

The English Delegation to The Synod of Dordt

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When mention is made of the national Synod of Dordrecht, the tendency for many is to associate that name with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands during the early 17th century. To do so is certainly not incorrect, but it should be borne in mind that that Synod was in certain respects unique so far as the assemblies of Reformed churches are concerned. Unlike any of the other great Reformed assemblies, it gathered together representatives of virtually all of the Reformed churches in Europe. In that respect it stands alone and deserves a peculiar place in the history of the Reformed churches.

The divines who met at Dordt on the 13th November 1618 constituted a remarkable array of talent and background. The ranks of those who attended at Dort included fifty-six ministers and ruling elders from the Dutch churches, five Professors of Theology, and twenty-six foreign divines, as well as eighteen political commissioners who were not members of the Synod but who were to supervise the proceedings and report to the States-General. The foreign divines included representatives from the Reformed churches of Great Britain, the Palatinate, Hesse, Switzerland, Wetteravia, Geneva, Bremen, and Emden. Delegates from France were also invited, but were prevented from attending by their king.

Consequently, this Synod was unlike any other within the Reformed church world. As a Synod, it has enjoyed high praise. Richard Baxter places this Synod on the same footing as the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Speaking of the Westminster Assembly, Baxter observes:

“The Divines there Congregate were Men of Eminent Learning and Godliness, and Ministerial Abilities and Fidelity: and . . . as far as I am able to judge by the Information of all History of that kind, and by any other Evidences left to us, the Christian world, since the days of the Apostles, have

never a Synod of more excellent Divines (taking one thing with another) than this Synod and the synod of Dort were."¹

In even more effusive terms, William Cunningham asserts:

"The Synod of Dort, representing as it did almost all the Reformed Churches and containing a great proportion of theologians of the highest talents, learning and character, is entitled to a larger measure of respect and deference than any other council recorded in the history of the church."²

This is high praise indeed, coming as it does from a Scottish theologian who was wedded to the work of the Westminster Assembly.

The focus of our consideration is an examination of the contribution which the English contingent made to the Synod. Initially, four English divines were nominated by James I of England to assist in the deliberations of the Synod. They were **George Carleton**, then bishop of Llandaff and afterwards of Chichester, and a brother to Sir Dudley Carleton, the English ambassador at the Hague; **Joseph Hall**, afterwards bishop of Exeter and subsequently of Norwich; **John Davenant**, then the Lady Margaret professor at Cambridge and Master of Queen's, afterwards bishop of Salisbury, and **Samuel Ward**, then master of Sidney College, Cambridge. These delegates were subsequently joined by two others, **Walter Balcanqual** who was chaplain to the king and afterwards dean of Rochester, and **Dr. Thomas Goad**, Precentor of St. Paul's and Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury. As we shall note, Goad attended the Synod in place of Hall, due to the latter's illness which necessitated his return to England.³

It is interesting to note that Balcanqual was born and educated in Scotland. After graduating, he moved to Cambridge and was subsequently ordained in the Church of England. He became a royal chaplain and was appointed Master of the Savoy in 1617. He took his place in the Synod on 20th December 1618.

As is evident by their titles, each of the English delegates held prominent positions within the Church of England though they were relatively unknown outside of England prior to their attendance at Dort. The Synod served to enhance their international reputations. For example, following Dort, the Gallican churches wrote to the English delegates concerning a doctrinal issue in the following terms, "The opinion of the divines of England, the most celebrated in the whole Christian world, is requested on this controversy, as it appears that this might conduce not a little towards confirming the peace of the Reformed Church in France."⁴ In particular,

¹ **Richard Baxter**, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, (London, 1696), Vol. I, p. 73.

² **William Cunningham**, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 1967), p. 367. As will shortly be noted, the English contingent also embraced a Scot by the name of Walter Balcanqual. Nonetheless, for all intents and purposes, although born in Scotland, Balcanqual represented the Church of England and not the Church of Scotland. Hence the use of the term "English" to denominate this contingent or delegation.

³ Cf. **John Platt**: *Irenical Anglicans at the Synod of Dort*, in *Councils and Assemblies*, ed. G.J. Cumming & Derek Baker. (Cambridge University Press 1971) p. 235.

