

A landmark in turbulent times. The meaning and relevance of the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619). Edited by Henk van den Belt, Klaas-Willem de Jong and Willem van Vlastuin. (Refo500 Academic Studies, 84.) Pp. 439 incl. 2 ills and 1 table. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022. €150. 978 3 525 56056 3; 2198 3089

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This is a superb collection of twenty-six essays on the important Synod of Dordt (1618–19). The synod was ‘intended to re-establish the unity of the young state of the United Provinces in a crucial *landmark* stage of the Eighty Years’ War (1568–1648), which was part of the broader confrontation between Catholic and Protestant powers in Europe after the Reformation’ (p. 9). The chapters are collected from Dordrecht (2018) and Gröningen (2019) conferences, which commemorated the four-hundredth anniversary of the synod. The pieces are organised in four parts: ‘Diverse Contexts’, ‘Theology at the Synod’, ‘Dordt’s Church Order and its Reception’ and ‘After the Synod’. An abstract of the piece begins each chapter.

This book shows the wide variety of contexts in which the Synod of Dordt took shape. Alec Ryrie’s ‘The ecumenical council of Dordt’ contends that Dordt, while seen by some as a Reformed General Council of the Church – like Early Church ‘councils’ – could not really function this way. For the Remonstrants did not vanish and ‘anti-predestinarian ideas surged back’ into various Churches in the next decades after Dordt (p. 32). Indeed, for the Reformed, General Councils ‘may err, sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God’ (English Articles of Religion). This means if there are ‘conciliar’ and ‘non-conciliar Christians’ – ‘that distinction ends up with not only the Remonstrants, but with the English Presbyterians, Calvin, the great Reformed Confessions and even the Thirty-Nine Articles on the radical side’ (p. 33). For, concludes Ryrie, ‘all Reformed Protestants were radicals or carried the seeds of radicalism within themselves’ (p. 34). Theological questions are always open for further assessments.

These perspectives help perceive other diverse contexts, such as how the delegates understood their roles. Polly Ha indicates that despite disagreements on many things, the Remonstrants and Contra-Remonstrants agreed on

the idea of incremental discovery of divine truths. For the Remonstrants, the synod’s purpose was to accommodate diversity through the continued discovery of theological views. For the Contra-Remonstrants ... theological argumentation was characterized by unification in the pursuit of further definition through an exacting dissection of knowledge rather than through greater theological variation (p. 51).

These differing perspectives set trajectories for the Synod.

Other diverse contexts include the public context, the historical and political, the international, academic and the broader theological contexts. These chapters provide important insights into the backgrounds and setting of Dordt.

‘Theology at the Synod’ pieces feature examinations of Dordt’s theological controversies. Basically, ‘the main reason the Synod of Dordt was convened was to settle the Arminian controversy that had agitated the Netherlands for about twenty years’ (p. 173). The synod’s ‘answer to the Arminians (Remonstrants) was the Canons of Dordt, approved and signed by every one of the Dutch and foreign delegates The canons were based on position papers (*iudicia*)

submitted by all nineteen delegations (eleven Dutch and eight foreign) on each of the Five Articles of the Remonstrants that were at the heart of the controversy' (p. 173).

Donald Sinnema's 'Doctrinal dissension among delegates at the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619)' focuses on the four major doctrinal topics where there was open dissension among the delegates. These were the debate over the role of Christ in election, the *causa physica* debate, the supralapsarian debate, and the debate over the extent of the atonement. Sinnema's piece shows the Synod was 'not a monolithic assembly' (p. 187) and that since there was 'a need for unanimous consent in approval of the Canons of Dordt', the Canons were 'deliberately written in a popular, rather than a scholastic style, so scholastic precision in defining doctrine was not necessary, leaving some flexibility for compromise. Hence, on a variety of doctrinal points, the Canons presented a compromise formulation by defining what was agreed in common while remaining silent on what was not, and avoiding a rejection of the differences' (p. 189).

Other chapters in this part deal with justification, election and predestination, divine foreknowledge, the extent of the atonement, preparatory work, regeneration, apostasy, and Eric A. de Boer's interesting 'The absence of Israel in Dordt's doctrine of divine election: on Anna Walker's prophecy, brought to (but not heard at) the National Synod of Dordrecht'. Here we find the detailed, technical theological arguments featured throughout the Synod's deliberations.

