

Einleitung

INTRODUCTION

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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 Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg 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 d