⁴ **John Davenant**, *On the Controversy Among the French Divines of the Reformed Church Concerning the Gracious and Saving Will of God Towards Sinful Men* (London: Hamilton, Adams., 1832), p. 561.

the reputation of Davenant was enhanced. He has subsequently been described as one of the remarkable divines of the 17th century⁵ and has been hailed as the “Jewel of the Reformed churches” for his eminence at the Synod.⁶ The most eminent of the English theologians to attend that Synod and one of the greatest names to have adorned the English church are also epitaphs which have been bestowed upon him.⁷ These are high commendations, considering the other illustrious divines whose lives dotted the ecclesiastical landscape of that century.

What contribution did these men make to the Synod? As noted, some have viewed their contribution as significant, while others have not been so generous in their praise.⁸

The British delegation, too, though highly esteemed at the Synod because of the friendly relationship at the time between the British king and the government of the Netherlands nevertheless was one of the weaker delegations at the synod.⁹

Invitations to attend the Synod were extended to various countries throughout Europe. Letters were sent to the French Huguenots and to the different Protestant States of Germany and Switzerland requesting them to send deputies to assist the deliberations.

Because of the close Anglo-Dutch political ties which existed at that time, it was only natural that English views should also be sought. England under Queen Elisabeth 1st had played a significant role in securing independence for the seven northern provinces from Spain and any threat to their continued survival remained a matter of importance to England.

James I, partly for political motives and partly because of his love of theological controversies, complied with this request and selected the theologians identified previously. Gerard Brandt describes the decision of James I in the following terms:

“King James sent such Divines to the synod of Dort whom he knew to be zealous enough to condemn the Remonstrants, but he was not so much inclined to act

⁵ Daniel Neal, *The History of the Puritans* (Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1979), Vol. 2, p. 93.

⁶ George Ella, *Bishop John Davenant and the Death of Christ: A Vindication* New Focus, August/September 1997, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 12; Morris Fuller suggests that “none stood higher than [Davenant] did at the Synod of Dort”. Furthermore, Fuller contends that from a theological point of view, Davenant “stood ihead and shoulders higher than any of his compeers thereat.” *The Life, Letters & Writings of John Davenant D.D.* (Methuen & Co., London, 1897), p. 192; Neal records that, “Davenant behaved himself with great prudence and moderation during the course of the Synod. He was a quiet and peaceable prelate, humble and charitable, a strict observer of the Sabbath, an enemy of pomp and ceremony and luxury of the clergy. He had a great reputation in foreign parts for profound learning.” Neal, Op. cit., p. 93.

⁷ George Smeaton, *The Apostles' Doctrine of the Atonement* (Alpha Publications, Winoa Lake, Indiana, 1979), p. 542.

⁸ Herman Hanko, *The History of the Free Offer* (Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, Grandville, Michigan, 1989), p. 82. Hanko referring to John Davenant describes Davenant as being “one of the delegates from Great Britain to the famous Synod of Dort and was, along with his fellow delegates, among the weakest representatives present at that great assembly.”

⁹ Homer C Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers* (Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1980), p. 23.

in this manner by the light of his excellent understanding, as for reasons of state, for his excellency Prince Maurice (with whom that king was engaged in a strict alliance, and for whose person and power he very much interested himself) having put himself at the head of the Contra-Remonstrant party he thought fit to contribute all he could towards the oppression of the weaker side and for corroborating the authority of a prince whose interest he had espoused; insomuch that this monarch was rather an enemy to the persons than to the principles of the Remonstrants.”¹⁰

Prior to attending the Synod, the members of the English delegation were summoned before James I and Archbishop Abbot, the Archbishop of Canterbury, to receive specific instructions as to the approach which they were to adopt to the issues which were likely to be canvassed at the Synod.¹¹

The instructions which they received included *inter alia* the following:

“You shall, in all points to be debated and disputed, resolve among yourselves before-hand, what is the true state of the question, and jointly and uniformly agree thereupon. If, in debating the cause by the learned men there, anything be emergent, whereof you thought not before, you shall meet and consult thereupon again, and so resolve among yourselves jointly, what is fit to be maintained. And this to be done agreeable to the Scriptures, and the doctrine of the Church of England. That if there be main opposition between any, who are over-much addicted to their opinions, your endeavour shall be, that certain Propositions be moderately laid down, which may tend to the mitigation of heat on both sides.”¹²

As will be observed, when controversy arose at the Synod, the King’s instructions had the effect of restraining the individual English delegates from fully expressing their personal views in public.

