

## Lecture 17 – “God’s Free Mercy”: The Church in the Netherlands

“What the descendants of the old Dutch Calvinists as well as of the Pilgrim Fathers have to do, is not to copy the past, as if Calvinism were a petrification, but to go back to the living root of [the] Calvinist plant, to clean and to water it, and so to cause it to bud and bloom once more, now fully in accordance with our actual life in these modern times, and with the demands of the times to come.” Abraham Kuyper

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world.”  
Ephesians 1:3, 4

### Background Reading

Gonzalez, ch. 20, pp. 179-83

### Prayer

Heidelberg Catechism

Q. 116: “Why is prayer necessary for Christians?”

“Because it is the chief part of the gratitude which God requires of us, and because God will give his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who sincerely beseech him in prayer without ceasing, and who thank him for these gifts.”

Q. 118: “What has God commanded us to ask of him?”

“All things necessary for soul and body which Christ the Lord has included in the prayer which he himself taught us.”

“Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread;

and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors;

and lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil,

for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.”

## “God’s Free Mercy”: The Church in the Netherlands

### I. The Synod of Dort (1618-1619)

#### A. Remonstrants and Counter-Remonstrants

1. Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) and Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641)

2. “Remonstrance” (1610)

a. God did not elect individuals

b. Christ died for all

c. Faith is a gift of God, **but**

d. Faith is resistible

e. Perseverance is unclear

3. Political-social issues—“A war party, militaristic, staunchly Calvinistic and anti-Catholic, predestinarian, centralist, politically even royalist, and ecclesiastically Presbyterian....A peace party, trademinded, theologically tolerant, republican and Erastian” (*Arminius*, Carl Bang).

#### B. The Synod

1. Ecumenical—delegations from England, the Palatinate, other German areas and German-speaking Switzerland, and Geneva

2. Unanimous—although minor differences expressed
3. Five Heads of Doctrine
  - a. God’s electing purpose not conditioned by anything in the sinner (“not founded upon foreseen faith”)
  - b. Christ’s death sufficient to save the world, but efficient only for the elect (“to bring them infallibly to salvation”)
  - c. Mankind is corrupt (“incapable of any saving good”)
  - d. The Holy Spirit irresistibly gives the gift of faith to the elect (who are “unfeignedly called”)
  - e. Those justified will be preserved to the end (“But God is faithful, who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end”)

Canons 1, 13: “The sense and certainty of this election afford to the children of God additional matter for daily humiliation before Him, for adoring the depths of His mercies, for cleansing themselves, and rendering grateful returns of ardent love to Him who first manifested so great love towards them.”

The foreign delegates at the Synod expressed the hope that the Dutch churches would persevere in and transmit to succeeding generations their “orthodox, godly, and simple confession of faith...until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

4. Pro-Acta Work—approved new translation of the Bible, organized catechetical instruction, established preparation and qualifications for candidates for the ministry
5. Post-Acta Work—established a definitive text of the Belgic Confession, set guidelines for Sunday observance, adopted a new church order

## II. The Second (Nadere) Reformation (17th and early 18th centuries)

### A. Situation in the Dutch churches in the 17th century

### B. Relationship with English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians

1. Historical and theological links—Puritans viewed the Calvinist Netherlands as “a special sanctuary of the Lord”
2. Differences
  - a. Dutch not as concerned with government and organization of the church
  - b. Dutch more inclined to emphasize theology as a science

### C. Representative Leaders

#### 1. William Ames (1576-1633)

- a. Converted by William Perkins’s preaching
- b. Exiled from England for his Calvinism and his views on church polity
- c. Writings left a deep mark upon Gisbertus Voetius
- d. *The Marrow of Theology*

#### 2. Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676)

- a. The “precisianist movement”
- b. Influence on German Pietism

The Second Reformation “was by and large a thoroughly responsible, evangelical movement. On the personal level it emphasized love for God and man....Its larger aim was the reformation of the visible church according to the pattern of apostolic Christianity. Intellectually it was highly respectable in so far as practically all of its leaders had enjoyed the opportunity of excellent theological training....Like the rise of any reform movement which tends to challenge the established order of things, [it] caused some strains and difficulties. At the end, however, the Reformed churches were the better for

having made the necessary adjustments” (Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 178-79).

### III. Rembrandt (1606-1669)

A. His Life

B. His Art

### Questions from Class

When Prince Maurice called the Synod did this imply Erastianism?

What was the situation of religious freedom in the 17th century in the Netherlands?

### For Further Study

\**The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, Stoeffler

Stoeffler uses “pietism” to include English Puritanism, the Dutch Second Reformation, and German Pietism.

A. Read selections from William Ames’ *Advice to Students of Theology from Reformed Reader: A Sourcebook in Christian Theology*, vol. 1, ed. William S. Johnson and John H. Leith (Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 327-29 and from *The Marrow of Theology*, ed. John D. Eusden (Pilgrim Press, 1968), 69-78, 219-24. William Ames (1576-1633) belonged to England by birth and education; to the Netherlands by providence (after attending the Synod of Dort as an English observer, he became professor of theology at Franeker in 1622); and to both countries and to New England by influence.

In his “Advice to Students of Theology,” how does Ames’s statement or definition of “the purpose of the minister” compare with Covenant Theological Seminary’s statement of purpose (“training servants of the triune God to walk with God, to interpret and communicate God’s Word, and to lead God’s people”)? Ames is rather hard on seminary students here but his warnings and advice are not without value.

Ames’s famous *Marrow of Theology* clearly and systematically sets forth the gist of Puritan thought about God, the church, and the world. Read “A Brief Forewarning of the Author concerning His Purpose.” Note the striking images: “showing them the nest itself,” “a spot marked where he may set his foot,” “a contracted light,” and the wooden “key.” Study the “Method and Chart of the *Marrow*.” Notice Ames’s two main points. Where does predestination fit in his system? Is this a surprise? The first chapter of Book 1 is “The Definition or Nature of Theology.” What, according to Ames, is theology? How does the study of theology differ from other studies? What is Ames’s main emphasis in this introductory chapter? “Observance in General” is the first chapter of Book 2 of the *Marrow*. What is the goal or purpose of the Christian life? What is the relationship between faith and obedience? What role does the law have “among the faithful”? Note Ames’s consistent and careful use of Scripture.

B. Study the Canons of the Synod of Dort from *Creeds of Christendom*, Philip Schaff (Baker, 1983), 581-95. (A brief summary of the Canons of Dort, as well as of the Five Arminian Articles, is found in Placher.)

First Head of Doctrine—“Of Divine Predestination”

\*How does the “first head” begin?

\*What is the “sole cause of election”?

\*What are the practical results of election?

\*Is the doctrine of election to be preached? How?

\*How does the doctrine of election relate to children of believing parents?

Second Head of Doctrine—“Of the Death of Christ, and the Redemption of Men thereby”

\*Why was the death of Christ necessary?

\*What message is to be preached to all people?

Third and Fourth Heads of Doctrine—“Of the Corruption of Man, his Conversion to God, and the Manner thereof”

- \*How does this canon describe fallen man?
- \*What “glimmerings of natural light” remain in fallen man?
- \*Why has God so blessed the Dutch nation with the Gospel?
- \*To what other works of God is regeneration compared?

Fifth Head of Doctrine—“Of the Perseverance of the Saints”

- \*What are the grounds of assurance?
- \*What are the means by which God preserves the elect?

Notice how the Gospel is presented in each of the four sections. Indicate the articles in which it is especially evident.