sup>29</sup> From that point on, he and his colleagues went their separate ways.

After his departure from Amsterdam, Samuels probably lived in Middelburg, a choice partly inspired by his good relations with the ministers of the Classis of Walcheren. In July 1589, he turned to the standing committee of the States of Zeeland, the *Gecommitteerde Raden*, as an ex-minister requesting a yearly stipend. He was referred to the *rentmeester der geestelijke goederen* (Steward of Ecclesiastical Properties) at St. Maartensdijk.<sup>30</sup> In September 1590, an opportunity seemed to present itself for him to revive his ministerial career. In that month, Prince Maurice took the town of Steenberg in western Brabant from the Spaniards, thus making possible the establishment of a Reformed church there which would belong to Zeeland in terms of ecclesiastical administration. Samuels sent a request to the *Gecommitteerde Raden* to which various church testimonials were appended. The *Raden* authorized the Classis of Walcheren to appoint Samuels as minister in Steenberg if the members of the classis considered him suitable for the job.<sup>31</sup> It did not happen; in 1592 a different candidate received the Steenberg post.

<sup>29</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 22 January 1590.

<sup>30</sup> Middelburg, Provincial Archives, Archives of the States of Zeeland, inv. no. 471, resolutions of *Gecommitteerde Raden*, fol. 252<sup>v</sup>, 14 July 1589.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, inv. no. 472, resolutions of *Gecommitteerde Raden*, fol. 107<sup>v</sup>, 30 October 1590.



*The Synod of Zeeland in 1591*

During all this turmoil, Samuels did not turn to any political authorities, as he had done with the Countess of Buren at the time of the troubles in Scherpenisse. The Zeeland governors, in turn, did not intervene in these ecclesiastical matters. Since the Revolt and Reformation in 1572, the Reformed consistories and classes in Zeeland were free bodies, convening regularly to discuss internal questions of church order and discipline. This mutual independence of church and state was in line with the experience of the Churches under the Cross<sup>32</sup> in the Southern Netherlands before the Revolt. The formerly clandestine Calvinist church had to become accustomed to its new role as public church under a Protestant government. In Holland, several attempts had been made by political and ecclesiastical authorities to establish a church order befitting a state church. In Zeeland, however, classes had enjoyed the autonomy from the state envisioned by the national synods, such as the 1586 Synod of The Hague.

This situation changed on 1 February 1591, the day on which a provincial synod of Zeeland assembled in the presence of delegates from the States of Zeeland. This synod resulted in a provincial church order, authorized and published by the States in September 1591. This church order was to become known for the powerful role it accorded political authorities, prerogatives exercised for the next two centuries. For example, the classes were no longer allowed to gather in synods without permission of the States. Zeeland was the only part of the Dutch Republic where provincial synods were forbidden after 1638. Another provision concerned the admission and dismissal of ministers: in each community these actions were to be taken in a so-called *collegium qualificatum*, a meeting in which magistrates and consistory members were supposed to reach decisions jointly.

In the historiography, the origins of this severe Zeeland church order have remained unclear. Indeed, it has puzzled church historians that ecclesiastical leaders in Zeeland themselves invited political authorities to attend synodical meetings, and that the ministers did not protest against the arrangement prescribed by this provincial church order.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Reformed congregations in areas controlled by Roman Catholic magistrates and thus, to varying degrees, clandestine, or embattled.

<sup>33</sup> C. Hooijer, *Oude kerkordeningen der Nederlandsche Hervormde gemeenten 1563–1638* (...) (Zaltbommel, 1865), pp. 299–305.

Had church leaders been entrapped or duped by political authorities? It is not my task to give a complete answer here, but a partial explanation can be found in the case of Gisbertus Samuels. Half a year before, in July 1590, the Classis of Tholen took note of the problem made evident by its experiences with Samuels: the resolutions of the provincial synods, such as that of 1588, could command little respect and had, in practice, little effect. In order to invest ecclesiastical decisions with greater authority, the provincial government had to be involved. For that reason, all four classes had requested the States of Zeeland to send delegates to the subsequent synod.<sup>34</sup> This is precisely what happened in 1591. Church and government together designed a set of rules to manage the risks associated with admitting pastors, some of whom later proved incompetent, and to establish an effective mechanism for dismissing the black sheep.

As noted above, the official records of the Synod of Zeeland of 1591 are incomplete; we have only the published church order. Even the proceedings of the previous synodical sessions of 1588 would have been unknown, had they not been recorded in the acts of the Classis of Tholen.<sup>35</sup> In fact, however, the Tholen acts also supplement the published record of the synod of 1591. In particular, they reveal that in response to Samuels's personal petition—a request supported by the other Zeeland classes—the synod consented to hear Samuels and consider his case. Their deliberations led to an instance of serious doctrinal discipline. The synod concluded that Samuels had promoted a set of heresies, and had not done so innocently, as he himself maintained, but intentionally. Therefore the synod required that he sign the 37 articles of the Dutch Confession and make a public admission of guilt in the church of Scherpenisse, where he had preached and proclaimed his heresies. He was thus also required to answer the following questions, posed by a minister appointed by the classis, during a regular Sunday worship service in that congregation:

Did he renounce these points of false doctrine, defended by him in oral and written form, with all his heart? [Did he reject statements he had made] against the gracious election by God to salvation, [and] against the personal union of the two natures in Christ? Did he regret [teaching] the

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<sup>34</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 2 and 3 July 1590.