In addition to these instructions, the divines were also instructed by both the King and the Archbishop to oppose strongly any attempt to meddle with the doctrine of the Church of England and furthermore to be preemptory in introducing into the determinations of the Synod, the universality of Christ’s redemptive work. As can be gleaned from the instructions which they received, a peaceable resolution with as little disputation was high on the English agenda. This emphasis was reflected in an address which Carleton delivered at a gathering of the States-General in the Hague on 6th November 1618, only a week prior to the commencement of the Synod. In the course of that speech, he pleaded:

“Our Lord and King, Christ Jesus, being about to go to His Father, and being desirous to leave his followers whom he loved, the greatest good that is to be found in this life, bequeathed them Peace. Neither could men desire a better gift from Heaven, nor the Angels declare better tidings from

¹⁰ Brandt, Gerard. *History of the Reformation in the Low Countries* (New York: AMS Press, 1979), Vol. 3, p. 6.

¹¹ Fuller, Op. cit., pp. 75, 76.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 78. The veracity of this instruction as it pertains to the universality of Christ’s redemptive work has been challenged. Cf. William Robert Godfrey, *Tensions Within International Calvinism: The Debate on the Atonement at the Synod of Dort, 1618-1619* (California: Stanford University, 1974), p. 168n.

thence, than glory to God in the Highest and on earth peace.”¹³

It should not be thought that the English delegation were completely open minded about the issues which were to be discussed at Dort. Apart from the instructions which they had received it is also chronicled that as early as 1616, Carleton had expressed his opposition to the views of Arminius. In writing to Dudley Carleton, he revealed that he had written a refutation of Arminius.

The Synod met for the first time on 13th November 1618. Thereafter, it met almost continuously until May 1619. Johannes Bogerman was elected President.

Shortly after the commencement of the Synod, Joseph Hall’s health failed which lead to his eventual return to England. Hall explained his departure from the Synod in these words:

“By that time I had stayed some two months there, the unquietness in those garrison towns, working with the tender disposition of my body, brought me to such weakness as to disable me from attending the Synod: which yet, as I might, I forced myself unto; as wishing that my zeal could have discountenanced my infirmity.”¹⁴

His only contribution of significance to the Synod was the delivery of a Latin sermon. He took as his text, Ecclesiastes 6:17 and in doing so urged the need for righteousness to be balanced with wisdom. In that sermon, he cautioned those present not to pry too far into the judgments of God. In that context, he observed that the issue of Predestination was one that was like the mathematical line, *divisibilis in semper divisibilia*. Consistent with the instructions of James I, peace was also a central theme of his message:

“By the awful name of almighty God, by the affectionate and gentle bosom of our common mother, by our own souls, and by the most holy bowels of our Saviour Jesus Christ, seek peace, brethren, enter into peace; and so compose yourselves, that setting aside all prejudice and party feeling and bad passion, we may all happily be joined in promoting the same peace”.¹⁵

After having delivered the sermon, Hall notes that this was no sooner done:

“than my former complaint renewed upon me, and prevailed against all the remedies that the counsel of physicians could advise me unto; so as, after long strife, I was compelled to yield unto a retirement, for the time, to the Hague; to see if change of place and more careful attendance . . . might recover me.

But when, notwithstanding all means, my weakness increased so far, as that there was small likelihood left of so much strength remaining, as might bring me back to England, it pleased his Gracious Majesty, by our Noble Ambassador’s solicitation to call me off; and to substitute a worthy Divine, Mr. Dr. Goade, in my unwillingly forsaken room.”¹⁶

¹³ Platt, Loc. cit., p. 234.

¹⁴ Josiah Pratt, *The Works of Joseph Hall* Vol. 1, (Oxford 1837), p. xl.

¹⁵ Pratt, Op. cit., Vol. 11, (Oxford 1837), p. 485.

¹⁶ Ibid, Vol. 1, pp. xl, xli.

