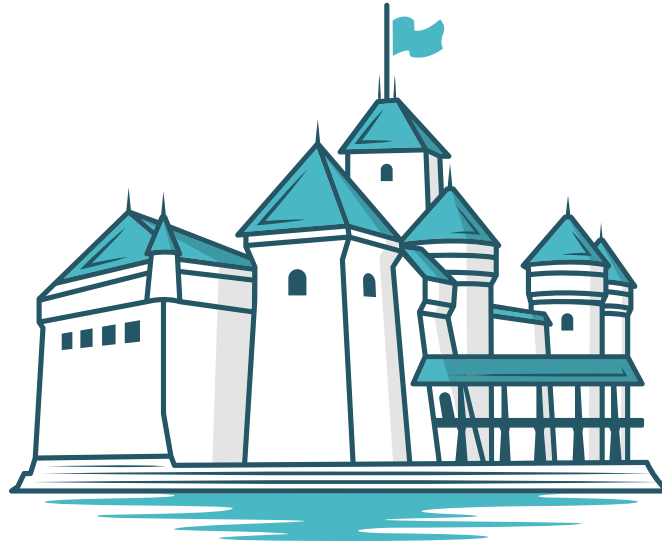




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*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;
he shall set me up upon a rock.
—Psalm 27:5*

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And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him. And Moses called unto them; and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned unto him: and Moses talked with them. And afterward all the children of Israel came nigh: and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him in mount Sinai. And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face. But when Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he took the vail off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

—Exodus 34:29–35

The Veil on Moses' Face

When God wrote his law upon the tables of stone a second time, he caused Moses' face to shine with glory. Although Moses did not know it right away, the burning glory of God's fiery law (Deut. 33:2), reflecting the fiery glory of God (Ex. 24:17), was now reflected in Moses' shining face. Aaron and all the children of Israel were afraid to come near him. Moses called them to come to him anyway. Though they had to avert their eyes and "could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance" (II Cor. 3:7), they came to Moses. Aaron and the rulers came first, and Moses talked with them. Then came all Israel, and Moses gave them God's law.

After Moses had finished speaking with the people, he put a veil on his face. It is usually thought that Moses put a veil on his face before he spoke to the people, hiding the glory of his face for them. But this was not the case. Moses spoke to the people with his face uncovered and glorious. Only afterward did he put on the veil. In Exodus 34:33 the word *till* is not in the original and should be deleted. Not *till* but *when* "Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face." This would be the pattern for the rest of Israel's time at Mount Sinai. Moses would go in to God with his face uncovered.

God would speak to Moses, and Moses would speak to the people. Immediately after speaking God's law to the people, Moses would cover his glorious face with veil.

And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him. (Ex. 34:34–35)

The meaning of the veil is very good news for us sinners. For Moses wore a veil to teach the children of Israel a very specific truth about God's holy law. That specific truth is this: Israel's salvation could not come from the law. Yes, the law is glorious and good, and Israel saw how glorious the law was in the shining of Moses' face. Yes, the law is God's word, written with God's finger. But God's purpose with his glorious law was never to save his people by it! Israel must learn not to look to the law for their righteousness or life or salvation.

And oh, how the Israelites would be tempted to look to the law for their life! They would want to "stedfastly look" at the law as if its "end" was salvation (II Cor. 3:13). That is, they would want

to stare at the law and gape after it, as if by their knowledge of it and obedience to it they could be saved. They had said as much when they had first arrived at Mount Sinai. “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8). But salvation could not come by the law! For the people of Israel were sinners! Those fiery letters of the law, reflected in Moses’ shining face, must kill them, for “the letter killeth” (II Cor. 3:6). The glorious law of God must be for sinners “the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones” (v. 7). The law, in all its shining resplendence, could only be for the sinful people “the ministration of condemnation” (v. 9). So every time that Moses, with shining visage, finished proclaiming the law, he put a veil over his face. By the veil he taught the people of Israel that they were not to look to the law for their salvation.

But from whence would their salvation come, if not from the glorious law? What could be more glorious than the law that caused Moses’ face to shine with such resplendence? Ah, but there is a word of much greater glory than the law! It is the word of the gospel, which is the glad tidings of great joy concerning Jesus Christ. For the “vail is done away in Christ” (II Cor. 3:14). And in Christ the condemnation of the law is abolished! Does the letter kill? That letter has been taken away and nailed to Jesus’ cross (Col. 2:14)! Is the law the ministration of death engraven in stones? That death is swallowed up in victory (I Cor. 15:54)! Is the law the ministration of condemnation? There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1)! The glory of the cursing law “was to be done away” (II Cor. 3:7). The condemnation of the law was to be “abolished”

(v. 13). The law had an “end” (v. 13). And the end of the law is Christ, for “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom. 10:4). Bearing the law’s curse, the letter’s death, and the law’s condemnation in the place of his elect people, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal. 3:13). By his atoning death Christ took away the law’s killing-power, the law’s death-ministry, and the law’s condemnation-administration.

Many of the Israelites at Sinai could only see the glory of the law, and many of the Jews throughout the ages refused to see the greater glory of Christ.

But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. (II Cor. 3:14–15)

But for God’s elect people, he graciously takes away the vail from our hearts and causes us to know righteousness and salvation in Christ. How glorious is Jesus Christ! And how glorious is his gospel! “For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory” (II Cor. 3:9). Thanks be to God that salvation does not come by the law. Thanks be to God for “the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). And thanks be to God that “we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (II Cor. 3:18).

