

# The Documents of the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) —A New Edition

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## Abstract

A new project is underway to produce a ten-volume critical edition of all the documents of the Synod of Dort in their original languages (Latin [eighty percent of them], Dutch, German, English, and French) as close as possible to the anniversary years 2018 and 2019. It is published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (Göttingen) and includes documents already published and those available only in manuscript. In contrast to the originally published *Acta*, the new edition contains the documents produced by the synod and its delegates and fully incorporates all the Remonstrant documents.

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**T**he years 2018–2019 mark the four-hundredth anniversary of the Synod of Dort (1618–19). Along with the Westminster Assembly, the Synod ranks as one of the most significant ecclesiastical assemblies in the Reformed tradition. It was the climax of the Calvinist-Arminian controversy, which had been raging in the Netherlands for some twenty years. The synod rejected the Arminian (or Remonstrant) position on predestination and related points and produced the Canons of Dort as its response.

The Synod of Dort met for six and a half months, from mid-November 1618 to the end of May 1619. It was convened by the Dutch government—

the States General—primarily to find a resolution to the Arminian controversy, but it also dealt with a variety of other important ecclesiastical matters.

Though it was a Dutch national synod, it also had a strong international character. Among the more than one hundred delegates present at the synod, there were not only sixty-one Dutch ministers, elders, and professors, but also twenty-six leading Reformed theologians from eight foreign territories, including Great Britain, the Palatinate, Geneva, Switzerland, Hesse, Nassau-Wetteravia, Bremen, and Emden. Since the Dutch government convened the synod, there were also eighteen state delegates present to supervise the proceedings and monitor church–state issues.

There were four segments to the agenda of the synod:

(1) The first three-and-a-half weeks, the Pro-Acta sessions, were devoted to preparatory matters and a number of important church items, including a new Dutch Bible translation, catechetical instruction, training for the ministry, baptism of slave children, and printing abuses.

(2) After the arrival of thirteen Remonstrant leaders, who were summoned before the synod to have their views examined and adjudicated, the synod and the cited Remonstrants were engaged in five weeks of procedural wrangling about the authority of the synod and how to handle the theological issues. This very contentious period of the synod ended when the Remonstrants refused to fully cooperate with the synod's demands—though both they and the synod had made significant concessions—and so the cited Remonstrants were summarily dismissed by President Bogerman in mid-January.

(3) During the next three and a half months, the synod focused primarily on examining the Remonstrant views from their writings, since they were no longer present, and on drawing up the synod's judgment on their views in what is commonly known as the Canons of Dort. In this period the synod also reviewed the doctrine of the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, and it considered four other discipline cases relating to Johannes Maccovius, Conrad Vorstius, four Kampen ministers, and the Geisteranus brothers.

(4) After the Canons were formally approved, the foreign delegates went home, and the Dutch delegates spent the final three weeks of the synod, the Post-Acta sessions, focusing on concerns relating to the life of the Dutch churches, especially matters of church order, liturgical forms, and subscription to confessions.

This article aims to introduce the project to produce a critical edition of all of the documents of the Synod of Dort in their original languages. The goal is a projected ten-volume series to be published in connection with

the 2018–2019 anniversary of the synod. This article first offers a survey of the documents of Dort and then describes the contours of the project to produce a critical edition of these documents. The critical edition will for the first time make all the documents of Dort readily accessible and enable scholars to better understand the deliberations of the synod and the dynamics of the controversy in its real-life context.

## I. *The Sources*

Since the synod lasted six-and-a-half months and had over a hundred participants, it produced much paperwork. Roughly half of the documents of Dort have been published, mostly in seventeenth-century editions; the other half have remained only in manuscript form. Among the unpublished materials were many essential documents, including the original *Acta* or minutes of the synod and a number of important journals reporting on the daily sessions.