Hall's departure from Dort resulted in the suggestion by the Remonstrants that his return to England was occasioned by his sympathy for their position and that he found the proceedings of the Synod to be distasteful.¹⁷ This appears unlikely given that Hall subsequently spoke of the Synod in the highest terms and was proud to wear the gold medallion presented to him by the States-General for his contribution to the Synod.

The Arminians did not arrive at Dort until early December 1618. When they did arrive, their appearance turned into a farce. They were treated from the outset as the accused; a position which they rejected.¹⁸ Under the leadership of Simon Episcopius, they resorted to several procedural manoeuvres designed to delay the Synod in its work. These tactics were employed, possibly in the hope that time would bring a favourable change in the political situation. As it was, their tactics prevented any official judgment being made at Dort until early January 1619, when, because of their attitude toward the Synod, they were dismissed.¹⁹ The manner of their dismissal caused a measure of consternation among the English delegation.

They were dismissed by Bogerman in these terms:

“With a lie you made your entrance into the Synod; with a lie you take your leave of it . . . Your actions have been full of fraud, equivocations, and deceit . . . But assure you the synod shall make known your pertinacity to the world; and know that the Belgic churches want not *arma spiritualia*, with which in time convenient, they will proceed against you.”²⁰

Balcanqual writing to the English ambassador in the Hague comments on their dismissal as follows:

“For the Dismission of the Remonstrants, since your Lordship is pleased to take notice of it, I hope I may without offence say that it was such, as certainly did the Synod much wrong. . . . For the delegates had their decree of Dismission written before they came into the Synod, yet our voices were asked, hoping it should have been answerable to their Decree: but finding it was otherwise, without so much as laying their heads together for consultation, they published a decree which they brought written with them into the Synod. On Monday the late acts of the Remonstrants' incredible obstinacy being read; . . . they were called in and dismissed with such a powdering speech as I doubt not but your Lordship hath heard with grief enough, I protest I am much afflicted when I think of it. For if the Remonstrants should write, that the President

¹⁷ Some support for the Remonstrant's assertion may be provided by Thomas Fuller's description of Hall's departure. “Thus returned Dr. Hall into his own country: since so recovered (not to say revived therein) that he hath gone over the graves of all his English colleagues there, (what cannot God and good air do) surviving in health at this day, three and thirty years after, may well with Jesse, go amongst men for an old man in these days.” **Thomas Fuller**, *The History of Britain* (Oxford, 1845), p. 468.

¹⁸ It is not the purpose of this paper to explore the rights and the wrongs associated with the manner in which the Synod proceeded.

¹⁹ The Synod subsequently condemned them in absentia.

²⁰ Cf. **L.H. Wagenaar**: *Van Strijd En Overwinning* referenced in Hendriksen: *Commentary on 1 Timothy* (BOT 1959) Page 96. Also cf. **Homer C. Hoeksema**, *Standard Bearer* Vol.29 pp. 375-376.

pronounced a sentence, which was not the sentence of the Synod, they should not lie.”²¹

Notwithstanding the absence of the Remonstrants from the Synod, their doctrinal views were extracted from their published writings and dealt with under the five principal points which characterised their doctrine.

The procedure adopted by the Synod was that each foreign delegation constituted a separate committee. In respect of each issue that came before the Synod, the various committees were required to frame an individual judgment which they then brought back to the Synod and which became the response of the particular committee. Furthermore, each committee was required to reduce their views to writing, so that they could be presented to the Synod in a cogent form. This requirement was also designed to facilitate the collation of a mutually agreeable statement at the conclusion of the Synod.

The first issue which came under the Synod’s purview was predestination. This matter presented no great difficulties with general agreement being reached on the unconditional nature of the decrees of election and reprobation.

The second matter which was discussed was the redemption purchased by Jesus Christ and it proved to be not quite so simple as the issue of predestination.

The Remonstrants, as regards the atonement rested their contentions on the sharp distinction that they drew between the accomplishment of Christ on the cross and the application of that accomplishment to the lives of men. Their basic notion was that Christ made salvation possible for all men, but that this salvation was actualised in men only by their response of faith. In other words, they propounded a conditional salvation which was dependent upon man for acceptance.

In summary, the position of the Remonstrants was that:

1. The price of the redemption which Christ offered to God the Father is not only in itself and by itself sufficient for the redemption of the whole human race but has also been paid for all men and for every man, according to the decree, will, and grace of God the Father; therefore no one is absolutely excluded from participation in the fruits of Christ’s death by an absolute and antecedent decree of God.

