

Remonstrant Confession

The **Remonstrant Confession** or literally the **Confession or Declaration of the Pastors which are called Remonstrants** refers to the [confession of faith](#) of the [Remonstrant brotherhood](#), published in 1621.

Historical context

By the decrees of the [Synod of Dort](#), the church services of the Remonstrants were prohibited. They united in 1619 at [Antwerp](#), where the basis for a new church community was laid, under the name Remonstrant Reformed Brotherhood. [Uytenbogaert](#) and [Episcopus](#), who had found a refuge in [Rouen](#), and Grevinchoven, formerly a preacher of [Rotterdam](#), now in Holstein, assumed the leadership of the Brotherhood while three exiled preachers secretly returned to their country to care for the congregations left there; for in spite of the unfavorable decree, there was still left a considerable number who would not hear the doctrine of absolute grace preached, and there were not wanting deposed preachers who dared to serve them. In 1621 Episcopus drew up a *Confessio sive declaratio sententiæ pastorum qui Remonstrantes vocantur* [*Confession or Declaration of the Pastors which are called Remonstrants*], which found a large circulation in its Dutch translation.^[1] Episcopus was actually the leading theologian of the Remonstrants.^[2]

Dr. Mark A. Ellis, states: "They intended it as a concise, easily understandable statement of their faith and a corrective to what they viewed as the misrepresentations published in the *Acts of the Synod of Dort*."^[3]

The Confession of 1621

Purpose

Concerning the purpose and the scope of the *Confession* Ellis, states:

"Many [Remonstrants] were hesitant, fearful of establishing the same type of creedalism which had resulted in their persecution and banishment. The Preface to the *Confession*, which the Remonstrants considered an integral part of the document, emphasized its non-binding character. The society eventually judged it more important to prove their orthodoxy to those who wanted to assist them, to silence the misrepresentations of their opposition, and most of all, to encourage and unite the now distressed and scattered Remonstrants. They

selected Episcopius and two others to write it, but in the end, he did the work alone."^[4]

The text

The confession was completed and approved in 1620. The Dutch edition was published in 1621, the Latin in 1622.^[4] The text itself is composed of one preface and 25 chapters,^{[5][6]} which deal successively with:

- Chapter 1: The sacred scriptures
- Chapters 2-6: God nature, deeds and providence mode
- Chapters 7-10: Christ salvation deeds toward men
- Chapters 11-16: Christian spiritual life aspects
- Chapters 17-20: God's election mode, and eschatological considerations
- Chapters 21-25: Church and Christian ministry aspects

Theological views

Theological legacy

[Roger E. Olson](#) notes that the *Confession* is substantially aligned with [Jacobus Arminius](#) views.^[7]

Ellis adds that "the *Confession* does not reflect Arminius theology alone. It also represents those who were Arminian before Arminius (such as Wtenbogaert and older pastors), together with Episcopius" own creative impulses."^[3]

Refutation of Socinian charge

In the *confession*, the Remonstrants gave a clear repudiation of [Socinianism](#)'s denials of the divinity of Christ and the trinity:

Therefore, the Son and the Holy Spirit, although both are divine with respect to their hypostasis, manner, and order, are truly distinct from the Father; yet they are truly partakers with the Father of the same deity or divine essence and nature absolutely and commonly considered [...]^[8]

Affirmation of total depravity

The remonstrants had denied [Pelagianism](#) in the original *Five articles of Remonstrance* of 1610, and repeated the same in the *Confession*, affirming again the [total depravity](#) of man:^[3]

Because Adam was the stock and root of the whole human race, he therefore involved and implicated not only himself, but also all his posterity (as if they were contained in his loins and went forth from him by natural generation) in the same death and misery with himself, so that all men without any discrimination, only our Lord Jesus Christ excepted, are by this one sin of Adam deprived of that primeval happiness, and destitute of true righteousness necessary for achieving eternal life, and consequently are now born subject to that eternal death of which we spoke, and manifold miseries.^[9]

