

*The Contra-Remonstrants demand state enforcement of religious orthodoxy and public morality,
1619*

Introduction: In an attempt to settle the religious controversies between the Remonstrants, who pleaded for toleration of Christian non-conformity in the Republic, and the Contra-Remonstrants, who demanded that the state enforce its version of the Reformed Church in the Republic, the States General of the Republic called for a national synod of the Reformed Church, which was held in Dordrecht in 1619. On April 24, 1619, the Contra-Remonstrants, who were in the majority, rejected the views of the Remonstrants, condemned them as heretics and demanded that the state exclude them from using the Republic's churches, which were owned by the cities and towns. Moreover, they put forth a set of demands that the state enforce not only doctrinal orthodoxy, but also censor heretical publications and enforce what can be described as a severe public puritan morality. The text of the Synod of Dordrecht's demands to the States General is from G. Brandt, *History of the Reformation*, (London, 1720-23, reprinted, 1990), Vol. III, pp. 324-327.

*To the High and Mighty Lords, the Lords the States General of the free United
Netherlands, our Sovereign Lords.*

With all due reverence and humble submission, the National Synod of the Reformed churches in the United Netherlands, assembled by the authority of your High Mightinesses in the Town of Dort, do represent, That pursuant to your Lordships' laudable commands, and the usage of all National Synods, they have taken into their consideration not only in general the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church, but likewise in particular the *Gravamina* and complaints which the several Churches of these Provinces have transmitted to the Synod; and they have made several Ecclesiastical Statutes and Laws about the same; all which shall shortly be laid before your Lordships.

But forasmuch as the said Statutes cannot, as indeed they ought not, to be put in execution in the respective churches of these Provinces, without the consent and concurrence of your High Mightinesses, our lawful Sovereigns; this Synod does most humbly pray and beseech you, that your High Mightinesses would vouchsafe, after having read and examined the proceedings of this Synod, to corroborate them by your christian approbation and concurrence; and to use your authority, in causing the same to be every where observed for the peace and edification of these churches.

And especially since the doctrine of these churches, which is contained and professed in their *Confession*, and in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, which is received by us, has been pursuant to the express commands of your Lordships again maturely examined according to the Word of God by this Synod; and since it has been determined by the unanimous voice, not only of all the Foreign Divines, but also of the Deputies of the *Low-Country* Churches assembled by order of your High Mightiness, that the said Doctrine is very conformable to Scripture, and to the Confessions of all the Reformed churches, as will more fully appear by the *Explanations* hereunto annexed: This Synod does therefore pray with all humility, that your High Mightinesses would graciously vouchsafe henceforwards more and more to protect and defend, to strengthen and support the said Doctrine of the churches of this land; as also the full and comprehensive Explanation made and agreed upon by this Synod, by order of your Lordships, according to the Word of God, with respect to the *Five Points*; together with the condemnation of those errors, which have been broached by some persons in these Provinces against the aforesaid pure Doctrine.

And likewise, that your High Mightinesses would vouchsafe to approve of the *Ecclesiastical Constitution*, as it has been examined by this Synod, and enlarged in some of its Articles, for the more effectual promoting of peace and edification; and to order that the said Constitution be uniformly observed throughout all the churches of these Provinces, as far as possible.

And forasmuch as the Synod has thought proper, that the churches of these Provinces, according to the example of all the Reformed churches of other nations and languages, should likewise have an accurate and faithful Version of the Old and New Testament in the *Low-Dutch* tongue, as has been frequently resolved in former National Synods; which work, by your Lordships' order, was committed first to the care of that worthy Gentleman, the Heer *Philip Marnix* of *St. Aldegonde*, of blessed memory; and after him to Dr. *Wernerus Helmichius* and *Arnoldus Cornelius*, who accordingly made a beginning of the same: therefore the Synod has now appointed three Ministers (if it might be done with your High Mightinesses' approbation) to translate the Old Testament, and three others to translate the New, together with the Apocryphal books; who, to the end they may make the greater dispatch, and finish that work the sooner, are

in the mean time exempted from all other Ecclesiastical functions, and are to meet together and communicate their thoughts to each other. And forasmuch as according to this scheme the said work will be very expensive, the Synod docs likewise beseech your Lordships to approve this Resolution, and to allow such a sum of money as may be sufficient to answer the charges of the work; and besides, to send letters to those churches, whose Ministers are appointed to carry it on, to the end that the said churches may not make any difficulty of their long absence.

And since your Lordships are not ignorant how much it concerns the churches of this land, that both the high and low, or inferiour Schools, should be well regulated; and since experience itself has taught us what great inconveniences have happend both in the Church and State, for want of a due regulation and management of the said Schools, it is desired that your High Mightinesses would likewise take such care in that matter, as thereby to prevent and obviate all the abuses arising from thence, that the proper fruits thereof may be produced and enjoyed.

