

THE GRACE OF GOD AND FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: COMPARING THE SYNOD OF DORT AND JOHN CALVIN ON DEPRAVITY AND ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF THE CORRUPTION OF THE MIND



Andrew T. Hancock
Parkview Church, Iowa City

Abstract: This article examines how the Synod of Dort further developed John Calvin's ideas on the human depravity of the mind. The Synod of Dort carried forward Calvin's teachings by explaining human depravity in more measured terms and by using more nuanced descriptions of the depraved mind. Though the corruption of the human mind affected humanity's ability to properly learn spiritual truth, the Synod of Dort believed that the grace of God and faithful Christian education could overcome the problem. Dort understood that effective Christian education in homes, schools, and churches would lead to greater theological unity resulting in peace throughout the Netherlands in the early 17th century.

Key Words: John Calvin, Calvinism, Synod of Dort, Canons of the Synod of Dort, Reformed theology, human depravity, human nature, 17th century Christian education, Reformation

Introduction

Every summer, in the middle of the cornfields of Iowa, tens of thousands of people descend upon the little town of Pella to celebrate all things Dutch during the Tulip Festival. Many years ago, Dutch settlers traveled to the Midwest and made their home in Pella. Every year during the Tulip Festival, descendants of these Dutch families put their culture on display with a weekend full of traditional Dutch treats, windmills, wooden shoes, and thousands of beautiful tulips everywhere. During the festival, Dutch families take part in the annual scrubbing of the streets, where they throw soapy water on the

streets with buckets and clean them up, just as their ancestors did many years ago. As I watched the scrubbing of the streets this year, I was intrigued by how similar the children of these families looked compared to their parents. Many of the children looked very similar to their parents, yet still had unique clothing and personalities as they scrubbed the streets.

The strong Dutch influence is evident in education as well. Some of my Pella friends attended Dordt College, named for the Synod of Dort and its impact on Dutch history. Most of these friends know about the Synod of Dort and also know at least some basic teachings of John Calvin. It is apparent that the Synod of Dort had an impact on my Dutch friends and influenced their upbringing and education. So why was the Synod of Dort so influential? What did the Synod of Dort teach about human depravity and how does it relate to John Calvin? What were the implications for 17th-century Christian education derived from the Synod of Dort's theology on depravity? In examining the relationship of John Calvin and the Synod of Dort on human nature, it becomes apparent that it is much like the Dutch families scrubbing the streets at the Tulip Festival. Both generations of the family look extremely similar, yet each successive generation has its own unique characteristics—developing, clarifying, and adapting to the ever-changing world around them.

The Synod of Dort's relationship with Calvin's theology is one of continuity and development rather than a relationship of strict continuity or discontinuity. This relationship of continuity is particularly evidenced when comparing Dort and Calvin's ideas on human depravity. Dort continues Calvin's teaching on depravity and also carries it forward by explaining human depravity in more measured terms and by using more nuanced descriptions of the depraved mind. The Synod believed that the negative influence of the depravity of the mind on learning spiritual truths could be overcome by the grace of God in Jesus Christ and through faithful Christian education.

This article is organized into four sections. The first section recounts the historical situation surrounding the Synod of Dort. Section 2 explores John Calvin's relationship with Reformed tradition and argues that it is a relationship of continuity, as Calvin's teachings remain securely within the tradition of Reformed theology. The third section of this article describes how this relationship of continuity reveals itself, comparing Calvin to the Synod of Dort within the topic of human depravity. Specifically, section 3 provides examples of continuity within Dort and Calvin's teaching on depravity. Section 3 offers examples of how Dort develops Calvin's ideas by taking a more measured approach when explaining depravity and by being more nuanced when describing the corruption of the mind. The fourth section of this article explains the Synod of Dort's belief that the depravity of the mind could be overcome by the grace of God and through faithful and effective Christian education.

Due to the vast number of Reformed writings, I will generally limit my analysis to Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1845) and compare them to the *Canons of the Synod of Dort* (Brannan, 1997).