<sup>35</sup> Reitsma and Van Veen include these extracts of the classical acts in their edition of the synodical acts (see above, n. 17).

error of the free will, [and] the schism in the churches he had thereby caused? Did he promise to keep himself to the true Christian religion in a pious and edifying lifestyle?

Samuels submitted to the sentence of the synod, signed the Confession and made his public admission of guilt on Sunday 7 April 1591.<sup>36</sup> Now rehabilitated as minister, he was eligible for the ministry in the Reformed church. In addition, he had a claim to financial support from the States of Zeeland, who paid all the ministers and schoolmasters. He settled in the town of Vlissingen on the island of Walcheren, without becoming a member of the congregation. The church records show that the Reformed there experienced much competition from the “strong meetings of the Anabaptists” and one immigrant from Bruges was said to be a member of the spiritualist Family of Love.<sup>37</sup> Despite such vigilance on the part of the orthodox, Samuels managed to gain the confidence of all three Vlissingen pastors: Cornelius Hondius, Daniël de Dieu (former *preses* of the 1591 Synod of Zeeland), and Abraham van der Mijle.

In September 1592 these ministers wrote a letter to the Classis of Tholen to help their unemployed brother. Was Samuels, who had fulfilled his duties of confession, retraction and reconciliation, to live as a layperson without a pulpit while there was a great need for ministers in the provinces of Gelderland, Friesland, and Utrecht? Although the three pastors acted on their own, not on behalf of either the consistory or the classis, their colleagues from the Classis of Tholen took the trouble to compose an extensive reply. Samuels’s never-ending drama having worn them out, they communicated to his supporters their lack of confidence in any future improvement of the man. Certainly, there were many vacancies in Gelderland, but what were they to do with a man who had provoked quarrels everywhere he had gone? The instability of this person was stronger than could be constrained by even the strictest church order.<sup>38</sup> The final episode of Samuels’s career would soon prove that the Classis of Tholen had been right.

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<sup>36</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 21 January 1591. The date of public confession is mentioned in the margin of the acta.

<sup>37</sup> Vlissingen, Municipal Archives, Acta of the consistory of Vlissingen, 4 July 1587 and 4 June 1588. Ten years later, a member of the congregation was excommunicated for criticizing the Reformed ministers, “that they did not correctly teach about perfection in this life, which he boldly professed that they should teach, and that reborn people can be perfect in this flesh”; Acta 6 June 1598; 31 August 1599; 6 September 1599; 4 December 1599.

<sup>38</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 15 and 16 October 1592.

*The Brouwershaven Experience*

By the end of 1592, Gisbertus Samuels appears to have established himself in Brouwershaven, a small town on the island of Schouwen-Duiveland.<sup>39</sup> We can only guess why he chose this town. Another controversial minister had, on occasion, ministered there, Caspar van Bijgaerden (ca. 1530–1598) from Brussels. After a two-year pastorate in Brouwershaven, he was dismissed on the charge of heterodoxy. In 1589, when living in Delft, he had briefly been considered to be the successor to Samuels in Scherpenisse.<sup>40</sup> Samuels and van Bijgaerden may have known each other through the Delft networks. Having served in various villages in South Holland, Bijgaerden wrote a theological essay in 1592, in which he rather cryptically argued, “that God in his Ten Commandments never promised eternal life, neither before nor after the fall of man, but only by the grace of Christ Jesus, his Son.” The Synod of South Holland forbade the publication of the treatise because of the confusing content.<sup>41</sup>

Having settled in Brouwershaven, Samuels remained in contact with ministers of the Classis of Walcheren, probably the same colleagues who wrote their supportive letter to the Classis of Tholen in October 1592. On their insistence, the latter classis turned to the consistory of Brouwershaven in February 1593, after having learned that Samuels had been living there for some time. The consistory was not willing to provide a testimonial regarding his doctrine and morals, as Samuels had never become a church member or partaken in the Lord’s Supper. In March 1593 he announced to the consistory that he intended to participate the following Easter. Asked about his absence last Christmas 1592, he said the local minister Johannes Tayus had refused to speak with him, but Tayus insisted that this was false. He then openly admitted to having acted in an unchristian and improper manner by taking communion in another community. He declared his intention to lead a better life in future.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> H.M.C. van Oosterzee, ‘Bijzonderheden uit de handelingen van den kerkeraad te Brouwershaven,’ in *Nehalennia, jaarboekje voor Zeeuwsche geschiedenis en letteren* 1 (1849), 169–198, there 173–175. Van Oosterzee disproves Te Water’s contention that Gisbertus Samuels served the church of Brouwershaven.