2. Christ has, by the merit of his death, so reconciled God the Father to the whole human race that the Father, on account of that merit, without giving up His righteousness and truth, has been able and has willed to make and confirm a new covenant of grace with sinners and men liable to damnation.

3. Though Christ has merited reconciliation with God and remission of sins for all men and for every man, yet no one, according to the pact of the new and gracious covenant, becomes a true partaker of the benefits obtained by the death of Christ in any other way than by faith; nor are sins forgiven to sinning men before they actually believe in Christ.

4. Only those are obliged to believe that Christ died for them for whom Christ

²¹ **John Hales**, *Golden Remains of the Ever Memorable Mr. John Hales* (London: Printed by Tho. Newcomb for Robert Pawlet, 1673), pp. 73, 74.

has died. The reprobates, however, as they are called, for whom Christ has not died, are not obligated to such faith, nor can they be justly condemned on account of the contrary refusal to believe this. In fact, if there should be such reprobates, they would be obliged to believe that Christ has not died for them.

All the members of the Synod, including the English delegation, agreed that these propositions were unacceptable.²² However, the delegates to the Synod found that they could not agree so easily on an acceptable orthodox reply to the Remonstrant position. Indeed, the discussions of the Second article produced tensions and bitterness among the orthodox at the Synod.

This issue also occasioned a divergence of views among the English delegation.²³ These divisions grew out of the significant diversity of opinion that existed within the so-called Reformed consensus.

Davenant and Ward took a view of the nature and extent of Christ's atonement which was not shared by the other members of the English contingent. On the question of the nature and extent of the atonement, Davenant and Ward maintained what could probably be called, a middle course, between the Reformed and Arminian positions. They held to the certainty of the salvation of the elect; but they also held that an offer of pardon was made not only to such as believed and repented, but to all who heard the Gospel. They also held, that a sufficient measure of grace to convince the impenitent, so as to lay their condemnation on themselves, accompanied the offer of salvation; and they held that the redemption of Christ was universal, and consequently, that salvation was attainable by all.²⁴ Davenant felt so strongly about this issue that he declared that he would sooner cut off his hand than rescind any word of it.²⁵

While the views of Davenant and Ward were opposed by the other English delegates,²⁶ they all rejected the distinction drawn by the Remonstrants between the

²² The English delegation identified their differences with the Remonstrants in a letter which they wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury dated 21st March 1618 where they said:

"In our avouching and declaring in this and other Articles, some fruits of Christ's death, not comprised in the Decree of election, but afforded more generally, yet confined to the Visible Church (as viz. true and spiritual Graces accompanying the Gospel, and conferred upon some non-elect) we gain ground of the Remonstrants, and thereby easily repel, not only their Instances of Apostasie, but also their odious imputation of illusion in the general propounding of the Evangelical Promises, as we are ready more clearly to demonstrate. Nor do we with the Remonstrants leave at large the benefit of our Saviour's death, as only propounded loosely to all *ex aequo*, and to be applied by the arbitrary act of man's will; but we expressly avouch, for the behoof of the Elect, a special intention both in Christ's offering, and God the Father accepting, and from that intention a particular application of that Sacrifice, by conferring Faith and other Gifts infallibly bringing the Elect to Salvation. And that our care in advancing this Doctrine might be the more remarkable, we in these our Theses have set in the forefront our Propositions concerning God's special Intention." Hales, *Op. cit.*, p. 185.

²³ Indications of the doctrinal positions of the English delegates can be gleaned from the reports sent from Dort to Sir Dudley Carleton. Carleton was the English special ambassador to the United Provinces. He initially received reports from his chaplain, John Hales and subsequently from Balcanqual.

²⁴ Neal, *Op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 467.

²⁵ Cf. Hales: *Golden Remains.....etc.* pages 577-578, and page 581.

²⁶ Hales : *Op. cit.* page 470 and page 577.

accomplishment of reconciliation by Christ's faith and the application of the benefits of His death. Beyond that fundamental agreement lay many other differences of thought and expression.