Background of the Synod of Dort

Controversy! This is a good word to describe the theological and cultural climate in the Netherlands in the early 1600s. The first couple of generations of Reformers, including Martin Luther and John Calvin, had written, preached, and taught about God's grace through faith in Christ alone. The Protestant Reformation spread throughout Europe, and Reformed beliefs took firm root in many Dutch communities. In the mid-1500s, Reformed churches in the Netherlands adopted the teachings of the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) as their standard for theological convictions. These confessions brought theological unity to the churches. However, following in the footsteps of Jacob Arminius, a growing number of teachers and preachers began spreading various disagreements with portions of the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism. In 1610, these men stated their disagreements in a confession called *The Remonstrance*, outlining five teachings in the Heidelberg Catechism with which they disagreed, followed by a list of their own views. The five views outlined in *The Remonstrance* are (a) God elects those he foresees will believe; (b) Christ died for all; (c) faith is from Christ and not from man; (d) grace can be resisted; and (e) it may be possible to lose one's faith and not persevere (Sinnema, Moser, & Selderhuis, 2015, xix). These teachers and preachers even said the beliefs they were in disagreement with were "not contained in the Word of God nor the Heidelberg Catechism, and are unedifying, yea dangerous, and should not be preached to Christian people" (Schaff, 2007, p. 517). This did not sit well with many church leaders. Quickly, a campaign was established to counter the five points of *The Remonstrance*. Sides were drawn: one group was called the Remonstrants and the opposite group was named the Contra-Remonstrants. At first, this disagreement was mostly a theological feud, but it quickly became political and spread throughout the entire country (Schaff, 2007). In many areas of the country, the Remonstrants ejected pastors and put Remonstrant leaders in their place. They scattered pamphlets to promote their ideas and garnered support from local leaders (Scott, 1831). The Contra-Remonstrants called these actions "horrid culumnities," "evil," and coming from a desire to alienate the people "more and more from the doctrine of the reformed churches" (Scott, 1831, p. 51). Political leaders also began to take sides, most notably Maurice of Nassau who later became Prince of Orange after 1617.

Maurice was a supporter of the Contra-Remonstrants, and it has been explained that he may not have known whether predestination was blue or green, but even if he did not know its color, he decided by his support to make it orange (Haley, 1972, p. 105).

By 1618, the Contra-Remonstrants had gained enough political and ecclesiological support to hold an official assembly of the Dutch Reformed church in the town of Dordrecht, or Dort for short. The group that gathered consisted of 84 members including international delegates, pastors and elders representing most areas of the Netherlands, professors of theology, state delegates, and a group of Remonstrants (Schaff, 2007; Sinnema, Moser, & Selderhuis, 2015). The Synod met for six months and made a number of key decisions, including drafting new church polity, reviewing and reapproving the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, writing expanded instructions for catechisms, and approving work to begin on a new Dutch translation of the Bible (Sinnema, Moser, & Selderhuis, 2015). The main goal of the Synod was to reestablish peace in the churches by resolving the Remonstrant issue. The Synod did so by writing and distributing the *Canons of Dort* (1619), a document responding to the Remonstrant beliefs that God elects people on the basis of their foreseen faith, that God's grace is resistible, and that it could be possible for a believer to lose salvation and not persevere. The Canons reaffirmed Contra-Remonstrant beliefs: (a) that election is unconditional and faith a gift of God; (b) that the death of Christ is sufficient to expiate the sins of the world, but its efficacy is particular to the elect; (c) that all men are corrupted by sin and are saved by God's grace through Christ; and (d) that all those whom God saved will persevere to the end.

As a result of the Synod of Dort, theological unity and peace were reestablished in the churches. About 200 Remonstrants were banned from churches and leadership positions. The *Canons of Dort* became a unifying document for the churches and helped refine and sharpen Reformed theology. Believers employed effective practices of Christian education in the homes, churches, and schools to help people learn and apply the truths in the Canons. Herman Selderhuis (Sinnema, Moser, & Selderhuis, 2015) summarizes the impact of the Synod: "Dordt became the unifying force for generations of Calvinist Reformed churches worldwide that accepted the Canons as their confessional basis and norm" (p. xv).

