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# *Fidei christianae delineatio brevis* by Conradus Vorstius (1620)

## *A Sketch for a Remonstrant Confession*

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### Abstract

“A Brief Sketch of the Christian Faith,” published in 1632, was written by Conradus Vorstius in 1620, at the request of Johannes Uytenbogaert. Uytenbogaert needed a Confession for the Remonstrant Society he had just founded, and asked Vorstius to assist the committee that was established for its production. Vorstius, who at the time lived in difficult conditions, was unable to deliver a full text, but managed to provide this Sketch, which was subsequently used by Simon Episcopius to compose his famous Remonstrant Confession. Vorstius’s sketch was never intended for publication.

### Keywords

Vorstius – remonstrants – socinianism – toleration – Remonstrant Confession

In 1632, ten years after its author’s death, an unknown editor published a brief document entitled *Fidei christianae delineatio brevis*. This had been written by Conradus Vorstius (1569–1622). It went largely unnoticed at the time, and has been almost completely forgotten by posterity. In this article, it shall be argued that it was never intended for publication, but that it was Vorstius’s answer to a request by Johannes Uytenbogaert to provide the outline of a confession for the newly established Remonstrant Society. Uytenbogaert forwarded it to Simon Episcopius, who used it as the basis for his much more elaborate *Confessio sive Declaratio* of 1621.

## 1 Fidei christianae delineatio brevis

The document in question is printed as a duodecimo book of 82 pages (excepting introductory matter and preface). On the title page, its full title is given as *Fidei christianae delineatio brevis per capita, aphorismos et porismata* ("A Brief Description of the Christian Faith, in Chapters, Aphorisms, and Corollary Conclusions"). The title suggests that the text will be in the Medieval form of published theses of a disputation. Its publisher is indicated as *Godefridus Philadelphus Eleutheropoli*, a pseudonym for a printer (or network of printers), probably in Amsterdam.

In a Preface, the editor (who remains anonymous) states that he is the same as that of another posthumously published work by Vorstius, his commentary on the New Testament Epistles.<sup>1</sup> In the case of the commentary, this editor states that he has had at his disposal the author's own copy, as well as copies made by students—Vorstius had used the commentary as his lecture notes when he taught at the Steinfurt gymnasium in the County of Bentheim. In the case of the *Delineatio*, however, the editor does not give any such information concerning its origin or intention. Moreover, there is no author's preface or dedication, which is where such background information would usually be given.

There is, then, no apparent reason for Vorstius to have written the *Delineatio*. The editor describes it as a concise survey of all the main tenets of the Christian faith, characterised above all by simplicity and clarity. He continues by deploring how many people, not content with those supreme qualities, have buried them under heaps of unnecessary dogmatic detail, fuelling sectarianism, controversy and discord, and damaging Christian unity and fraternal love. He adds that the author, having experienced the resulting turmoil first hand, decided to bring the necessary articles of faith together in this easily accessible overview, leaving out all unnecessary and useless questions. If all ecclesiastical doctors would follow his example, peace in the church would be very much served, and the Kingdom of God would come much closer.

Sentiments such as those of the editor were not new in his time, and had been part and parcel of the theory of toleration as proposed, for instance, by Castellio, Erastus, Acontius, Uytenbogaert, and Grotius (to mention only a few within the Reformed tradition). Vorstius's text itself, however, is no plea for tol-

1 *Commentarius in omnes Epistolas apostolicas, exceptis Secunda ad Timotheum, ad Titum, ad Philemonem et ad Hebraeos* (Amsterdam: Blaeu, 1631).

erance. To be sure, Vorstius had pleaded for it already in other writings (e.g., in the Dedication to the Netherlands States General of his *Anti-Bellarminus contractus*),<sup>2</sup> and much of his work seems to have been devoted to showing the futility of scholastic discussions (above all in his much misunderstood *De Deo*).<sup>3</sup> It is, therefore, natural to see the *Delineatio* as representative of the toleration movement, and this is useful in explaining its contents, but is hardly helpful in establishing the occasion and purpose of the document.

