The Synod of Dordrecht was a memorable event, in all the meanings of the word ‘memorable.’ It was an important moment in European history and the history of Reformed Protestantism. It is also memorable in the literal sense of ‘easily remembered.’ It is fixed in our memories, not only because we have factual knowledge of the when, where, and why of the proceedings, but also because paintings and prints enable us to actually visualize it. This makes the Synod special. The majority of events that have made the textbooks for church history have not inspired contemporary artwork. This is annoying for church historians today who want to illustrate their work. It also begs the question what kind of impression the theological and ecclesiastical battles during the Twelve Years’ Truce made on a seventeenth century audience—or rather, how it was presented to this audience. Today an international summit meeting, which the Synod of Dordrecht was for its own time, would certainly make the headlines of the newspapers, and be on the evening news. As newspapers were still in their infancy in the 1610s, information on matters of public interest flowed along different channels: official proclamations, semi-private letters, pamphlets, popular prints, morality plays, protest songs, handwritten pasquinades posted in public places.¹

These various media represented diverging interests, from public authority to disaffected individuals. Their audience, however, cut across distinctions of rank. They were read, viewed, and sung by high and low. A professional class of writers, drawers, engravers, and printers that catered to official and unofficial and illegal publications indiscriminately, as long as there was a profit to be made, produced this kind of news service. News was distributed in a lively but somewhat segmented market, of interlocking public and covert channels, by booksellers, peddlers, and, in ways hard to reconstruct nowadays, among friends and connoisseurs. Theirs

was, however, not an open market. Censorship suppressed opinions that were unwelcome to the authorities or harmful to privileged institutions and ‘persons of quality.’

By and large all these news media shared a common language, that strikes modern readers as preachy and tedious, but may more accurately described as holistic. It presents society as a complex organism that, in order to live and flourish, should be in a state of equilibrium. Early modern news was never impartial. It could speak with the voice of authority which stated that its benign rule was the best way to maintain that desired harmony. It could also represent a particular ‘opinion’—a concept with strong negative connotations, as harmful to the ideal of equilibrium and harmony. And of course it could be anything in between. The holistic message was most poignantly conveyed through allegory or emblem, a genre that was enormously popular at the time.

To some extent this emblematic language is present in all the prints on the outcome of the Arminian Controversies, and the Synod of Dordrecht in particular. The originals are mostly contained in the collections of ‘historical prints’ of Frederik Muller, Abraham van Stolk, and Simon van Gijn, now in the Print Cabinet of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, in the Historisch Museum Rotterdam, and Museum Van Gijn in Dordrecht respectively. For the most part these prints are well known. This is due to two books in particular, to which I am much indebted: the volume

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