Calvin, Dort, and Reformed Tradition

In light of the significance of these historical events, it is important to examine whether or not The *Canons of Dort* were theologically aligned with the teachings of John Calvin. Many people today view John Calvin (1509–1564)

as extremely influential in Reformed tradition, living and writing half a century before the Synod of Dort. How are Dort and Calvin related? This article argues that Dort and Calvin have a relationship of continuity and development. They both remain within the same family of Reformed thought, yet Dort's ideas represent development in key areas of theology—mainly related to the Remonstrant controversy. In examining the relationship of Calvin and Reformed tradition, two problematic views must be avoided: the strictly discontinuous perspective and the strictly continuous perspective.

The Strictly Discontinuous Perspective

The strictly discontinuous perspective about the relationship of Calvin and Reformed tradition has often been called the “Calvin against the Calvinists” view. This view claims that while Calvin was the founder and norm for the Reformed tradition, in the ensuing generations after his death, his followers manipulated and corrupted his teachings so that they no longer represented Calvin's ideas. A few notable scholars who hold this view are R. T. Kendall, Basil Hall, and Brian Armstrong. These writers argue for larger gap between the thought of Calvin and later generations of Reformers. An example of their view is evident within the topic of the atonement as they argued for a concept of a universal or hypothetical universal atonement in Calvin, which differed from the views of many Reformers such as Theodore Beza (1519–1605) and the Synod of Dort (1619) (Armstrong, 1969; Hall, 1966; Kendall, 1979). The problem with the Calvin against the Calvinists view is that a strong connection exists between Calvin and the Reformed theologians who came after him as many of the themes in Calvin's writings are reflected in preceding generations. An extensive amount of excellent scholarship has recently been developed to debunk this Calvin against the Calvinists view, most notably from the work of Richard A. Muller (2001), who explains that this view has “given way to the portrait of a highly complex tradition in process of development” (p. 12). Muller explains that the Calvin against the Calvinists view is part of an old master narrative of interpreting Calvin and the Reformed tradition that has been reappraised and reassessed (Muller, 2012). Calvin was important in the development of Reformed thought, carrying forward Reformed themes that were also reflected in generations after him. In commenting about the strictly discontinuous view, Muller (2012) explains,

Calvin's thought is placed into the context of this developing tradition, he appears as one of several major codifiers or systematizers of the second generation of the Reformation, whose thought was not always appropriated directly into the theologies of later generations of Reformed exegetes, theologians, and pastors. (p. 10)

The Reformed tradition is a diverse movement neither founded solely on Calvin nor a complete deviation from Calvin (Muller, 2012).

The Strictly Continuous Perspective

The strictly continuous perspective about the relationship of Calvin and Reformed tradition has often been called the “Calvin for the Calvinists” view. This view suggests Calvin as the norm and standard of Reformed theology whose ideas should be used when assessing later Reformed tradition, hence a relationship that is strictly continuous. Example scholars within this view are George Park Fisher (1901) and Leonard Trinterud (1951). The problem with this view is that it elevates Calvin to a place of prominence that he should not have. Calvin certainly was instrumental in the development of Reformed tradition, but he is not the only voice of the Reformation nor should his ideas be viewed as the standard and norm for all Reformed thought (Muller, 2012, p. 36). Overall, it is important to read Calvin in a balanced way as a significant voice in the Reformed tradition, but not as the norm, standard, or as the founding father of the tradition.

