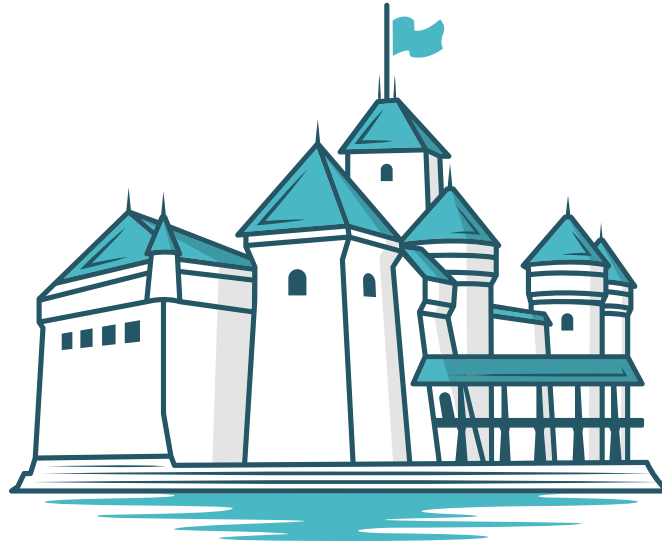




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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.
—Psalm 27:5*

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And he said, Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD: for it is a terrible thing that I will do with thee. Observe thou that which I command thee this day: behold, I drive out before thee the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite. Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee: but ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: for thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; and thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods. Thou shalt make thee no molten gods.

—Exodus 34:10–17

God's Covenant at Sinai

At Mount Sinai God made a covenant with his people Israel. “Behold, I make a covenant” (Ex. 34:10). God’s covenant with Israel was lovely. The child of God will spend all eternity in the assembly of the upright learning to fathom the loveliness—the grace—of our God in this covenant at Sinai. “The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein” (Ps. 111:2). The truth of God’s covenant with his people at Sinai is the glad tidings of the gospel for us unworthy sinners. Let us consider it and be glad.

What was God’s covenant at Sinai? It was the sacred bond that God established between himself and his people Israel. At Sinai God bound himself to his people and his people to himself. God indicated this bond between himself and his people in memorable language by teaching Israel his name: Jealous. God the Jealous made a covenant with Israel. God the Jealous claimed Israel as his own. God the Jealous would suffer no other god to claim his people. God the Jealous would do great and terrible things for his people in the eyes of all men. God the Jealous would drive out from Canaan all his rivals—the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite, and all

their gods with them. God the Jealous would see to it that their altars were destroyed. God the Jealous would see to it that their images were broken. God the Jealous would see to it that all their groves were cut down. God the Jealous said of Israel, “You are mine! You are all mine! You are only mine!” God the Jealous would not suffer Israel to bind herself to anyone else by a covenant, for she was bound to him. “Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest” (Ex. 34:12). God the Jealous would suffer Israel to give herself to no other god. “For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God” (v. 14).

The name that God taught Israel is a gracious name: God the Jealous! It is a name that reveals God’s covenant at Sinai to be a covenant of grace. For consider who Israel was as a people: a nation of dying slaves from Egypt. Consider what Israel had done in the wilderness: murmured and complained. Consider what Israel had done at Mount Sinai: worshiped the golden calf. Israel was a nation of helpless, rebellious sinners. Yet God said about them, “Behold, I make a covenant.” They are mine! And God would suffer no one else to claim

them. God the Jealous! What a gracious covenant between God the Jealous and his unworthy but beloved people.

The covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai was his everlasting covenant of grace in Christ. It was not a different covenant than before. It was the same gracious covenant that he had made with Noah (Gen. 9:9), Abraham (17:7), Isaac (v. 21), and Jacob (Lev. 26:42). Nor was God's covenant with Israel at Sinai a republication of a supposed covenant of works with Adam, as if Adam by his zealous obedience—and then Israel by her zealous works—must keep God's covenant and make it stand. The theories of a conditional covenant of works with Adam and a republished conditional covenant of works at Sinai turn the gracious covenant of God the Jealous into a conditional covenant of Man the Zealous. But mere man is never sufficiently zealous, and a covenant conditioned on his works must fail.