It was from this that the highest necessity and also advantage of divine grace, prepared for us in Christ the Savior before the ages, clearly appeared. For without it we could neither shake off the miserable yoke of sin, nor do anything truly good in all religion, nor finally ever escape eternal death or any true punishment of sin. Much less could we at any time obtain eternal salvation without it or through ourselves.^[10]

Affirmation of prevenient grace

The Remonstrants had previously denied [Semipelagianism](#) and reaffirmed in the *Confession* the [prevenient grace](#) of God:^[3]

“We think therefore that the grace of God is the beginning, progress and completion of all good, so that not even a regenerate man himself can, without this preceding, or preventing, exciting, following and cooperating grace, think, will, or finish any good thing to be saved, much lest resist any attractions and temptations to evil.”^[11]

They differed with their opponents not over the necessity of grace, but in their belief that a person can “despise and reject the grace of God and resist its operation”.^[12] [Roger Olson](#) sees here and elsewhere in the *Confession* a depiction of the [Prevenient grace](#), consistent with the one presented by [Charles Wesley](#).^[13]

Affirmation of conditional preservation of the Saints

In the *Five articles of Remonstrance*, the Remonstrants proposed that the [perseverance of the saints](#), may be conditional upon the faith and obedience. Sometime between 1610, and the official proceeding of the Synod of Dort (1618), the Remonstrants became persuaded of [conditional preservation of the saints](#), and of the possibility of [apostasy](#), which is that a true believer is capable of falling away from faith and perishing eternally as an unbeliever. They formalized their views in "The Opinion of the Remonstrants" (1618).^[14]

In the *Confession*, the Remonstrants simply confirmed that opinion in several ways. For instance they held that:

Even if it is true that those who are adept in the habit of faith and holiness can only with difficulty fall back to their former profaneness and dissoluteness of life, yet we believe that it is entirely possible, if not rarely done, that they fall back little by little and until they completely lack their prior faith and charity. And having abandoned the way of righteousness, they revert to their worldly impurity which they had truly left, returning like pigs to wallowing in the mud and dogs to their vomit, and are again entangled in lusts of the flesh which they had formerly, truly fled. And thus totally and at length also they are finally torn from the grace of God unless they seriously repent in time.^[15]

Rejection of scholasticism

Ellis says :

We find in the *Confession* a corollary to the rejection of [Reformed scholasticism](#), the Remonstrant insistence that all true theology was entirely practical and not speculative or theoretical. Whatever the modern equivocations over the meaning of "speculative theology," for Episcopius it signified theology which was derived from reason rather than from Scripture and served to satisfy theological curiosity rather than promote the worship of God. [...] This emphasis on theology as a practical science became one of the hallmarks of Remonstrant theology.^[16]

Reception

The reception of the *Confession* was mixed among the [Dutch Reformed](#), some praised it while others considered it heterodox.^[17] Several theologians from the Netherlands, France, England,

Denmark and Germany in particular declared it to be orthodox and moderate. It was also approved by the Anabaptists.^[17]

Revisions of 1940 and 2006

The *Remonstrant confession* of 1621 was revised and published in a succinct form in 1940, losing most of its original details.^[18] This revision was made as a testimony against the spiritual pretensions of [National Socialism](#) at the start of the German occupation of the Netherlands (1940-1945).

Afterwards a slight revision was done in 2006. The text does not start with God the Father (as is customary) but with the person who realizes and accepts "that existence is infinitely greater than we can comprehend". Next, reference is made to the inspiration by the Holy Spirit ; this leads to Jesus and Jesus refers to God.^[19] This change in the classical order of the Christian confession is remarkable, but it also characterizes the current remonstrants views: faith starts with people.^[20]

See also

- [Arminianism](#)