The Synod of Dort in Reformed Tradition

So where do the ideas of the Synod of Dort fit within this conversation of Calvin and Reformed tradition? The theology of Dort must be placed within the trajectory of the continued development of Reformed thought as Dort modifies, elaborates, and enhances certain topics of Reformed tradition. In reflecting on Dort's relation to the strictly discontinuous perspective, Herman Selderhuis (Sinnema, Moser, & Selderhuis, 2015) explains, “Recent scholarship, however, has shown that this thesis is untenable, and that the Canons are a deeper elaboration of one specific set of issues (i.e., predestination and related points). This is evident from the text of the Canons” (p. xxx). Richard Muller (2012) agrees by explaining that Calvin and his contemporaries held to doctrines that stand in clear continuity with the *Canons of Dort* (pp. 58–59). An important scholar who contributed greatly to the transmission of this trajectory of Reformed thought from Calvin to Dort is Theodore Beza (1519–1605). Beza taught, wrote, and preached in Geneva for many years after Calvin's death, preserving and furthering Calvin's ideas within Reformed tradition. Within a little over a decade after Beza's death, the Synod of Dort met to produce the Canons. The authors of *The Calvin Handbook* (Selderhuis, 2009) explain that the *Canons of Dort* “reflect much of Calvin's thinking and theology” and the central concerns “are basically continuous with Calvin and the early reformers,” yet Dort is more focused

in its scope of topics “primarily concerned with a narrow range of issues raised for the Dutch church by the rise of Arminianism” (pp. 505,477). The theology of Dort exists in the same family of Reformed tradition with Calvin, yet Dort is also a part of a new, developing generation that nuanced and focused its theology in order to refute the articles of the Remonstrants. Armed with the nuanced and focused theology of the Canons, the churches were able to refute the teachings of the Remonstrants and help people learn and apply sound doctrine as they employed effective practices of Christian education.

Thus far this article has discussed both the history of the Synod of Dort and also the relationship of Calvin and Dort within Reformed tradition. While a full treatment of the scope of topics represented in the *Canons of Dort* and John Calvin is beyond the parameters of this article, the particular topic of human depravity in Calvin and Dort will now be explored in order to demonstrate continuity yet development within Reformed tradition.

Human Depravity in Calvin and Dort

The Synod of Dort continues Calvin’s ideas on human depravity and also develops them further.

Depravity: Continuity in Dort and Calvin

Genesis 3 tells of how Adam and Eve sinned against God their Creator by eating the forbidden fruit. As a result, human nature became corrupted by sin as humanity fell from the state of original perfection of creation. The whole of the human race fell into sin resulting in the corruption of every human being (Rom 5:12). This idea of widespread corruption is what theologians have termed “depravity,” which is the sinfulness, corruption, and pollution of human nature (Erickson, 2001, p. 49). In regards to this doctrine of depravity, both Dort and Calvin teach that the fall of humanity resulted in the corruption of God’s original design. The result of this corruption is that all people deserve death and eternal punishment. Furthermore, it is a corruption so deep that no one, apart from Christ, is able to or willing to return to God.

The Synod of Dort began the Canons by stating, “All men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are deserving of eternal death” (*Canons*, 1:1). The Canons teach that this corruption is widespread and that the whole human race has become corrupted as men have “wholly given themselves up to the cares of the world and the pleasures of the flesh” (*Canons*, 1:7). The Canons also explain that the original fall of Adam has resulted in a corrupt

human nature in each generation by using the phrase “a corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring” (*Canons*, 3/4:2). The *Canons* state,

All men are conceived in sin, and are by nature children of wrath, incapable of saving good, prone to evil, dead in sin, and in bondage thereto; and without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit, they are neither able nor willing to return to God, to reform the depravity of their nature, or to dispose themselves to reformation. (*Canons*, 3/4:3)

This corruption has resulted in men possessing perverse, impure, and unstable minds, and they are unable to deliver themselves from the wrath of God (*Canons*, 1:6; 2:2).