At the time, the publication of the *Delineatio* drew little or no attention. I have seen it quoted or cited almost nowhere,<sup>4</sup> and it is absent from most of the many existing biographies and bibliographies of Vorstius.<sup>5</sup>

## 2 Contents

At this point, a look at the content of the document is in order. A list of the chapter titles gives a good impression of the subjects treated in the work:

- 2 In the dedication of *Anti-Bellarminus contractus, hoc est, Compendiosum examen omnium fidei controversiarum quae hoc tempore inter Evangelicos et Pontificios agitantur* (Hanau: Antonius, 1610), Vorstius pleaded in particular for the academic freedom to speculate about doctrinal details (*libertas prophetandi*), and warned against renewed ecclesiastical 'Papism' within the Reformed churches. He held the magistrates to be responsible for guaranteeing this freedom.
- 3 Explicitly, in the preface to *Apologetica exegesis, sive Plenior declaratio locorum aliquot quae ex libro eiusdem [scil. Vorstii] de Deo, sive De natura et attributis Dei excerpta, eique pro erroneis imposita, hoc titulo late in vulgus emanaverunt* (Leiden: Patius, 1611); see C.A. Mellby, *Conrad Vorstius. Ein Vorkämpfer religiöser Duldung am Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig: Schmidt, 1901), 64–65.
- 4 The author of the preface, not Vorstius himself, is quoted in Simplicius Christiano-catholicus, *Synopsis locorum Sacrae Scripturae, patrum, et recentiorum quorundam theologorum, quibus demonstratur quatenus sint ad salutem creditu necessaria et sufficientia* (Amsterdam: Blaeu, 1650), 123 (the second edition, Utrecht: Zyll, 1666, mentions Timan Gesselius as the compiler of this work).
- 5 It is mentioned in "Vorstius (Conrad)," in Moréri's *Le grand dictionnaire historique, ou Le mélange curieux de l'histoire sacrée et profane*, 2nd ed., vol. 6 (Basle: Brandmuller, 1733), 980; "Vorstius, (Conrad)," in Zedler's *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste welche bishero durch menschlichen Verstand und Witz erfunden und verbessert worden*, vol. 50 (Leipzig/Halle: Zedler, 1746), cols 1290–1310, spec. col. 1308; L.D. Petit, *Bibliografische lijst der werken van de Leidsche hoogleeraren, van de oprichting der Hoogeschool tot op onze dagen*, Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, eerste aflevering (1575–1619) (Leiden: Van Doesburgh, 1894), 106. In worldcat.org eight copies were listed on March 1, 2022; on books.google.com (where the present author stumbled upon it), a digital version of the copy held by the Netherlands National Library in The Hague is available (last accessed on March 1, 2022).

I.	De fundamento et norma religionis, nempe verbo Dei sive Sacra Scriptura, eiusque auctoritate, sufficientia et perspicuitate	The foundation and norm of religion, namely the word of God, or Holy Scripture; its authority, sufficiency, and perspicuity
II.	De summa et partibus christianae religionis, ubi generatim de foedere gratiae	The sum and the parts of the Christian religion; on the covenant of grace in general terms
III.	De Deo, eiusque essentialibus attributis, deque Sancta Trinitate	God and his essential attributes; the Holy Trinity
IV.	De creatione mundi et hominis, ubi etiam de angelis	The creation of the world and of humanity; including the angels
V.	De providentia Dei, maxime circa hominibus	God's providence, in particular towards humanity
VI.	De peccato et miseria hominis	Human sinfulness and misery
VII.	De persona et officio Iesu Christi mediatoris	The person and ministry of Jesus Christ, our mediator
VIII.	De beneficiis Iesu Christi in foedere gratiae promissis. Ubi de praedestinatione, vocatione, iustificatione, electione, glorificatione etc.	The benefits of Jesus Christ, as promised in the covenant of grace, including predestination, vocation, justification, election, glorification and so on
IX.	De praeceptis Iesu Christi decalogo summam comprehensis	The commandments of Jesus Christ, summarily listed in the Decalogue
X.	De precatione dominica, eiusque partibus	The Lord's prayer and its parts
XI.	De sacramentis Novi Testamenti, baptismo scilicet et sancta coena	The New Testament sacraments, namely baptism and the holy supper
XII.	De ecclesia Iesu Christi, eiusque externo regimine ac disciplina	The church of Jesus Christ, its external administration and discipline