No, the covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai was his everlasting covenant of grace in Christ. Christ alone is the zealous man. "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (Ps. 69:9). And Christ alone has borne away the sins of his people by his suffering and death. That is why, literally translated, God said to Moses, "Behold, I *cut* a covenant" (Ex. 34:10). In the hands and feet and brow and cheek and back of our Lord, God cut his covenant of grace with us.

Is this not wonderful news for sinners such as us? God has bound us to himself in Christ, and no one shall take us away. For our covenant God is God the Jealous. "Behold, I make a covenant: before all thy people I will do marvels, such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation: and all the people among which thou art shall see the work of the LORD" (Ex. 34:10).

—AL

CANONS OF DORDT

Historical Background of the Canons (2)

When the Synod of Dordt convened in 1618, the delegates were conscious of the fact that the Remonstrant controversy was not truly a new controversy in the church but was part of the history-long war of the truth against the lie. Arminius may have brought the battle to a new arena—God's predestination of the elect and the reprobate. Arminius may have proposed a new contingency—man's will fulfilling the conditions necessary for God's election of him. But the Remonstrant controversy was simply another battle in the age-old enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

The delegates to the Synod of Dordt indicated in several ways that they were conscious that their battle was one part of the larger war. First, Dordt repeatedly connected the Arminian error to Pelagius. "For these savor of Pelagius" (Canons 1, rejection 4). "These...summon again out of hell the

Pelagian error" (Canons 2, rejection 3). "These...seek to instill into the people the pernicious poison of Pelagianism" (Canons 2, rejection 6). "As the Pelagians of old asserted" (Canons 3–4.2). "Which the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains" (Canons 3–4.10). "This is altogether Pelagian" (Canons 3–4, rejection 7). "The ancient church long ago already condemned this doctrine in the Pelagians" (Canons 3–4, rejection 9). "This view consists of obvious Pelagianism" (Canons 5, rejection 2).

Pelagius was a British monk in the fourth century who emphasized man's responsibility in salvation. Pelagius was opposed by Augustine of Hippo and was condemned as a heretic by a synod in AD 415. By the time of the Synod of Dordt, some twelve hundred years later, Pelagius was universally recognized as a notorious heretic. When the Synod of Dordt connected the Remonstrants to Pelagius, it exposed Remonstrant theology as

essentially Pelagian. Pelagius' emphasis on man's responsibility by the exercise of man's will in his salvation was a theology of divine contingency. More than a millennium later, Arminius resurrected Pelagius' theology by Arminius' doctrine of divine contingency in predestination. When the Synod of Dordt connected the Remonstrants to Pelagius, it also indicated that the synod was engaged in the same battle that had already been fought all those centuries earlier.

Second, the Synod of Dordt connected its controversy against the Remonstrants to the great Reformation of the sixteenth century. The Synod of Dordt met a mere one hundred years after God had mercifully reformed his church in Europe. Martin Luther had nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg in 1517, and the Synod of Dordt convened in 1618. During the years and decades after 1517, God had raised up John Calvin, established a Reformed seminary in Geneva, and caused the gospel of the Reformation to go to the Netherlands. Though the Roman Catholic Church was strong in the Netherlands and though the Roman Catholic rulers imprisoned and murdered Reformed people by the thousands, God by his gospel broke the Romish stranglehold and caused the Reformation to take deep root. The Roman Catholic Church killed more than 100,000 Reformed men and women in the Netherlands, but God established his Reformed church there.

