

DORDRECHT: Fortress of the Canons

“What are the Canons of Dordt?”

The questioner was a bemused pre-Seminary student attending an American Conservative and Calvinistic college sometime in the early 1950's. Having a point of contention with a fellow student he had made a distinctly Arminian assertion, and his fellow had referred him to the Canons of Dordt, since they were part of the Doctrinal Standards of the questioner's denomination.....the very denomination of which he was preparing to enter the ministry.

“What are the Canons of Dordt?” One would have thought that a student such as he in pre-seminary training would have known what the Canons were long enough before he ever deigned to come forward for ministerial training. Here he was.....heading along the long road that would lead to the pastorate, and the pulpit, and he did not know what the Canons of Dordt were.....let alone know what truth was contained in them. Literally, he not only didn't know where he was going.....he didn't even know where he was supposed to go.....

It happened that the questioner's fellow-student was also in pre-seminary training. And he came from a different Reformed denomination. Since childhood in his denomination, it had been impressed on him just exactly what the Canons of Dordt are. So this fellow-student graciously enlightened the questioner.....and their debate went on from there. It terminated with the questioner saying, in all seriousness:

“Well.....and I thought the Canons of Dordt were the guns the Spanish used at the Siege of Leiden.”*

Laughable? Nay.....tragic.

He had of course, confused “canons” with “cannons”. But such confusion could only be the result of ignorance. His Reformed denomination had those very Canons established as a vital part of their creed, yet it seemed that knowledge about them was minimal to zero amongst the rising generation. Here was one en route to their ministry, if he didn't know what the Canons were, was it likely that the average lay-person of his generation in that denomination would have known?

And how can a denomination have a creed and not bother to teach its young rising generations the truths contained therein? When things have reached such a pass it is a mark of serious apostasy, and it ought to be remarked that the particular denomination in question here has since those days of the early 1950's gone so far as to sink into all manner of unBiblical idiosyncrasies, allowing higher criticism in its schools, evolutionism and feminism into its pulpits, ordaining women as office-bearers, and even evincing an ever-increasing open-ness

* Leiden, one of Holland's famous old University towns of the Reformation period, was besieged by the forces of the Spanish King from about May to October in 1574. After months of horrific privations, the godly citizens were delivered in the end by the providential action of God bringing in the ocean waters that effectively flooded the Spanish out. See Wylie: *Hist. of Protestantism* Vol. 3 pp. 106 ff.

to sodomy. Such horrors await all those who would treat the Bible as anything less than the Divine-inspired, inerrant, infallible Word of God, and who would have little to no regard for the fore-fathers who suffered even unto horrific deaths for the sake of the Biblical truths encoded in their creeds.

So then, *what* are the Canons of Dordt?

How many evangelicals, how many even from Calvinist denominations across the world could answer that question today? Leave alone tell you what is actually in the Canons.....

Reader.....do you know what they are? More, do you know the teaching and assertions contained therein? Do you know the importance of the Canons for the well-being of the Reformation Churches? Are the Canons just some museum piece that may be safely relegated to the basement, so to speak, as certainly has happened in many Reformed churches?

It is due to the appalling ignorance we find on all hands today concerning this vital creedal statement of Christian belief that we publish herewith this special issue "Dordrecht, Fortress of the Canons". (And the pun on the word "cannon" is intended.) We are deeply concerned, not only about the ignorance of modern professors of faith concerning them, but more, we are concerned at the antipathy we discover towards the doctrines contained in those Canons, not only amongst avowed enemies of the Reformed Faith, but even amongst some of its erstwhile "friends".

In God's predestinating providence, it must needs be that His church be unsettled from time to time by "evil men creeping in unawares".(Cf. Mat. 18:7; II Pet. 2: 1-2; Jude 4.) It is His decree that "there must be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." (1 Cor. 11 : 19). The annals of Church history reveal how, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, the God of Predestination fulfilled such predictions through the instrumentality of the Romish orders of the Jesuits, and fulfilled it amongst the very ranks of those faithful Dutch Protestants that had stood and suffered so much for the Biblical Truth. Arminianism, a form of Jesuitised semi-pelagianism entered the Dutch Reformed Churches, claiming to be the Biblical truth. And it rose to prominence at that very city which had withstood the Spanish guns in 1574, as Arminius was appointed a Professor at Leyden's Theological School. It was later that the great Synod of Dordrecht meeting from 1618 to 1619 met this threat head on, refuted and defeated it, and codified a set of doctrinal statements clarifying the true Reformed Orthodoxy as over against the Arminian heresy. This codification, handed down through the generations, we know as "The Canons of Dordt."

Majestic, like the Truth to which they witness, these "Canons" have stood the test of nigh 400 years, a giant beacon marking out the way to God and His Truth, a veritable "fortress" of Biblical and Reformed doctrine.

The Canons of Dordt! Guns,..... used at the siege of Leiden?

Well, in a way, yes, they're guns alright. But not the ones used at the siege of that famous city. Strange.....the ways of God's inscrutable providences. One might say that there were two "sieges of Leiden". One with Romanist Spanish cannons in 1574, and another with Romanist dogmas in the 1590's and on to 1618. By the hand of God's providence, Leiden, and the Dutch churches withstood both. But in the second siege the "canons" turned out to be different, and on the Reformed side. And across the ensuing centuries, wherever Dordrecht's massive "canons" have swept the theological horizons with their formidable polemical "muzzles", heretics have cowered, and fled from the field. In this modern age of theological ignorance and heresy, the time has come, we believe, for those mighty "guns" of Dordt to roar yet again. May God's people take up the call, and come to the ramparts.....