The most significant published source is the *Acta Synodi Nationalis*, first published in Leiden in 1620.<sup>1</sup> This *Acta* volume was published at the direction and expense of the Dutch government, the States General. The first half of the *Acta* consists of session-by-session minutes of the synod, with a selection of supporting documents integrated into the minutes; the second half consists of the *iudicia* or judgments of the nineteen foreign and Dutch delegations on the Five Remonstrant Articles (1610) at the center of the controversy. It is important to recognize, however, that the published *Acta* was a highly edited version of the official *Acta Authentica*. There are changes in almost every line. Daniel Heinsius, the secretary of the state delegates at the synod, and Festus Hommius, one of the synod's secretaries, were mainly responsible for producing this government-sponsored edited version, which was intended primarily for foreign readers, especially for churches and schools in countries that supported the Reformed tradition.

Most of the changes in the published *Acta* were of an editorial nature, polishing the Latin of the original *Acta Authentica*. But there were also many changes affecting content, often motivated by political considerations. There were many alterations of the text and omissions intended to cast a favorable light on the Dutch nation and its religious situation in order to avoid negative impressions by foreign readers. The minutes of the Post-Acta sessions, which focused on specifically Dutch church matters, especially church order, were entirely omitted. The embarrassing case of

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<sup>1</sup> *Acta Synodi Nationalis ... Dordrechtii habitae, Anno MDCXVIII et MDCXIX* (Leiden, 1620).

Maccovius, an orthodox theologian who was overly scholastic in his treatment of theology, is only mentioned in passing as “the particular Frisian case.”<sup>2</sup> The published *Acta* was dedicated to foreign princes and authorities.<sup>3</sup> The States General used these *Acta* to strengthen its foreign relations at the end of the Twelve Year Truce by highlighting the participation of foreign theologians at the synod and by downplaying anything embarrassing to the Dutch government.<sup>4</sup>

The original *Acta Authentica* incorporated very few supporting documents. The published *Acta* include not only the *iudicia* of the nineteen delegations, starting with the foreign delegations, but also a variety of supporting documents, some of them highlighting the participation of the foreign delegates. However, apart from just eight Remonstrant documents on procedural matters and their *Sententiae* on the Five Articles<sup>5</sup>—a brief statement of their views—most Remonstrant documents submitted to the synod were not included in the published *Acta*; the most important of these were their lengthy explanations and defenses of their views, as well as their observations on the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism. The Dutch government clearly wanted to limit access to Remonstrant views and also suppressed the publication of their books.

Since the published *Acta* omitted most Remonstrant documents, the Remonstrants themselves clandestinely published their synod-related documents later the same year, 1620, in a hefty volume titled *Acta et Scripta Synodalia Dordracena Ministrorum Remonstrantium* (Harderwijk, 1620). This volume included all the Remonstrant documents relating to the squabbles over procedure and the statements of their views in their *Sententia*, *Explicatio*, and *Defensio* of each of the Five Articles. According to the preface, the Remonstrants wanted the world to see their views in their own words, not as distorted by the partiality of synodical judgments.

Beyond these two major published sources, a variety of other Dort documents have been published. These include the English letters of John Hales and Walter Balcanqual reporting on the synod,<sup>6</sup> the letters of the Hesse

<sup>2</sup> Sessions 139, 141–42, 152.

<sup>3</sup> *Acta*, letter of dedication.

<sup>4</sup> On some of the differences between the *Acta Authentica* and the printed *Acta*, see J. P. van Dooren, “De Tekst van de Acta van de Synode te Dordrecht 1618–1619,” *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 51 (1970): 187–98; and Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser, and Herman J. Selderhuis, eds., *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae, 1618–1619*, vol. 1, *Acta of the Synod of Dordt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), xlv–l.

<sup>5</sup> Sessions 31, 34.