Notes and references

Citations

1. [Schaff & Herzog 1953](#), Chap. 2.
2. [Chisholm 1911](#), p. 82.
3. [Episcopius & Ellis 2005a](#), p. 5.
4. [Episcopius & Ellis 2005a](#), p. 9.
5. [Episcopius & Ellis 2005b](#).
6. [Episcopius & Taylor 1676](#).
7. [Olson 2015](#). Anyone who reads the Remonstrant Confession of 1621, authored by Episcopius, will be hard pressed to find any substantial disagreement with Arminius' own views.
8. [Episcopius & Ellis 2005b](#), Chap 3.3.
9. [Episcopius & Ellis 2005b](#), Chap 7.1.
10. [Episcopius & Ellis 2005b](#), Chap 7.10.
11. [Episcopius & Ellis 2005b](#), Chap 17.6.
12. [Episcopius & Ellis 2005b](#), p. 6.

13. [Olson 2011](#). This is not all the Confession says about prevenient grace; the whole context makes crystal clear that this Remonstrant confession agrees entirely with Charles Wesley's great hymn.
14. [DeJong 1968](#), pp. 220-. Points three and four in the fifth article read: True believers can fall from true faith and can fall into such sins as cannot be consistent with true and justifying faith; not only is it possible for this to happen, but it even happens frequently. True believers are able to fall through their own fault into shameful and atrocious deeds, to persevere and to die in them; and therefore finally to fall and to perish.
15. [Episcopius & Ellis 2005b](#), Chap 11.7.
16. [Episcopius & Ellis 2005a](#), pp. 7–8.
17. [Brandt 1726](#), p. 325-326.
18. [LBR 2019a](#), Remonstrant confession of 1940. We believe in the holy, almighty God, our Creator and Lord, whose wisdom is unfathomable, whose judgement is about everything, He is just and merciful, our Heavenly Father, who wants to adopt all in His love; the Source of all good. We believe in Jesus Christ, Effigy of God's holy Being and Revelation and His Grace. For all he came and for all he died. He brings God's eternal love close, which forgives and reconciles. He calls us to labor and struggle in the victorious sign of the Cross, and is for man and community the Way, the Truth and the Life. We believe in God's Holy Spirit, which opens our hearts to the Truth and inspiringly pours into us, so that we, in the freedom of the Spirit and in love towards one another, unite ourselves in worship and in holy service of God. We believe in the Communion of Saints, in which the Church of Christ is founded, which is one in diversity. As a witness of Christ on earth the Church has the sacred mission to preach the Gospel and lead souls on the eternal journey. We believe in the Kingdom of God, which is and will come through God's will and power. This kingdom breaks through where Christ reigns in the hearts, and it comes in its fullness when Christ has prevailed. Then God will be in His eternal glory forever: All in all. To Him be the glory and honour in time and eternity. Amen
19. [LBR 2019a](#), Remonstrant confession of 2006. We are aware and we affirm, that we do not find our peace in the certainty of what we confess, but in wonder of what befalls us and what we are given; that we do not find our destination in indifference and greed, but in vigilance and in connection with all that lives; that our existence is not fulfilled by who we are and what we possess, but by what is infinitely greater than we can contain. Guided by this awareness, we believe in God's Spirit who transcends all that divides people and inspires them to what is holy and good, that in singing and in silence, in prayer and in work, they worship and serve God. We believe in Jesus, a Spirit-filled human, the face of God, seeing us and disturbing us. He loved humanity and was crucified but he lives, beyond his own and our death. He is our holy example of wisdom and courage and he brings God's eternal love close to us. We believe in God, the Eternal, who is love unfathomed, the ground of being, who shows us the way of freedom and justice and beckons us to a future of peace. We believe that weak and fallible though we are, we are called to be church, connected to Christ and all who believe, in the sign of hope. For we believe in the future of God and the world, in a divine patience that gives time to live and to die and to rise, in the kingdom that is and will come, where God will be for eternity: all in all. To God be the glory and honour in time and eternity. Amen
20. [LBR 2019b](#), 1. Faith starts with you. What does that mean exactly?.

Sources

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External links

- [The Society of Evangelical Arminians \(http://evangelicalarminians.org/\)](http://evangelicalarminians.org/)

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