In its historical preface to the Canons, the Synod of Dordt recounted God's liberation of the Dutch churches from the tyranny of Rome. By mentioning God's reformation of his church as the background to the Arminian controversy, the synod indicated that its present controversy with the Arminians was simply part of the larger battle of the Reformation.

With the same favor, our faithful savior at this time has affirmed his gracious presence in the Dutch churches, which have been most afflicted for many years. For this church was liberated by the powerful hand of God from the tyranny of the Roman antichrist and the horrible idolatry of the papacy; was

miraculously preserved many times in the dangers of the long war; and flourished in the concord of true doctrine and discipline to the praise of her God, to the admirable growth of the Republic, and to the joy of the whole Reformed world.¹

Third, the Synod of Dordt connected its controversy against the Remonstrants to the entire history of the church militant in the New Testament. Synod noted that the church has always been besieged by enemies, threatened by deceivers, and tormented by persecutors. But in this great battle, the church has been preserved time and again by Christ's promise to be with her to the end of the world. Yes, the battle against the Remonstrants may have been dangerous and painful; but the Lord, who had delivered his church throughout the New Testament, was still with his church and would again give her the victory. As synod wrote in its preface to the Canons,

Among the many consolations that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ gave to his militant church in this weary sojourn, one in particular is deservedly celebrated, which he left to her as he was about to depart into the heavenly sanctuary unto his Father: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." The truth of this sweetest promise shines forth in the church of all ages, which, since she has been besieged from the beginning not only by the open violence of enemies and the impiety of heretics, but also by the secret cunning of seducers, would long ago surely have been either crushed by the force of tyrants or seduced to destruction by the fraud of deceivers, if the Lord had ever deprived her of the protection of the saving promise of his own presence. But that Good Shepherd, who most steadfastly loves his flock for which he laid down his life, has always restrained the rage of the persecutors in due season, often miraculously stretching out his right hand; and he has uncovered and scattered

¹ See "Canons of the Synod of Dordrecht: Preface," *Reformed Pavilion* 3, no. 15 (July 19, 2025): 8.

the crooked ways and fraudulent counsels of the seducers; each time demonstrating that he is most certainly present with his church. An illustrious proof of this exists in the histories of pious emperors, kings, and princes, whom the Son of God so often has raised up for the relief of his church; has inflamed with holy zeal for his house; and by their handiwork has not only restrained the fury of tyrants but also has provided for his church the remedies of holy synods when she was troubled by false teachers who variously corrupted religion; in which synods the faithful servants of Christ, united in prayers, counsels, and labors, have valiantly stood fast for the church and for the truth of God; have fearlessly opposed the ministers of Satan, though they transformed themselves into angels of light; have removed the seeds of error and discord; have maintained the church in the concord of pure religion; and have handed down the genuine worship of God, undiminished, to posterity.²

The delegates to the Synod of Dordt were greatly encouraged by the fact that their controversy was only part of the larger battle of the ages. So also

today, God's people in the church of Jesus Christ can be greatly encouraged that they do not stand alone in their battles and toils for the truth of the gospel. In the heat of the battle, it can be difficult for God's people to see the larger battlefield. In the loss and weariness and damage that God's people suffer from the ceaseless assaults of the foes, it can seem as if the victory of the truth is impossible. In the reproach and persecution that God's people bear from the whole world, including their closest family and friends, it can seem as if the whole world must be right and the cause of the truth must be wrong. But over against all that sorrow and grief stands the unshakable promise of Christ, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20). And by the eye of faith, the child of God can see down the long corridor of history that God's truth has always endured and that Christ's church has endured upon that truth. Such was the faith of the delegates to the Synod of Dordt, and such is the faith of the church of Jesus Christ today. To the heirs of Dordt in your weary sojourn, Christ's promise is sure. Let this be our confession with our fathers of old: "The truth of this sweetest promise shines forth in the church of all ages."³

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² "Canons of the Synod of Dordrecht: Preface," 8.

³ "Canons of the Synod of Dordrecht: Preface," 8.