John Calvin explains fallen human nature with many of the same themes as Dort. Calvin taught that the entire human race has become corrupted and that this corruption is an inheritance of each generation after Adam as a “perpetual corruption of nature” (*Institutes*, 2.3.2). Calvin, like Dort, taught that the whole of humanity is fallen and is unable to deliver itself from its state of sin. Calvin taught that “there is no part in which it is not perverted and corrupted.... All are overwhelmed with inevitable calamity, and can be delivered from it only by the mercy of God” (*Institutes*, 2.3.2). Calvin taught that fallen human nature’s character is one of widespread depravity with an inward distortion of character that polluted all human acts and rendered each person utterly unworthy before God (Muller, 2012). Michael Horton (2014) explains the term *total depravity* as it relates to Calvin’s view of fallen human nature: “For Calvin, then, total depravity does not mean that we are as bad as we can possibly be, but that all of our best thoughts, feelings, willing, and actions fall short of God’s glory” (p. 69). Anthony Lane, in *The Calvin Handbook* (Selderhuis, 2009), summarizes Calvin’s view of the corruption of humanity well: “Calvin believed that the fall changed humanity radically for the worse, if not the worst. The whole human nature is corrupted (p. 278). “No part of human nature is exempt from depravity” (p. 280). There is, therefore, much similarity and continuity in Calvin and Dort regarding the topic of fallen human nature.

Depravity: Development in Dort

Not only is there continuity, but there also exists development and modification within the *Canons of Dort* in relation to Calvin on fallen human nature. Dort’s development of Calvin’s ideas on human depravity is evidenced by (a) Dort’s more measured language when describing fallen humanity and (b) by Dort’s more nuanced and refined description of the depraved human mind.

First, Dort's development of Calvin's ideas on the corruption of human nature is evidenced by using more measured language when describing fallen humanity. Calvin's strength of language regarding the state of fallen humanity is more intense and bold when compared to Dort. According to Calvin,

1. Humanity is so corrupted "that any thing which remains is fearful deformity" (*Institutes*, 1.15.4).
2. Humanity is so "enslaved by depraved lusts as to be incapable of one righteous desire" (*Institutes*, 2.2.12).
3. Man is "utterly destitute" (*Institutes*, 2.2.9).
4. Man's fallen will has "the most eager inclination disposed and hastening to sin" (*Institutes*, 2.3.5).
5. Human nature "is not only utterly devoid of goodness, but so prolific in all kinds of evil, that it can never be idle" (*Institutes*, 2.1.8).

The Synod of Dort does use phrases such as "corrupt stock," "depravity of nature," and "prone to evil," but these terms are mild compared to Calvin (*Canons*, 3/4:2). Richard Muller (2012) explains,

Whereas Calvin himself used phrases such as 'totally depraved' and 'utterly perverse,' such terminology does not appear in the Canons of Dort, which declare briefly that 'all have sinned in Adam' and are therefore under the curse and destined for eternal death. In other words, on the issue of the 'T' in TULIP, the language of the Canons of Dort is more measured than that of Calvin. (p. 59)

The idea of human depravity is certainly taught in the *Canons of Dort* but Calvin's terms such as "totally depraved," "enslaved by depraved lusts," "utterly devoid of goodness," and "utterly destitute" are more intense than those of Dort (*Institutes*, 2.1.8, 2.2.9, 2.2.12). Calvin and Dort both teach that the entire human race is corrupted as a result of the fall, yet Dort's language in describing depravity carries forward Calvin's ideas by using descriptions that are more measured and softened in intensity.

Second, Dort's development of Calvin's ideas on the corruption of human nature is evidenced by a more nuanced and refined description of the depraved human mind. Both Dort and Calvin teach that the human mind has become wholly polluted by sin, yet Dort's ideas are also refined and nuanced when compared to Calvin. Richard Muller (2012) summarizes this development and modification in Dort: "Arguably, the *Canons of Dort* and the Reformed orthodox theologians who followed and supported its formulae, offer a clearer, more nuanced and, indeed, more moderate understanding of

fallen human nature than what can be found in Calvin's writings" (p. 60). But exactly how does Dort offer a clearer, more nuanced, and more moderate understanding of fallen human nature as Muller suggests? One example is Calvin's descriptions of the effect of the fall on the human mind versus Dort's descriptions. A sample of Calvin's descriptions is as follows:

1. The mind of men became "weak and immersed in darkness" (*Institutes*, 2.2.12).
2. His reasoning abilities were so weakened and corrupted that "a shapeless ruin is all that remains" (*Institutes*, 2.2.12).
3. The mind has some sparks to show that men are rational beings but these sparks are likened to a light that "is so smothered by clouds of darkness that it cannot shine forth to any good effect" (*Institutes*, 2.2.12).
4. Man's ability to understand God and his paternal favor is described as nonexistent. In this characteristic humans are "blinder than moles" (*Institutes*, 2.2.18).