Each chapter consists of numbered theses. At the beginning of the document, these are concise aphorisms, occasionally supplemented with corollary conclusions (*porismata*) that apparently form no part of the main argument but are regarded as necessarily flowing from it. The form is basically that of a disputation. From chapter VII onwards, however, no more *porismata* are added, and the text becomes increasingly discursive, even though the various subsections remain numbered and fairly concise. Also characteristic of the first chapters is the use of definitions and distinctions in scholastic style, which gradually becomes somewhat less frequent from chapter IX onwards. These formal imbalances give the impression that the document in its present form is

unfinished. It is complete, in that it has a distinct beginning and ending, but it seems to need polishing and more uniformity in form and style.

As regards content, the document is characterised less by what is included than by what is left out, especially in light of the theological debate around 1600. Thus, for instance, in chapter III Vorstius presents only the ‘essential’ attributes of God (including for instance his incorporeality, eternity, immeasurability, omnipotence, and omniscience), but makes no mention of those divine attributes he regarded as deriving from God’s will, which are, in that sense, conditional (such as his love, hate, and wrath).<sup>6</sup> By way of a further example, in chapter VIII Vorstius presents predestination as God’s eternal decree to give Christ for humanity’s salvation, but does not give the slightest hint of the question, hotly debated in his days, of whether this decree also included the rejection of part of humanity.<sup>7</sup>

This apparent tendency to hold back on controversial detail could be seen as an attempt, in the tradition of toleration, to foster accord and unity within the church as a whole, comparable, for instance, to Hugo Grotius’s *Meletius*.<sup>8</sup> That the *Delineatio* does contain references to some of Vorstius’s pet theories—hardly indispensable for such an aim—should not, however, be overlooked. Thus, e.g., his insistence that God’s place is primarily in heaven (contradicting the doctrine of God’s essential omnipresence; III 6, in a *porisma*), or that divinity was communicated to the Son by the Father (III 13), implying a hierarchical relationship between them. Unless Vorstius was as naïve as some have taken him to be,<sup>9</sup> he can hardly have believed that urging these tenets would build bridges between the opposing factions within the Protestant church of his day.

Further features of this outline of the Christian faith include the emphatic and consistent designation of the relationship between God and humanity as a covenant, depicting both as ‘parties’ to a contract on an almost equal basis (chapters II, VII, VIII, XI); the stress on obedience to Christ’s commandments as an obligation flowing from that contract (chapter IX); and the generous attention given to the rules, regulations, and administration of the church (chapters

6 Contrast Disputation x in his *Tractatus theologicus de Deo*: “De amore, odio, ira, et similibus quasi affectibus Dei”—note the adverb ‘quasi’!

7 It should be noted that Vorstius does take a clear stance on this matter in this document when he unambiguously ascribes the perdition of some humans to their own failure to answer God’s call (e.g., chapter VIII 5, on the efficiency and sufficiency of divine vocation). He avoids, however, relating this directly to predestination (discussed in chapter VIII 3).

8 G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes (ed.), *Hugo Grotius: Meletius, sive De iis quae inter christianos conveniunt epistola* [Studies in the History of Christian Thought 40] (Leiden, 1988), 22–25.

9 W. Otterspeer, *Groepsportret met dame 1. Het bobwerk der vrijheid, de Leidse universiteit, 1575–1672* (Amsterdam, 2000), 246.