<sup>40</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 7 August 1592 (followed by a letter of the countess of Buren, 28 August 1592).

<sup>41</sup> See extensive discussion in Wouters & Abels, *Nieuw en ongezien* (see above, n. 21), pp. 441, 485–487, and 606.

<sup>42</sup> Zierikzee, Municipal Archives of Schouwen-Duiveland, Acta Consistory of Brouwershaven, 14 and 21 February, and 7 March 1593.

The consistory of Brouwershaven, however, soon received information which presented yet another obstacle to his reception into membership in the congregation. According to four church members, both Gisbertus Samuels and his son Hubrecht had made “blasphemous statements” to a number of people, expressing opinions that conflicted with sound doctrine. Samuels confronted the accusations at a consistory meeting and demanded to receive the main points in writing so he could think about them and then justify himself or, if necessary, issue a retraction. And so it happened: on 9 March 1593 Johannes Tayus recorded the witnesses’ statements [Appendix 1].<sup>43</sup> One week later, Samuels sent a letter asking for the name and specific allegations of each accuser so that he might know who his enemies were. The consistory denied this request but did promise, in the spirit of brotherly love, to grant him a hearing.<sup>44</sup>

The reason why the Brouwershaven consistory examined the doctrinal views of Samuels so scrupulously lies at least in part in political factors which came to the fore in the meeting of 28 March 1593. The consistory members noted with sadness that Samuels maintained contact with “some of the great people,” meaning members of the town government. These government officials had recently begun to stay away, not only from church services, but even from the Lord’s Supper. Some of them had refused the reprimands of the consistory, declaring “that one could please God as well without hearing sermons and attending the Lord’s Supper.” Others had said “that they would prefer to follow the pastor of Gouda than the doctrine of the Reformed churches.” The Brouwershaven consistory thought the commotion was clearly a matter “of a bad example and its consequences, tending toward division and turmoil in the congregation.” Furthermore, various members had begun, under Samuels’s influence, to entertain heterodox ideas, and had asked the ministers for advice.<sup>45</sup>

Mention in this context of the pastor of Gouda is, of course, noteworthy. We have observed that Herman Herberts was a critic of predestination who had been denounced by the Synod of South Holland. At the same moment as Samuels was facing charges in Brouwershaven, Herberts was again under attack from church authorities, a fact certainly known to Zeeland ministers. The alarm which suspected sympathies for and con-

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 March 1593.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 March 1593.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 March 1593.

tacts with Herberts could elicit became evident in the case of the minister Henricus Hensberg of St. Maartensdijk, discussed in July 1592 in the Classis of Tholen. The classis had received a letter from a certain pastor in Holland who claimed that Hensberg maintained “some correspondence” with Herberts in Gouda. Hensberg, however, assured his colleagues “that he had neither received letters from Herman nor written any to him, nor desires to have anything to do with his affairs and issues.”<sup>46</sup> The case against Hensberg, accused of hidden sympathies implied by an alleged correspondence, may have been exaggerated, but a connection to Herberts was explicitly drawn in Brouwershaven by people attracted to the views articulated by Samuels.

These new charges against Samuels were not quickly adjudicated in Brouwershaven, despite the efforts of the consistory to “put out in time, by prudent means, the small fire that was started” in their community. Samuels had been summoned unsuccessfully three times (he had a “bad leg” and was out of town) and it was not until 11 April 1593 that the consistory finally convened the meeting with Samuels and his four accusers.<sup>47</sup> The man, who had astonished so many so often, came to recant his opinions during this meeting and again managed to give the impression that he was sincere. After the accusations had been read to him, he declared he regretted using the objectionable words “not without greatly blaspheming the Holy Word and also to the detriment of sound doctrine in many.” He promised to reconcile himself with the persons he had offended and gave an explanation of some of his views that was judged to be in accordance with the Bible and the Catechism (Appendix 2.)<sup>48</sup>

Now that Samuels had cleared himself anew as to his beliefs and his morals, he could be allowed to participate in the Lord’s Supper. On 17 April 1592, in a service of preparation for communion, a declaration

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<sup>46</sup> Acta Classis Tholen, 8 July 1592. Hensberg admitted that he had once been invited to come to Gouda and had received two letters from Gouda, issuing him a call. However, after his salary in St. Maartensdijk had been augmented, he no longer had any reason to leave that community. Later, Hensberg worked briefly as minister in Gouda from November 1597 until August 1598. After his return to St. Maartensdijk, he could not produce a testimonial from Gouda for the Classis of Tholen until 1601. He was admonished thereafter to conduct himself prudently. He remained in St. Maartensdijk until his death in 1621.

<sup>47</sup> Acta Consistory of Brouwershaven (see above, n. 42), 21, 25, and 28 March and 4 April 1593.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 April 1593.