The nature of the disputation within the ranks of the English delegation is evident from the following report of Balcanqual to Sir Dudley Carleton. Balcanqual wrote:

“the question amongst us is whether the words of the Scripture, which are likewise the words of our confession, (Christ died for the whole human race, even for the sins of the whole world) are to be understood of all particular men, or only of the elect who consist of all sorts of men. Dr. Davenant and Dr. Ward are of Martinius of Bremen his mind, that it is to be understood of all particular men. The other three (Balcanqual, George Carleton and Goad) take the other exposition, which is of the writers of the Reformed Churches and namely of my late Lord of Salisbury. Both sides think that they are right, and therefore cannot yield one unto the another with a safe conscience.”²⁷

Balcanqual suggested that further discussion of this matter be postponed until the end of the Synod and that in the interim, English Church leaders be consulted. This was done. However, for reasons which are not presently important, conflicting advice was received by the English delegates from James I and Archbishop Abbot. In any event, both advices arrived too late to assist the English delegation in the formulation of their written submission or *Judicium* to the Synod regarding the atonement.

Ward received advice concerning the approach to be taken from James I, through an intermediary. With reference to the king, Ward was advised that he:

“likes very well of your media via, wishing you to hold the articles of the Church of England in any case for your parts . . . and his majesty wisheth heartily a happy and peaceable end of your meeting that the common adversary have not matter of insulting against us: that of the winning of the Lutherans if they could so be brought to hold the same, you say his majesty took special notice of and would to God it might be so brought to pass, but whatsoever so long as in your definitiones you keep *formam sanorum verborum* and rather by some general words as we find the scripture phrase often runneth give them occasion to think well of our doctrine than that by too particular and curious a restraint be still estranged from us.”²⁸

The formal response received from the English Ambassador was summarised by Hales in these terms:

“That before the Synodical resolution concerning Christ's death and the application of it to us, we stand upon it, to have those conclusions couched, in manner, and terms, as near as possibly may be, to those which were used in the primitive church by the fathers of that time against the Pelagians, and semi-Pelagians, and not in any new phrase of the modern age; and that the same may be as agreeable to the confessions of the Church of England, and other

²⁷ Hales, Op. cit., p. 101.

²⁸ Ibid. pp. 184, 185.

Reformed Churches and with as little distaste and umbrage to the Lutheran churches as may be.”²⁹

In an attempt to avoid controversy within their own ranks and to comply with the King’s initial instructions, the English delegation attempted to omit all controversial references from their submission. They formulated a response which took into account the divergent views within their own ranks. This is evident from the description of the English Judicium given by Balcanqual:

“There was read the judgment of the divines of Great Britain upon the Second article; they were briefer than upon the First Article, they left the received distinction of *sufficientia* and *efficacia mortis Christi* untouched; as likewise they did not touch that received restriction of those places which make Christ’s sufferings general to the world, only *ad mundum Electorum*.”³⁰

In their final form, the English Judicium comprised six propositions and three rejections of error, all of which were explained and defended. The first two positive statements reflected the attitudes of Carleton, Balcanqual and Goad. These emphasised the Reformed position that Christ died efficaciously for the elect to give them faith and all other gifts necessary for salvation. The four remaining theses were designed to grant significant concessions to the consciences of Davenant and Ward. The remaining theses dealt with the more general love of God toward the whole creation. Avoiding both the Arminian and purportedly Reformed extremes, these theses proposed an expanded view of sufficiency. They referred to a general promise and a conditional covenant. The special intention of God for the elect was supplemented by his general and sufficient intention for all mankind. Compromise had raised its multifaceted and ugly head!

The interpretation to be placed on the English submissions, at least so far as Davenant was concerned, is reflected in the reasons which he prepared in relation to the Second Article. He wrote:

“For the universality of the promises of the Gospel, which is the Second Article, the Church of England, doth teach Artic. Relig. 7 de Predestinatione, That we must receive God’s promises, in such wise, as they be generally set forth to us in holy Scripture; where our Church doth signify that the promises of God in the Gospel do appertain to all generally to whom they are published, and according to this we hold, that the reason why the promises of the Gospel are not effectual to all to whom they are published, is not through any defect in Christ’s death, as though he had not truly founded and ratified by his death and passion the Evangelical Covenant or promise to all; or that this promise pertained not to all; or, that God did not thereby seriously invite all, to whom this Evangelical promise is propounded in the Ministry of the word, to repentance, and faith, and so consequently to the participation of the benefits promised therein: but the defect is inherent in man who will not receive that grace, that is truly and seriously offered on God’s part.”³¹

²⁹ Ibid. p. 185.