There are five chapters in part C, 'Dordt's Church Order and Its Reception'. The book's 'Introduction' describes the reasons for this relatively small number of pieces, which are primarily descriptive in nature. Yet, 'a significant part of the themes raised still plays a role in today's ecclesiastical life' (p. 16).

'Reactions and Reflections after the Synod' as Part D are significant chapters in that 'the later development of Reformed theology reveals a continuous struggle to understand and apply the theological principles of Dordt in new cultural and historical contexts' (p. 17).

On this, Joke Spaans and Pauline Wegener write about 'Practical theology after Dordt'. They show that Dordt received recommendations for pastoral training of candidates from churches of Zeeland and took these 'under advisement only' (p. 363). But later, in the seventeenth century, the emphasis in the issue of 'assurance of salvation' shifted 'from confessional religion, defined as knowledge of and assent to an established doctrine to a much more experiential form of religion' (p. 366). This led to the introduction of practical theology at the universities and, 'very, very slowly, synods started to follow up, making practical theology a compulsory subject in the examination of future ministers' (p. 378). Thus, 'the recommendation presented at the synod of Dordt towards introducing practical theology as a mandatory subject in the training of ministers finally came into its own' (p. 379).

Arnold Huijgen concludes with 'The lasting value and limitations of the canons of Dordt'. In this stimulating discussion, Huijgen emphasises 'the lasting value of the Canons as a catholic, biblical document that safeguards the gratuity of grace and God's sovereignty' while recognising that 'the Canons also have their limitations and there is reason to say things differently and also to say different things than the Canons did' (pp. 411, 412).

This book is an indispensable resource for Dordt studies and a significant contribution to our understandings of this landmark synod.

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Between scholarship and church politics. The lives of John Prideaux, 1578–1650. By John Maddicott. Pp. xxii + 430 incl. frontispiece and 7 ills. Oxford–New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. £75. 978 0 19 289610 0

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With this substantial and handsomely produced biography of the seventeenth-century Oxford theologian John Prideaux (1578–1650), John Maddicott draws attention to ‘an undeservedly neglected figure’, an individual who, during his long career, served as Rector of Exeter College, regius professor of divinity, vice-chancellor of the university and bishop of Worcester. In highlighting Prideaux’s accomplishments, Maddicott contributes to a growing body of literature which explores the diversity of religious identity within the early Stuart Church (p. vii). Work by Anthony Milton, Peter Lake and Stephen Hampton, among others, has considered the significance of a group described variously as ‘conforming Calvinists’, ‘Reformed conformists’ or, to use one of Maddicott’s preferred terms, ‘moderate Calvinists’ (p. 93), a group which included prominent churchmen like John Davenant, James Ussher, Joseph Hall and others who do not fit comfortably within an interpretive binary focused exclusively on Laudianism and Puritanism. The subject of the present study, the royalist, high-Calvinist, anti-popish, *jure divino* episcopalian John Prideaux, was a leading member of this group. What sets *Between scholarship and church politics* apart from other works in this area, however, is its close attention to Prideaux’s role within his university and college. ‘No biography’, writes Maddicott, ‘should allow the regius professor of divinity to edge out the rector of Exeter’ (p. ix). Given this volume’s place within Oxford’s *History of Universities* series, this emphasis feels thoroughly appropriate and, moreover, by thus setting Prideaux within his college context, readers typically more interested in theological controversy are helpfully reminded that the authors of polemical divinity cannot be reduced to their published works.

The book is organised around three main sections, the first and third of which treat Prideaux’s life chronologically, while the second works thematically. In the first section, stretching from 1578 to 1624, Maddicott traces John Prideaux’s origins and entry into Exeter College through to what he describes as his subject’s ‘halcyon years’, a decade during which Prideaux rose to prominence both as Rector of Exeter from 1612 and as a regius professor of divinity from 1615. Here Maddicott both uncovers less well-known local conflicts in which Prideaux was directly involved (for example, a protracted dispute between Exeter College and William Lord Petre, the grandson of the college’s refounder) and locates Prideaux in relation to episodes of wider significance (for example, the Synod of Dordt). Readers are also given a convincing account of Exeter’s growing ‘reputation as a special bastion of Calvinist orthodoxy’, an accomplishment largely fuelled by the rising theological profile of its Rector (p. 53).