Calvin describes the fallen human mind as immersed in darkness, shapeless and ruined, blind and nonexistent, and smothered by the clouds of darkness. According to Calvin, the mind of sinful man is darkened and incapable of understanding God's goodness (*Institutes*, 2.2.12).

Dort describes the effect of the fall on man's understanding abilities as man has "become involved in blindness of mind" (*Canons*, 3/4:1). This is in contrast to being in the image of God before the fall as Dort describes that the mind was then adorned with saving knowledge of the Creator and of spiritual things. The *Canons of Dort* also describe the state of fallen human mind as "understanding that has been rendered wholly polluted" (*Canons*, 3/4:4). The result is a state of unrighteousness before God. But Dort takes a more nuanced tone about the human mind compared to Calvin. Dort says, "But as men by the fall did not cease to be a creature endowed with understanding and will..." (*Canons*, 3/4:16). Dort also explains, "There remain, however, in man since the fall, the glimmerings of natural understanding, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behavior" (*Canons*, 3/4:4). Indeed, Dort acknowledges that the mind is polluted because of sin, but Dort's teaching on the mind is more nuanced and refined than Calvin. Dort teaches that the depraved mind retains some knowledge of God and some evidences of morality. This idea of the glimmerings of natural understanding in the depraved mind is something that Calvin does not stress to the same degree as Dort.

In review, this article has explained the history of the Synod of Dort, established the relationship of Calvin and Dort within the Reformed tradition, and demonstrated how Dort both continues Calvin's ideas and also develops them further in regards to human depravity after the fall. Next, this article will focus on implications for 17th-century practices of Christian education related to the Synod of Dort's view of human depravity and its effect on the mind.

Implications for Seventeenth-Century Christian Education

A major goal of the Synod of Dort was to restore peace to a country in turmoil. The Synod of Dort was essentially a gathering of pastors, teachers, and leaders of the country to examine the Word of God that resulted in the publishing of a new theological document. This document was written to counter the Remonstrants while simultaneously retaining a strong commitment to Reformed theology. The Synod believed that the *Canons of Dort* would be a powerful tool used to restore peace as they desired that "true doctrine might be confirmed and false rejected" resulting in "tranquility of consciences, and for the peace and safety of the Belgic church" (Scott, 1831, pp. 80–81). It was the will of the Synod that the Canons would circulate throughout the country in order to help people understand Reformed beliefs related to the Remonstrant controversy: "All the reformed churches are requested, willingly to embrace, preserve, and propagate this orthodox doctrine, so solemnly in this Synod, explained and confirmed from the word of God; and transmit it to all posterity, to the glory of divine grace, and the consolation and salvation of souls" (Scott, 1831, pp. 75–76). The *Canons of Dort* became a document, along with the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, that every new minister, professor, and elder was required to sign in agreement. A major component of Dort's strategy to reestablish peace was to request the Canons to be taught in the churches so that true doctrine would be confirmed and false doctrine rejected. This would require that church leaders possess the ability to understand, embrace, and teach the Canons. The people of the country would need to accept and learn the Canons with willing hearts and minds inclined toward spiritual realities. But how could this process of teaching and learning be effective given the Synod's teaching on depravity and its negative effect on the mind?

As demonstrated in this article, the Synod believed that because of the fall human nature became polluted, corrupted, and depraved. The result of this corruption is that the entirety of each person is inclined toward sin, including the mind. The Synod taught that there were positive glimmers in the mind

of depraved man in the area of knowledge of God and morality, providing some hope for learning. However, the Synod also taught that though these positive glimmerings existed, the human mind remained wholly corrupted and unable to demonstrate true spiritual understanding. An implication of this doctrine is that spiritual teaching and learning has become hindered because of the corruption of sin. Given this truth about sin's pollution of each mind, how could the Synod realistically believe that people would effectively learn the spiritual truths of the Canons? In short, the Synod emphasized that proper spiritual learning could be accomplished by the grace of God in the name of Christ and through faithful Christian education.