<sup>6</sup> John Hales, *Golden Remains* (London: Printed by Tho. Newcomb, for Robert Pawlet, 1673), 2:1–168.

delegation,<sup>7</sup> the reports on the synod by Remonstrant writers Caspar Barlaeus,<sup>8</sup> Bernard Dwinglo,<sup>9</sup> and Eduard Poppius,<sup>10</sup> the materials of the Pro-Acta<sup>11</sup> and Post-Acta sessions,<sup>12</sup> some early drafts of the Canons,<sup>13</sup> materials relating to the Swiss delegation,<sup>14</sup> Anthony Milton's edition of documents relating to the British delegation,<sup>15</sup> and Nicolas Fornerod's *Registres* of the Genevan Company of Pastors for the years 1618 and 1619, which includes documents of the Genevan delegation.<sup>16</sup>

Nevertheless, a good half of the documents of Dort have remained only in manuscript. There are over 18,000 pages of Dort manuscripts dispersed in some twenty-five European archives in the Netherlands, England, Switzerland, Germany, and France. Many of these pages are copies of documents already published or available in original manuscripts. The original autographa of Dort have been well preserved in seventeen folio volumes housed in the Utrechts Archief.

The main reason Dort documents are so dispersed is that foreign theologians were invited from ten foreign lands (those from France and Brandenburg could not attend). There is correspondence with the state or church leaders who sent them, and these theologians returned home with their papers, some of which ended up in archives.

Among the unpublished materials are many very significant documents. First of all, the *Acta Authentica* needed to be published.<sup>17</sup> There are fourteen

<sup>7</sup> Heinrich Heppe, ed., "Historia Synodi Nationalis Dordracenae, sive Literae delegatorum Hassiacorum de iis quae in Synodo Dordracena acta sunt ad Landgravium Mauritium missae," in *Zeitschrift für historische Theologie* 23 (1853): 226–327.

<sup>8</sup> [Caspar Barlaeus], "Epistolica Narratio eorum quae in Synodo Dordracena gesta sunt," in *Praestantium ac Eruditorum Virorum Epistolae Ecclesiasticae et Theologicae* (Amsterdam, 1684), 513–27.

<sup>9</sup> [Bernardus Dwinglo], *Historisch Verhael van't ghene sich toeghedraeghen heeft binnen Dordrecht, in de Jaeren 1618 ende 1619* ([Amsterdam], 1623).

<sup>10</sup> Eduardus Poppius, *Historisch Verhaal van 't gene tusschen den Synode Nationaal ende de geciteerde Remonstranten in ende buyten de synodale vergaderinghe is ghepasseert* (Amsterdam, 1649).

<sup>11</sup> Hendrik Kaajan, *De Pro-Acta der Dordtsche Synode in 1618* (Rotterdam: T. de Vries, 1914).

<sup>12</sup> H. H. Kuyper, *Post-Acta of Nahandelingen van de Nationale Synode van Dordrecht in 1618 en 1619 gehouden* (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1899).

<sup>13</sup> D. J. De Groot, "Stukken met Betrekking tot de Opstelling der Dordtsche Canones," *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap (gevestigd te Utrecht)* 59 (1937): 134–210.

<sup>14</sup> In *Miscellanea Tigurina* (Zurich, 1723), 2:263–473.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Milton, ed., *The British Delegation at the Synod of Dort, 1618–1619* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Nicolas Fornerod, ed., *Registres de la Compagnie des Pasteurs de Genève*, vol. 14, 1618–1619 (Geneva: Droz, 2012).

<sup>17</sup> In Utrechts Archief: Oud Synodaal Archief, vol. O.

journals of synodical delegates and observers that report on the day-to-day proceedings of the synod. The unpublished journals include those of Swiss delegate J. J. Breitingen,<sup>18</sup> Genevan delegate Theodore Tronchin,<sup>19</sup> English delegates John Davenant<sup>20</sup> and Samuel Ward,<sup>21</sup> Nassau delegate Georgius Fabricius,<sup>22</sup> Dutch delegates Caspar Sibelius<sup>23</sup> and Theodore Heyngius,<sup>24</sup> another Swiss journal,<sup>25</sup> and an unidentified journal titled *Synodalia Hollandica*.<sup>26</sup> These journals are extremely important, since they offer much more color and detail about the daily proceedings of the synod than do the official minutes. The most significant of these journals is that of Theodore Tronchin, since it offers the most detail. But it is extremely difficult to read, since Tronchin's hand is very challenging to decipher.