—AL



Historical Background of the Canons (4)

The States General of the Dutch Republic had decided that a national synod would convene on November 13, 1618, in the city of Dordrecht. In preparation for the synod, the States General invited Reformed representatives from all over Europe to attend the synod and give their advice. Although only the Dutch delegates would have a vote, the foreign delegates would give their written advice on all the points of doctrine that would come before the synod. The foreign delegates would also give their assent to the decisions on which the Dutch delegates had voted. Thus the Synod of Dordt was not only a national synod—composed of church delegates from all the provinces of the Dutch Republic—but it was also an international synod. In attendance were delegates from Great Britain; the great Swiss cities of Geneva, Zurich, and others; and the German territories of the Palatinate, Emden, and others. The delegates from France were not able to attend, for the Roman Catholic king Louis XIII threatened them with banishment if they left France.

The presence of foreign delegates served a very significant spiritual purpose at the Synod of Dordt. First, their presence demonstrated the catholicity of the Reformed faith. The Reformed faith was not the private gospel of Geneva, where John Calvin had labored. The Reformed faith was not the private gospel of the Dutch Republic, where it had taken hold and flourished. Rather, the Reformed faith was and is the true Christian gospel that is for all nations. The Reformed faith is the gospel of which Jesus spoke when he said, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matt. 24:14). The Reformed faith is the gospel of which Paul spoke when he wrote to the Romans, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of

Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). The presence at Dordt of Reformed delegates from foreign churches demonstrated the catholicity of the Reformed faith. Still today, the Reformed faith is the true, catholic, Christian gospel that goes forth for a witness into all the world.

Second, the presence of the foreign delegates at Dordt demonstrated that Dordt’s judgment against the Remonstrants was fair and unbiased. Before the convening of the synod, the Remonstrants complained that a church synod could not possibly render a fair verdict, since the synod would be composed of delegates who were already personally opposed to them. The invitation of the foreign delegates cut off this complaint. The foreign delegates were not personally invested in the Remonstrant controversy as it had unfolded in the Netherlands. In fact, at least one foreigner—the English Puritan William Ames—was weak on the deadly seriousness of the Arminian error. When Ames was asked whether Arminianism was a heresy, “he responded that Arminianism was not a heresy but a serious error tending to heresy.”¹ In its judgment of the Remonstrants, the Synod of Dordt would go much further, declaring the Arminian error to be a resurrection of the old Pelagian error out of hell. Due to the presence and advice of the foreign delegates, no Remonstrant could complain that the Synod of Dordt was a stacked court.

What especially cut off the Remonstrant complaint about bias was the synod’s determination to judge the Remonstrant doctrine out of the word of God. The basis of synod’s verdict would not be what this or that Reformed theologian had said but what God had said in the Bible. Synod followed through

¹ W. Robert Godfrey, *Saving the Reformation: The Pastoral Theology of the Canons of Dort* (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2019), 23. Although William Ames was not an English delegate to the Synod of Dordt, he was in attendance throughout the synod and served as secretary to Johannes Bogerman, the president of the synod.

on this determination, for the Canons of Dordt establishes its Reformed doctrine and condemns the Remonstrant doctrine by many quotations from scripture.

About its determination to render righteous judgment, the synod wrote this in its preface to the Canons:

By their authority they [the States General] convened a synod at Dordrecht from all the provinces which they governed; having sought for it the favor of the most serene and powerful King James of Great Britain and of the most illustrious princes, earls, and republics; and having obtained many of the most esteemed theologians; that by the common judgment of so many theologians of the Reformed church, those doctrines of Arminius and his followers would be judged accurately and by the word of God alone; that true doctrine would be established and the false rejected; and that—by divine blessing—concord, peace, and tranquility would be restored to the Dutch churches. This is that blessing of God in which the Dutch churches rejoice, humbly acknowledging and gratefully proclaiming the mercies of their faithful savior.

Therefore, this venerable synod (prior proclamations having been made and assemblies having been held in all the Dutch

churches, by the authority of the Supreme Majesty, for prayer and fasting, to avert the wrath of God and to implore his gracious aid) gathered in the name of the Lord at Dordrecht, inflamed with love for the divine majesty and for the welfare of the church; and after calling upon the name of God, synod bound itself by a holy oath that it would accept sacred scripture alone as the standard of judgment and that it would operate with a good and clear conscience in examining and judging this cause.²

Finally, after years of controversy and after extensive preparations, the Synod of Dordt convened on November 13, 1618, with prayer and thanksgiving to God.

These sacred proceedings were begun with solemn exhortations and prayers in the churches, in Dutch by Mr. Balthasar Lydius and in French by Mr. Jeremias Poursius, after which the distinguished delegates—professors, pastors, and elders—went together to the place designated for this meeting, where everyone sat in their own seats and order.³

Johannes Bogerman was appointed the president, and the work of synod began.

(To be continued)

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²See “Canons of the Synod of Dordrecht: Preface,” *Reformed Pavilion* 3, no. 15 (July 19, 2025): 9.

³Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser, and Herman J. Selderhuis, eds., *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae (1618–1619)*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 9. My translation from the Latin.