The Grace of God in Jesus Christ

The Synod of Dort believed that the grace of God in the name of Jesus Christ could overcome the sinful corruption of the mind so that the spiritual truths of the Canons could be effectively learned. The prayer of the Synod was

May Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who, sitting at the right hand of the Father, bestows gifts to men, sanctify us in the truth; lead those to the truth who err; shut the mouths of those who cullumnate the holy doctrine; and endow the faithful ministers of his word with a spirit of wisdom and discretion, that all their eloquence may tend to the glory of God and the edification of the hearers. Amen. (Scott, 1831, p. 126)

This prayer demonstrates the Synod's belief that the work of teaching, learning, and edification would be done through the power of Jesus Christ himself as he gave faithful ministers wisdom and discretion. As they appealed to Jesus Christ to do the work, the leaders of the Synod recognized that the power of the grace of God through his Son would sanctify people in the truth and give ministers wisdom to teach—all to the glory of God. In their decision concerning the Remonstrants, the Synod explained that the work of restoring peace would be "by the grace of God," "in the name of Christ," and "in the Lord" (Scott, 1831, p. 126). The Synod recognized that human depravity, including the corruption of the mind that hindered people's learning, could be overcome by the work of Christ as he led people to believe in him. This conversion would result in the regeneration of the entire person, including the heart, will, and mind. This regeneration would give believers a renewed mind to understand God's ways, resulting in the desire to learn and apply biblical principles, including the principles taught in the Canons. One result of Christ's work in salvation is that biblical and spiritual truth can be understood and applied effectively through the process of renewing the mind (Rom 8:6; 12:2; Eph 4:23–24).

Faithful Christian Education

How exactly could the spiritual matters contained in the Canons be understood and applied? The Synod's plan was clear: the Canons would be understood and applied through faithful Christian education. The Synod desired that pastors at the churches, teachers at the schools, and all who cared for the souls of people would (a) cast away the erroneous articles of the Remonstrants, (b) faithfully explain the teaching of the Canons, and (c) instruct those who had been led astray in the truth that they might be restored to sound mind and return to the church (Scott, 1831). The anticipated result of this faithful Christian education would be that all the members of the church would have "one heart and mind in the Lord" (Scott, 1831, p. 127).

To put the plan into action, Dort adopted a "scheme of Christian education" that explained three modes of instruction (Barnard, 1681, pp. 77–78). The three modes of Christian education were (a) in the houses by parents, (b) in the schools by teachers, and (c) in the churches by pastors, elders, and catechists. The Synod exhorted parents to diligently instruct their children in the principles of the Christian religion and prepare them for catechism. Parents should take their children to church and be punctual with family worship. Parents were also encouraged to assign Bible verses to read, quiz their children about the sermons, and help them memorize Scripture. The schools should be places for instructing the young in proper Christian doctrine as the teachers should memorize and teach Reformed beliefs. Likewise, the churches were to ensure that Reformed doctrine was taught and catechisms preached with "cordiality, faithfulness, zeal, and discretion" (Barnard, 1681, pp. 77–78). Church leaders should protect their congregations from the false doctrine of the Remonstrants by "diligently watching over the flocks" and by driving away those who believed in the false teaching (Scott, 1831, pp. 128–129). The Synod believed that faithful Christian education in the family, the schools, and the churches would yield abundant fruit in "growth in religious knowledge, and holiness of life, to the glory of God, and the prosperity of the Church of Christ" (Barnard, 1681, p. 78). Why was the Synod so concerned with the particulars of Christian education? Because faithful Christian education empowered by the grace of God in the name of Christ was believed to be instrumental in restoring sound mindedness, reestablishing peace to the churches, and protecting against false teachers (Scott, 1831, pp. 126–127).