Among other unpublished materials, the most important are the *Acta Contracta*, an abbreviated version of the synodical minutes; the minutes of the meetings of the state delegates; the advices of the nineteen delegations on a variety of issues; the speeches of foreign and Dutch theologians on theological issues relating to the Five Articles; various early drafts of the Canons and related documents; many States General resolutions with correspondence relating to the synod; the documents of the five other discipline cases; and contemporary letters about the synod.

Of special interest is over a hundred documents relating to the drafting of the Canons by President Bogerman and the drafting committee. These include the various drafts of each chapter (eight drafts for Chapter One alone), amendment suggestions submitted on these drafts by the nineteen delegations, and various drafting committee documents.

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<sup>18</sup> J. J. Breitingen, *Profectio ad Synodum Nationalem Dordracenam*, in Zentralbibliothek Zürich, Ms F 216:1–379.

<sup>19</sup> "Journal de Theodore Tronchin au Synode de Dordrecht," in Musée Historique de la Réformation, Geneva, Archives Tronchin, Ms 16:9r–170r.

<sup>20</sup> Exeter College, Oxford, Ms 48:6r–29v.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Ward, *Diarium rerum gestarum in Synodo Dordracena*, in Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, Samuel Ward Papers, Ms L1.

<sup>22</sup> *Synodus Dordracena, hoc est, Summaria et Compendiosissima Relatio plerorumque eorum, quae in Synodi sessionibus omnibus et singulis ... proposita et pertractata fuerunt*, Hessisches Staatsarchiv Marburg, Ms 83, nr. 6429, 32r–64v.

<sup>23</sup> Caspar Sibelius, *Annotationes ad Synodum Dordracenam*, in Stadsarchief Dordrecht, GAD150, Ms 1113, [206 pp.].

<sup>24</sup> Theodore Heyngius, *Acta Synodi Nationalis breviter conscripta*, in Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, Ms 457:15–233.

<sup>25</sup> In Centrale Bibliotheek Rotterdam, Bibliotheek der Remonstrantsch-Gereformeerde Gemeente te Rotterdam, Ms 58:58–111.

<sup>26</sup> *Synodalia Hollandica*, in Centrale Bibliotheek Rotterdam, Bibliotheek der Remonstrantsch-Gereformeerde Gemeente te Rotterdam, Ms 58, [164 pp.].

## II. A New Critical Edition

To address the need to make the documents of Dort readily accessible to modern scholars so that they may make fair assessments of both the synod and the Remonstrants, the four-hundredth anniversary of the Synod of Dort is providing the occasion for a major project to publish a critical edition of all the documents of Dort in their original languages.

The inception of this project goes back to 2008, when Herman Selderhuis and William Den Boer of the Theologische Universiteit of Apeldoorn conceived the idea of celebrating the upcoming anniversary of Dort with a new edition of the *Acta*. They shared the idea with me, since I had done my dissertation on the Synod of Dort and had worked extensively with the manuscripts and printed sources.<sup>27</sup> I proposed that such a project should be extended to publish a critical edition of all the documents of Dort, since many significant Dort documents had never been published. In 2009, Den Boer and I presented an outline of this project to a conference in Dordrecht on John Calvin. We received strong encouragement from conference participants to proceed with the project.

After that, we began to organize the project by drawing up a prospectus and recruiting interested scholars to transcribe and edit the documents. In the summer of 2010, I compiled the first draft of an inventory of all the documents of Dort. Selderhuis, the director of Refo500, became involved in organizing the project and recruited several institutional sponsors for the project. The main sponsor is the Johannes a Lasco Bibliothek in Emden,

