

Critical Comments on the Synod of Dort, Fear, and Worship

By: Dan Mages

The more I reflect upon the history of Christianity, and particularly the Reformed tradition, the more convinced I become that fear is a reoccurring theme and primary motivation for obedience. It is out of the terror of hell that masses have been converted, it is out of sheer horror of endless torment and torture that people are urged to bow and submit to God. Sinners are in the hands of an angry God according to Jonathan Edwards. What is utterly detestable to me is that God, according to the Synod of Dort, decided the final outcome of this inconceivable fate before any decisions by his creatures were ever made. All things are according to God's eternal decree. This amounts to every woman that was ever raped, every child who has ever been ravaged by hunger and disease, every tragic car accident, every tsunami, hurricane, earthquake, tornado, child molestation, cancer, and holocaust was a part of God's plan. It was God's decision, God's decree, and God's immutable will whereby these ideas were conceived. This is bleak, dark, and disgusting, but is typically proudly accepted by those who desire to glory in the ultimate sovereignty of God. I write with such passion because I used to hold to the 5 points of Calvinism. I used to teach the supposed doctrines of grace. I now see that there is nothing gracious, or glorious about them.

In Reformed theology, God decreed these monstrosities before time was even created, yet God is said to be free from all responsibility. Even though God decreed the event, man is ultimately responsible. Some Reformed scholars talk about "compatibilism," which seeks to preserve God's sovereignty and the responsibility of man. It does not seek to explain how man can be responsible if all events are planned and designed by God, but just states this is fact. This is not an answer and should be rejected until an explanation can be produced. Secondly, all of the ghastly events described above are said to be for the ultimate good. In other words, there is apparently consolation knowing that rapes and murders, molestations, and human sacrifice are for the greater good. Is this the wise council of God? Is this as good as God could have done? Could not the good of a few elect have come about without all of the blood, pain and torture? I certainly think so.

Lastly, it seems that most people who hear about Reformed theology are repulsed by the dogmas and doctrines, and rightly so. If the God described in Reformed theology is so

utterly repulsive, if God brings people into being who never asked to be created in the first place only to be a vessel of wrath, why would anyone worship such a God? Since I was one of these people, all that I can say is that I was immature. I took pride in submitting to something that others despised. It was a kind of badge of honor I walked around with. I saw myself as one who believed the truth and lived for the truth. The truth was that God was sovereign and this meant that God controlled all events. Everything happened according to God's sovereign will, in God's sovereign timing, for God's sovereign purposes. All revolved around the sovereignty of God. This was God's glory. I taught people about it, and didn't even bother myself with trying to convince anyone that my God was the true God because if God wanted anyone to believe and submit then God would give faith and regenerate their wicked heart.

If this is what God is like, I submit that noble, righteous, and just creatures should rebel. They should rise up with one heart and attempt to overthrow such a detestable dictator. For this kind of God sounds more like a devil than a saint. If God is good, and I believe God is, then God will stand on the side of those who intend to demolish and overthrow such heinous conceptions of the deity. These are bold statements and they arise out of a heart that has been freed from fear. Perfect love casts out fear and I think many more would join with me if they were not scared of being eternally inflicted with red, hot, fiery flames. Crippling fear is common and not unusual. History is filled with examples of people being ruled and dominated by unjust, heavy-handed, bloodthirsty tyrants. Many have submitted and obeyed such beasts. But every once in a while, the people can stand it no longer and they join hands and with noble, upright, peace-seeking, justice-loving, freedom-fighting hearts, and put an end to such tormentors. I look forward to the day when despicable conceptions of God are not taken seriously in theological circles, but abandoned for what hopefully amounts to a God who is truly, authentically, and genuinely worthy of honor, praise, and worship.