Applications for Christian Education Today

The task of Christian education today, as in the days of Dort, must include all three modes: in the houses by parents, in the schools by teachers, and in the churches by pastors and other leaders. Teachers at Christian

schools should take to heart Dort's exhortations to the schools as a model by studying and memorizing doctrine as they instruct the young in spiritual truths (Barnard, 1681, pp. 77–78). Being reminded of Dort's exhortations, today's churches can be a powerful arena of faithful Christian education as they employ initiatives to teach biblical truth. Perhaps the most important mode of Dort's "scheme of education" is in the houses by the parents. Within the scheme, parents were exhorted to diligently instruct their children in the principles of the Christian religion; earnestly and carefully admonish them toward the cultivation of true piety; engage their punctual attendance in family worship; and take them to hear the Word of God (Barnard, 1681, p. 77). This is a high calling and exemplary model for today's parents. By taking to heart Dort's specific exhortations, parents today will recognize their critical role as the primary disciple-makers of their children as they train them in the fear of God (Nelson & Jones, 2011). Churches assist in this task by intentionally and consistently coordinating their ministries to help parents disciple their children (Jones, 2011).

The Synod of Dort taught about the widespread and all-pervasive nature of the depravity of the mind (*Canons*, 3/4:1; 3/4:4). This corruption of the mind still impacts Christian education today as believers live in the inaugurated eschatological realities of being made already but yet not fully complete in Christ (Rom 6:1–14; 8:18–25). Gregg Allison explains that the task of Christian education encounters a "host of difficulties" due to the "pervasive depravity" with which humans are beset including sinning in the mind and resisting the transforming work of God (Estep, Anthony, & Allison, pp. 192–194). The Apostle Paul felt this as he battled the inclinations to sin that were waging war within his mind (Rom 7:21–23). To combat this reality, Christian educators must be ever-diligent, like Dort, to understand and teach theological truth with great precision, recognizing theology as the foundation and core aspect of Christian education that informs its tasks, targets, and theory (Estep, Anthony, & Allison, pp. 297–300). As theology is correctly taught, Christian educators become major catalysts in the process of transformation through the renewing of minds (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23–24). Dockery explains that this process of renewal engages in loving God with all of the mind (Matt 22:36–40) through adopting a biblical worldview that thinks critically and theologically about every aspect of life (2008, pp. 8–9).

Conclusion

The Synod of Dort had a significant impact on 17th-century Reformed theology and Christian education. This article has argued that the theology of Dort is in continuity with John Calvin. Dort's relationship to John Calvin

is similar to that of the families I saw scrubbing the streets in Pella at the Tulip Festival. Both generations of the family looked extremely alike, yet each successive generation demonstrated its own unique characteristics as they adapted and developed. Dort demonstrated this adaptation and development by sharpening and modifying principles of Calvin's theology particularly as they related to the Remonstrant controversy. This article explored Dort's continuity and development in one particular area of theology: human depravity. Dort carried Calvin's ideas further on depravity by explaining human corruption in more measured terms as well as refining descriptions of the depraved human mind. Though the corruption of the human mind affected humanity's ability to properly learn spiritual truth, Dort believed that the grace of God in Christ could overcome the problem. The Synod of Dort also believed that faithful Christian education in homes, schools, and churches would lead to greater theological unity resulting in peace throughout the country once again.

The Synod of Dort's desire for unity, peace, and theological clarity came to fruition. In the decades after the Synod, the *Canons of Dort* along with the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism were faithfully taught through Christian education and the much-sought-after peace was reestablished in the Reformed churches. The influence of the Synod of Dort has also spanned centuries. Today, some call Dort the Great Synod, because great was its length—half a year. Great was its method—patient and thorough. Great was its personnel—influential Reformed leaders of the time. And great was its fruit—it produced the *Canons* (Hoeksema, 1980, p. 17). The influence of the Synod of Dort still has an impact today on Reformed theology, Dutch Reformed churches and schools, and even on the Christian education of my friends from Pella, Iowa.

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AUTHOR

Andrew T. Hancock (M.Div., currently an Ed.D. student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) serves as Young Adults Pastor at Parkview Church in Iowa City, Iowa. Email: ahancock@parkviewchurch.org