For which purpose, so far as it may concern the Universities, and the *Gymnasia* or High-Schools; the Synod humbly intreats your Lordships to attend to those Articles which were presented last year to the Lords the States of *Holland* and *West-Freesland* on the same account, by the Synod of *South-Holland*; copies of which are hereunto annex, to the end that they may be recommended to the States of the respective Provinces, where there are any such Universities or Schools.

But as for the trivial or inferiour Schools, the Synod likewise most humbly prays your High Mightinesses, that you would be pleased to order, that some general rules for the Government of such Schools be drawn up and prepared, by and with the advice of such learned men who understand best what relates to the instruction of Youth; whereby those defects, which are so frequently observed in Schools, may be amended; and as far as possible, a uniform method of teaching be established, especially in the principles of *Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric*.

And whereas it appears that the abuses in Matrimonial cases more and more increase, and that the Churches of these Provinces meet with many difficulties in relation thereto; and besides, that there is no uniform method observed about Marriages, your Lordships will be pleased, after

having consulted with the Divines, to appoint some general form of Marriages, such as may be observed by all the Churches of these Provinces, as far as is practicable.

'Tis likewise their humble request that, besides the present commendable Laws relating to the printing and selling of all kinds of books, some more effectual Orders may be made about visiting or inspecting books already printed, and also about the whole affair of printing, in order to prevent the publication of all sorts of pernicious and scandalous books, with which these Countries have been infected, to the very great hurt of the Church, and visible offence of the Community.

And since all good Christians, on account of that zeal and charity with which they are commanded to promote the honour of God, and their neighbours' salvation, are obliged to use all the means proper for those ends; since also God has been pleased to open a way for us of these Provinces to very remote and distant countries in the *Indies*, and elsewhere, which are intirely destitute of the knowledge of the true God; the said Synod humbly prays, that your Lordships would be pleased to lay this holy case to heart, with a Christian zeal, earnestly to take it into consideration, and to make use of such methods as may be most proper and expedient for the propagation of the Gospel in those countries.

Moreover, that your High Mightinesses would graciously be pleased to have an eye upon those good Christians and Churches, which are now groaning under the Cross in the neighbouring oppressed Provinces of the *Netherlands*, so as to find out and apply some means for their service, and for the strengthening them in the true religion; for which purposes your Lordships may be pleased to recommend it to the respective Provinces, to maintain some fit persons to serve the said churches, as the Lords the States of *Holland* and *West-Freesland*, and also those of *Zeeland* have long maintained, and still do maintain two Ministers on that account.

That at a proper season some care may likewise be taken about the Popish Priests, who still publickly officiate within the bounds of the *United Provinces*, and particularly in the Barony of *Breda*, and the Marquisate of *Bergen op Zoom*; to the end that said Priests be driven out of these places, and Reformed Ministers settled in their stead, as we see has been done in other parts of your Dominions.

Also, that your Laws and Placards against the creeping in, and strolling about of the aforesaid *Popish Priests and Jesuits*, may be put in execution, many simple souls being seduced by their means; and that some more effectual Laws be made against the exercise of Popish Idolatry; it being found by experience, that these abuses increase more and more every day. And that at the same time some way be thought on to restrain the blasphemies of those *Jews* who dwell in the midst of us, and to prevent them likewise from perverting any of our Christians to their religion.

Moreover, that the abominable and manifold profanations of the Sabbath, which daily happen by means of *Markets, Fairs, and Feastings of Companies; by keeping Watch and Ward, by merry Meetings and Weddings; by the Exercises of the Militia; by Fishng, Fowling, Stool-ball play; by Comedies, Dancing, frequenting of disorderly Houses and Clubs*; or by any kind of unnecessary servile works, and many other irregular customs, which are daily increasing in this land, to the great reproach and dishonour of the Reformed religion, and to the great obstruction of piety, may be forbidden and hindred.

And that those numerous and glaring abuses, by which the people are seduced from true holiness, to the pomps and vanities of the world; such as *Carnivals, Comedies, Farces of strolling Comedians and Mountebanks, Hocus-pocus tricks, drunken Clubs, Dancing-Schools*, and many other things of the like nature, may be prohibited and banished out of these Provinces: And above all, that some good Laws be made and executed by the Civil Magistrate against that dreadful *Cursing and Swearing*, which is daily heard among us, to the utmost dishonour of God's holy name.

And since it appears that in some places such forms of Oaths are used, which border upon Popish idolatry, we pray that there may be established one uniform manner of taking Oaths, and that the like abuses may cease.

Finally, since it appears that the maintenance of Ministers, and the pensions allowed to their Widows, are very mean in several Provinces, notwithstanding that the Church-lands, in the places to which such Ministers belong, would be sufficient for that purpose; the Synod does likewise beseech your High Mightinesses earnestly to recommend this matter to the respective

Provinces, to the end that the wants of the Clergy may be obviated, and they sufficiently provided for, as the dignity of their office requires.