XI and XII). As regards the last point, Vorstius's emphasis on the decisive role of a Christian magistrate in ecclesiastical matters is an unveiled reference to the discord within Protestant theology current at the time, in which he clearly sides with the toleration wing.

In sum, the *Delineatio brevis* is a complete but concise outline of Christian doctrine. Although the document gives the impression of being unfinished, its conciseness seems intentional. In this, and in a number of the issues addressed, the author shows himself to be a representative of the toleration movement within the Reformed churches (as he always had been). As such, it is more of a partisan manifesto than an attempt to play down differences between the various factions for the sake of unity (even though, no less than their opponents, the toleration movement never tired of claiming unity and peace as their ultimate aim).

In the next section, a brief overview of the author's life will be given, followed by a section on Vorstius's position within Dutch theology after the Synod of Dort.

### 3 Conradus Vorstius

The tragic story of the author's life has often been told.<sup>10</sup> As a student in Heidelberg and a young theologian in Geneva, Conradus Vorstius had been a rising star, who in 1596 was awarded the professorship at the *Gymnasium albertinum* in the county of Steinfurt. Apparently, his conditions there were such that he felt able to turn down various calls from loftier establishments of Reformed theology (e.g., the universities of Saumur and Marburg).<sup>11</sup> When, however,

10 Masterfully by H.C. Rogge, "Het beroep van Vorstius tot hoogleeraar te Leiden," *De Gids* 37 (1873), 31–70, 499–557. More recent: J. Rohls, "Der Fall Vorstius," in *Religiöser Nonkonformismus und frühneuzeitliche Gelehrtenkultur*, ed. F. Vollhardt [Quellen und Darstellungen zur Geschichte des Antitrinitarismus und Sozinianismus in der Frühen Neuzeit 2] (Berlin/New York, 2013), 179–198.

11 When, in 1598, he became suspected of Socinian tendencies, the interest of the Polish community of Socinians was raised. In 1601 they offered him the leadership of their school in Lublin. He refused because of his rejection of some of the central Socinian tenets, such as their denial of the Trinity and of the satisfaction through Christ's suffering and death. See C. Vorstius, *Oratie tot verantwoordinghe ghedaen inde volle vergaderinghe der Edele seer vermoghende Heeren de Staten van Hollandt ende West-Vrieslandt* (The Hague: Jacobsz, 1612), 42–43 = *Oratio apologetica habita in pleno concessu illustrium ac praepotentium Hollandiae et Westfrisiae Ordinum* (Leiden: Patius, 1612), 54–55.

he was offered a chair at Leiden university, vacant since the death of Jacobus Arminius in 1609, he did not refuse.

Vorstius had been nominated to the chair by Johannes Uytenbogaert, at that time the undisputed leader of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, confidant of stadholder Prince Maurice and close advisor in ecclesiastical matters to Johan van Oldenbarnevelt (*de facto* political leader of the province of Holland).<sup>12</sup> Vorstius may have drawn attention to himself in early 1610 by publishing both his *Anti-Bellarminus* (dedicated to the Republic's States General) and a new and completed edition of his *De Deo* (the first edition of which had been dedicated to Count Maurice of Hessen, and seems to have earned him the bid from Marburg in 1606). The handsome salary offered by Leiden may have contributed to his, and the Count of Bentheim's (who also ruled Steinfurt) succumbing to the urgent pleas of Uytenbogaert for him to come and lead the tolerant wing of Protestantism in the Netherlands and accept the position.

As soon as rumour of Vorstius's impending appointment spread, the opposing movement sprang into action and began what became within weeks and months a concerted and ruthless campaign against Vorstius, whom they consistently depicted as a heretic and Socinian. Letters written to the curators, to the States of Holland, and to the States General were published, and a number of often vicious pamphlets were printed. His detractors even managed to involve King James I of England. It was the latter's warning of serious damage to Anglo-Dutch relations that moved the States of Holland to request that Vorstius withdraw to the town of Gouda (with retention of salary) to conduct his defence in writing from there and wait for better times.