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 130, 131.

³¹ Ibid. p.188.

The stand taken by the English delegation lead subsequently to the allegation that they had deserted the doctrine of the Church of England. To this Davenant replied:

“I know that no man can embrace Arminianism in the doctrines of predestination and grace, but he must desert the articles agreed upon by the church of England; nor in the point of perseverance, but he must vary from the received opinions of our best approved doctors in the English church.”³²

By way of explanation, Davenant observed:

“We had a special charge in our instructions to endeavour that positions be moderately laid down which may tend to the mitigation of heat on both sides, which we judge to be most necessary in this second article.”³³

He goes on to state:

“We verily think that the strictness of the Contra-Remonstrants in this second article is one chief reason which keepeth the Lutheran churches from joining with us. And we think that if way were given in this synod herein they would be the more easily brought to hold the doctrine of predestination according to the opinion of St. Augustine and the Church of England.”³⁴

While Davenant and Ward rejected Arminianism they maintained a view of the atonement which held that Christ in some respect had died for all. In this respect, the English delegation were in a clear minority. Most of the other delegations wanted to distinguish between the sufficiency and efficacy of Christ’s death. They asserted that the atonement of Christ upon the cross was sufficient for all but that it was not efficacious for all, as it was not intended for all. This position was eventually reflected in the Canons which were formulated at the conclusion of the Synod.

Article 8 of the Second Head of Doctrine reads:

For this was the sovereign counsel, and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation: that is, it was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father; that he should confer upon them faith, which together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment in his own presence forever.

This issue was the only one in which the English delegation differed significantly from the majority of the delegations.³⁵ Following the completion of debate, the

³² Neal, *Op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 467.

³³ Hales, *Op. cit.*, p. 190.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ It is of interest to note that despite the wording of the Canons, Ward, because the Biblical references to all men were not specifically equated with the elect alone, felt able to assert that the Canons had defined nothing .. which might gainsay the confession of the Church of England. *Usher, Works*, xv. 145.

Synod appointed a committee of which Carleton was a member and that committee prepared draft Canons for the consideration of the whole Synod. The Canons were divided into five chapters dealing with the subjects of sovereign predestination, particular atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace and perseverance of the saints. The Canons were adopted by the Synod and their approval was affirmed by the signatures of all the English delegates.

Following the Synod, the English delegates returned to England where they were graciously welcomed by the King. A job well done from the king's perspective. For their efforts, the majority of the delegates received prestigious appointments.

In conclusion, how can the contribution of the English divines be summarised? The role played by the English delegation at Dort was in many ways a *moderating* one. For example, on 22nd January 1619, Matthias Martinius, one of the Bremen delegates clashed with Gomarus on the issue of Christ's role in God's predestination of the elect. Hales reports the matter in this way:

“Martinius, as it seems, is somewhat favourable to some Tenets of the Remonstrants concerning Reprobation, the latitude of Christ's merit, the Salvation of Infants etc. and to bring him to some conformity was there a private meeting of the Foreign Divines upon Wednesday morning (the 23rd) in my Lord Bishop's Lodging in which thus much was obtained, that though he would not leave his conclusions, yet he promised moderation and temper in such manner that there should be no dissension in the synod by reason of any opinion of his.”³⁶

In that respect, the English delegation appears to have played an important role in the functioning of the Synod.

As regards their doctrinal position, for the most part they were orthodox, save for the views of Davenant and Ward in relation to the Second article. Without doubt, the views which they expressed in that regard were heterodox. As to whether one views the contribution by the English delegation in a positive light, probably depends on the weight that one gives to this issue.

Notwithstanding the doctrinal weaknesses of some of the English divines, it will always remain a fact that England did contribute to the international status of the Synod. However, the extent to which she contributed in a doctrinal sense will probably continue to be a moot point.

This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the pre-requisite, cause or condition on which it depended; but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith, holiness, etc., therefore election is the fountain of every saving good; from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects.....CANONS I article 9.

³⁶ Hales, Op. cit., p. 87.