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<sup>27</sup> Donald Sinnema, "The Issue of Reprobation at the Synod of Dort in Light of the History of this Doctrine" (Ph.D. diss., University of Saint Michael's College, Toronto, 1985); also, "Reformed Scholasticism and the Synod of Dort (1618–19)," in *John Calvin's Institutes: His Opus Magnum*, ed. B. van der Walt (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1986), 467–506; "The Drafting of the Canons of Dordt: A Preliminary Survey of Early Drafts and Related Documents," and "The Canons of Dordt: From Judgment on Arminianism to Confessional Standard," in *Revisiting the Synod of Dordt, 1618–1619*, ed. Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 291–311, 313–33; "Calvin and the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)," *Church History and Religious Culture* 91 (2011): 87–103; and more recently, "The French Reformed Churches, Arminianism, and the Synod of Dort (1618–19)," in *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches: From Henri IV to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes*, ed. Martin Klauber (Grand Rapids, Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 98–136; "The Doctrine of Election at the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)," in *The Doctrine of Election in Reformed Perspective*, ed. Frank van der Pol (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), forthcoming; "Is the Canons of Dordt a True Reflection of Calvin's Doctrine of Predestination?," in *die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* (2018): forthcoming; "Procedural Wrangling in the Remonstrant Case at the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)," in *More than Luther: The Reformation and the Rise of Pluralism in Europe*, ed. Karla Boersma and Herman Selderhuis (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), forthcoming.



Germany. Other supporting institutions include the Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, the Huygens Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis in Den Haag, the Institut für Schweizerische Reformationsgeschichte Zurich, the Protestantse Kerk Nederland, the Remonstrantse Broederschap, and the Vrij Universiteit Amsterdam.

The first formal meeting of interested participants took place in Zurich in July 2011. Since then, meetings have been held in Emden in January 2012, in Dordrecht in September 2012, and then annually in Berlin (2013), Bologna (2014), Leuven (2015), Copenhagen (2016), and Wittenberg (2017), in connection with the annual RefoRC conference each May. Otherwise, regular communication among participants is by email.

The goal is to produce a critical edition of all the documents of the Synod of Dort in their original languages as close as possible to the anniversary years 2018 and 2019. The new edition includes all the documents of Dort, both those already published and those available only in manuscript. Moreover, in contrast to the originally published *Acta*, the new edition includes not only the documents produced by the synod itself and its delegates, but it fully incorporates all the Remonstrant documents relating to the synod, their explanations and defenses of their views, as well as three or four important Remonstrant journals. Well over eighty percent of the Dort documents are in Latin; the rest are in Dutch, German, English, and French. It is expected that the full series will consist of ten volumes, each over five hundred pages. The publisher of the series is Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, based in Göttingen.

The project is led by three general editors. Herman Selderhuis is taking the lead in coordinating the organizational aspects of the project; Christian Moser, formerly from the Institut für Schweizerische Reformationsgeschichte in Zurich, is in charge of the technical aspects and the project website; and I am taking the lead in overseeing the inventory and general content of the edition. Janika Bischof, representing the a Lasco Bibliothek, served as the first editorial assistant and is now succeeded by Dagmar Bronner. Under the direction of the general editors are many contributing editors, who work on transcribing and editing individual documents or collections of documents. Thus far, an international team of over fifty scholars has been assembled to work on the project. Most are European scholars. Among the participants are five scholars from the Remonstrant tradition. Since this is an enormous project, there is still need for more contributing editors to transcribe and edit documents that are not yet assigned.

The task of each contributing editor is to transcribe the most authentic text of a document—in most cases the original copy—and edit the text by



providing a critical apparatus that takes note of editorial matters, especially variant readings, when there are multiple copies.

The general editors have developed a detailed set of editorial guidelines. The decision was made to use the TUSTEP program for layout of the edition. This program enables us to reproduce marginal notes, and it provides for two levels of footnotes, one for the critical apparatus to take note of variant readings, the other for notes relating to content. TUSTEP also enables us to create name and Bible reference indices easily.

In 2012, Christian Moser developed an in-house website for the Dort project, for use by the project participants. It gives access to online copies of the major printed sources, and of the major manuscripts of the synod. The website also includes a task list of Dort documents, a bibliography, editorial guidelines, and templates needed for editing documents and creating the critical apparatus. Moser also developed ten helpful screen-casts to introduce new participants to every phase of the editing process, and he has posted a number of samples illustrating the editing stages.