In the meantime, the Vorstian affair contributed greatly to the escalation of the theological and ecclesiastical conflicts within the Republic, which in 1618 eventually led to a coup d'état by Prince Maurice, the execution of Oldenbarnevelt, and Uytenbogaert's flight to Antwerp. At the Synod of Dort (1618–1619), the toleration movement (or Remonstrants, as they had come to be called) and their doctrines were condemned, and ministers who continued to adhere to their 'five articles' were banished from the Republic. Professor Vorstius was declared "unworthy of the office," dismissed, and finally expelled from the country.

Unable to find an alternative place in which to establish himself and his family, Vorstius went into hiding, what we might today call 'sofa-surfing,' mainly in the province of Utrecht, constantly alert and ready to flee in the event of

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12 On Uytenbogaert, see H.C. Rogge, *Johannes Wtenbogaert en zijn tijd*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Rogge, 1874–1876).



impending arrest. Finally, in 1621, he was contacted by the Duke of Holstein, who offered him a position in the town of Friedrichstadt, which the Duke had commissioned to be built for the sake of the exiled Remonstrants and other dissenters. Vorstius was again prevented from taking up the position he had been offered, this time by his sudden illness and death on the way to Friedrichstadt in 1622.

#### 4 The Establishment of the Remonstrant Society in Antwerp, and the Need for a Confession

Soon after the Synod, Uytenbogaert took it upon himself to organise the exiled Remonstrants. His aim was to continue to provide spiritual and pastoral guidance to the communities they had been forced to abandon. In a bold move, he decided to found a new denomination, the Remonstrant Society, which would not be bound by the Synod's ecclesiastical laws and would theoretically assure them of the right to enjoy the religious liberty that had been official policy in the Netherlands since the Union of Utrecht (1579). Vorstius, who remained in correspondence with Uytenbogaert, applied for membership of this Society, which admitted him—after some initial reluctance.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most urgent matters in the organisation of the Society was a document in which the Remonstrants would present the views and convictions they held in common, describing how these distinguished them from other denominations, but also demonstrating how they fit seamlessly into the church as a whole. The need for this 'confession' was pressing for several reasons, not least the need to present the Remonstrants as the good and peace-loving citizens the Duke of Holstein had required them to demonstrate themselves to be prior to inviting them to Friedrichstadt.<sup>14</sup>

On 1 October 1619, the matter was discussed in the founding meeting of the Remonstrant ministers assembled in Antwerp, and a committee was designated to propose such a Confession to the Society. This committee consisted of Uytenbogaert, Simon Episcopius, Nicholas Grevinchoven, and Charles Nielius.<sup>15</sup> In a letter of 20 January 1620, however, Uytenbogaert invited Vorstius to

13 Vorstius had to ask for membership twice, and was only admitted on condition that he would take care not to cause additional trouble; see J. Tideman, *De stichting der Remonstrantsche Broederschap, 1619–1634*, vol. 1, 1619–1623 (Amsterdam: Rogge, 1871), 107–108.

14 For this and the next paragraph, see: Tideman, *De stichting*, 166; A.H. Haentjens, *Simon Episcopius als apologet van het Remonstrantisme in zijn leven en werken geschetst* (Leiden: Adriani, 1899), 55–58.

15 Tideman, *De stichting*, 104.

compose a text for the Confession.<sup>16</sup> Apparently, none of the committee members felt able to set to work on this task; something that went far beyond merely setting out, once more, the five articles of the Remonstrance of 1610.

