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van de Kamp, J

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Matthias Freudenberg and Aleida Siller, eds., *Emder Synode 1571. Wesen und Wirkungen eines Grundtextes der Moderne* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 93 pp., €15,00 (ISBN 978-3-525-56726-5).

Four hundred fifty years ago, in 1571, delegates of Dutch-speaking Reformed congregations, most of them in exile in Germany, came together at a synod in the East Frisian city of Emden. The minutes of this synod are now again translated into German and presented in an edition with annotations and an introduction. This work has been completed by Prof. Dr. Matthias Freudenberg, university lecturer at Saarbrücken, and Aleida Siller, representative of the *Reformierte Bund* (based at Hannover) for the anniversary of the Synod of Emden. Overall, the synod is presented as an influential model within church and society through the ages down to the present.

The foreword by the president of the synod of the Protestant Church of Germany (EKD), Dr. Irmgard Schwaetzer, and a preface by the editors are followed by an introduction, in which Freudenberg and Siller analyze the synod from a historical, theological, and editorial perspective.

The introduction to this volume makes four useful contributions to historical and theological scholarship on the synod. First, the historical conditions and the process leading to the synod are addressed, in which context the circumstances of the Dutch congregations in exile due to religious and economic oppression is explained.

Second, the Reformed understanding of the *ecclesia* is clarified in an illuminating way, including the participation of the congregation in the threefold office of Christ and the establishment of lay elders and deacons (the presbyterial element) and the ecumenical communion with other Dutch Reformed congregations (the synodal element).

Third, the editors summarize the topics of the minutes: the letter inviting delegates to attend, including the keywords 'participation,' 'communion,' and 'unanimity,' which are critical to the letter; the structure and contents of the church order, such as fundamentals, classes and other assemblies, the selection of ministers, elders and deacons, the celebration of the sacraments, marriage, and church discipline. Overall, the editors consider the synod of Emden to be a substantial innovation (*erhebliche Innovation*, 41) because it established boards in which congregations were represented and connected and because it offered solutions for fundamental and practical issues.

Fourth, Freudenberg and Siller sketch the impact of the synod of Emden up to the present, particularly in German countries. They argue that the principles of subsidiarity (emphasizing the personal responsibility of the individual and limiting public regulation) had an effect not only on the church but also on the

political and social realm. As regards the presbyterial and synodal principles, the state challenged these ideals of the church well into the twentieth century.

Fifth, an overview is given of the transcriptions of the minutes of the synod in Latin, Dutch, French and German, and of newer translations into German.

Finally, the editors present their German translation of the minutes. Both the introduction mentioned earlier and the translation are annotated with references to Bible verses, biographical notes, and explanations of Latin phrases in the original text.

Although I appreciate the short and clear overview of the historical and theological dimensions of the synod, I would challenge the editors on a few points. To begin with, the editors suggest that in 1568 a preparatory convention took place at Wesel, preceding the synod of Emden, although Jesse Spohnholz, whose book (2017) they cite, has shown that this assembly probably did not actually take place. Furthermore, the editors also characterize the travel of the Dutch-speaking Reformed migrants from London through the North Sea and Baltic Sea as an odyssey (*Odyssee*, 24), but this treatment should be reassessed in the light of recent publications by Mirjam van Veen, which reconsiders these travels. Moreover, the editors describe the aim of church discipline as to promote better and more responsible living and to be serious about the fact that the Gospel both liberates and unites (*zu einem besseren und verantwortlichen Leben anzuhalten und damit ernst zu machen, dass das Evangelium befreit und verbindet*, 30). However, this description misses the important concept of repentance (*poenitentia*, *Reue*, cf. the minutes, section on church discipline, art. 30, 32, 34). In addition, the editors state without elaboration that church discipline had its consequences, such as a rigid moralization of life and abuse of power (31, cf. 41). Furthermore, I wonder whether the decisions mentioned on p. 37 are examples of a pragmatic understanding of freedom or willingness to forgive, as the editors suggest. Instead, they could be expressions of the delegates' endeavors to preserve the purity and integrity of their congregations. Finally, the editors consider the opening up of such offices as churchwardens to women, which was not allowed in 1571, as a significant advance for Protestant churches today (41). However, such a normative conviction is somewhat jarring in a historical study, quite apart from the consideration that one might disagree with the ordination of women on both biblical and church-historical grounds. Notwithstanding these critical remarks, this edition of the minutes of the synod of Emden serves as a fine example of making a historical model of church order accessible and relevant for church and society today.

Jan van de Kamp

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

j.vande.kamp@vu.nl