The series is being published under the title *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae*. The first volume contains the actual acts or minutes of the synod; the remaining volumes contain mostly the supporting documents produced by the synod and reports about the synod. Thus far, two volumes have been published. Volume one contains four versions of the *Acta* of the synod: the *Acta Authentica*, the first printed *Acta* of 1620; the *Acta Contracta*; and the acts of meetings of the state delegates.<sup>28</sup> This volume also includes various introductory articles that provide an introduction to the synod, the editorial guidelines, an introduction to each version of the *acta*, and short bios on each of the synod's participants. Volume II/2 focuses on the early sessions of the synod, including the Pro-Acta sessions and the period of procedural debates with the Remonstrants until their expulsion on January 14, 1619.<sup>29</sup>

Because there was too much material to include in this one volume, a decision was made to publish a separate volume II/1, which focuses on the convening of the synod. This volume, which will be published in the fall of 2018, includes multiple resolutions of the States General and correspondence relating to the convening of the synod by the States General, as well as correspondence relating to the invitations of foreign theologians from the various foreign lands.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 4.

<sup>29</sup> Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser, and Herman J. Selderhuis, eds., *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae, 1618–1619*, vol. II/2, *Early Sessions of the Synod of Dordt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).

Volume three will focus on the doctrinal deliberations after the expulsion of the Remonstrants and the drafting of the Canons of Dort as the synod's response to the Remonstrant Five Articles. Volume four will contain the various Remonstrant doctrinal statements they submitted to the synod, and volume five will include the judgments of the nineteen synodical delegations on the Remonstrant Five Articles. Volume six will contain documents from the later sessions of the synod and its immediate aftermath. These include the five other discipline cases considered by the synod, as well as the Post-Acta sessions. Volumes seven, eight, and nine will contain the various journals and reports on the synod produced by Remonstrant observers, various foreign delegates, and several Dutch delegates, as well as assorted letters concerning the synod.

## Conclusion

A major result of the production of this critical edition will be full access to Dort documents on both sides of the Arminian controversy, so that new scholarship may be able to reach a fairer understanding of the opposing positions and see through the misunderstandings created by the heat of the original setting.

It will be possible to examine the Synod of Dort in a much more nuanced way than was previously possible. Let me illustrate this in three ways. First, with the availability of new materials, especially journals that flesh out details of sessions not in the official *Acta*, scholars will discover that Dort was not a monolithic synod, as was previously supposed. Among the Dutch and foreign delegates themselves—though they all considered themselves orthodox Reformed and rejected the Remonstrant positions—there was some diversity of views, and, at moments, even open contention over such matters as the role of Christ in election, the supra- versus infralapsarian stances to predestination, the nature of reprobation, the scope of Christ's death, the absolute versus hypothetical necessity of Christ's incarnation for human redemption, the identity of the "physical cause" of conversion; and the irresistibility of grace.

Second, closer scrutiny of all of the Dort documents will allow scholars to recognize that the synod was not as intolerant as previously thought. At least on the procedural disagreements about how to handle the theological issues, there were definite concessions on both the Remonstrant and synodical sides, though in the heat of the conflict this was not fully recognized at the time. With only a little more grace toward the other side, agreement on procedure was certainly within reach, and the Remonstrants need

not have been dismissed from the synod but could well have remained present to explain their views in person.

Third, with the publication of all Dort documents on both sides of the controversy, including States General resolutions and correspondence relating to the convening of the synod and its ongoing proceedings, the Synod of Dort may be studied in its fuller national context. For example, it will become evident that the Remonstrants were summarily dismissed from the synod, not simply because of President Bogerman's angry outburst, "Dimittimini! Exite!" but because the States General and state delegates had already authorized the dismissal.

All in all, the availability of the documents of Dort should spark a revival of scholarly interest in this very defining event of the Reformed tradition.