Vorstius's reply to Uytenbogaert's invitation has not been preserved, but it may be that he asked to be excused, perhaps because of the difficult circumstances in which he found himself; he was in hiding and constantly on the move at the time. At any rate, in a later letter Uytenbogaert informed Vorstius, in response to the latter's question, that the confession was being finalised by Simon Episcopius. Episcopius was the second most important theologian within the Society after Vorstius. He had also been appointed to take the chair at Leiden after Vorstius had been forced to withdraw to Gouda in 1612. On 30 October 1620, Uytenbogaert wrote to Vorstius concerning Episcopius's work on the confession as follows (nr. 385):

Ut Confessionem concinnet, Episcopius in eo iam totus est, et fere ad umbilicum perduxit, prout dicit; et credo tua fere sequutus vestigia.

Episcopius is entirely occupied with producing the *Confession*. He says he is almost done, and I think he has followed closely in your footsteps.

To the best of my knowledge, the phrase "he has followed in your footsteps" has never drawn any particular comments from historians, perhaps because it was taken to mean no more than that in many respects Episcopius agreed, in a more or less general sense, with Vorstius's views and convictions. The rediscovery of the *Delineatio brevis* now opens up the possibility that the phrase may have had a more specific meaning, to wit, that Vorstius had sent a confession to Uytenbogaert after all, but in the form of a draft to be worked out by his successor, Episcopius. In the next section, it will be investigated whether the *Delineatio* was indeed designed as a preliminary sketch to support Episcopius in his work on the confession.

16 P. a Limborch (ed.), *Praestantium ac eruditorum virorum epistolae ecclesiasticae et theologicae*, 3d ed. (Amsterdam: Halma, 1704), nr. 368: "On the Confession I recently wrote to you, and the situation remains unchanged, except that quite a few brothers here would like you to compose something that could be presented to the brothers so that they can decide upon it" (*De Confessione nuper scripsi, eaque res eodem adhuc loco est, nisi hoc excipias esse hic ex fratribus haud paucos qui optent a te aliquid concinnandum quod fratribus diiudicandum proponatur*). On March 14, Uytenbogaert insisted (nr. 369): "I should very much like Your Reverence to be fully dedicated to this matter" (*velim sane ego huic rei totum se det Tua Reverentia*).

5 Possible Sources

The *Confession, or Declaration of the views of the ministers, in the United Netherlands called Remonstrants, on the major tenets of the Christian religion* appeared in a Dutch translation in 1621. The original Latin was printed a year later. Both were published without an author's name, but Episcopius's authorship is not in doubt and is well documented. The final draft had been sent for comments to a significant number of Society members, and their reactions had been integrated into the definitive text by Episcopius and Vorstius, working in tandem.<sup>17</sup>

It is illuminating to compare the chapter titles with those of the *Delineatio*.

<i>Delineatio</i>		<i>Confessio</i>	
I.	De fundamento et norma religionis, nempe verbo Dei sive Sacra Scriptura, eiusque auctoritate, sufficientia et perspicuitate	I.	De Sacra Scriptura, eiusque auctoritate, perfectione et perspicuitate
II.	De summa et partibus christianae religionis, ubi generatim de foedere gratiae		
III.	De Deo, eiusque essentialibus attributis, deque Sancta Trinitate	II.	De cognitione essentiae Dei, sive natura divina
IV.	De creatione mundi et hominis, ubi etiam de angelis	III.	De Sacrosancta Trinitate
V.	De providentia Dei, maxime circa hominibus	IV.	De cognitione operum divinatorum
VI.	De peccato et miseria hominis	V.	De creatione mundi, angelorum et hominum
VII.	De persona et officio Iesu Christi mediatoris	VI.	De providentia Dei, seu rerum conservatione et gubernatione
IX.	De praeceptis Iesu Christi decalogo summatim comprehensis	VII.	De peccato et miseria hominis
		VIII.	De opere redemptionis, deque persona et officio Iesu Christi
		IX.	De cognitione voluntatis divinae in Foedere Novo patefacta
		X.	De praeceptis Iesu Christi in genere, deque fide ac poenitentia, sive conversione ad Deum
		XI.	De fide in Iesum Christum
		XII.	De bonis operibus in specie, deque decalogi expositione
		XIII.	De directione et abnegatione nostri ipsorum, deque tolerantia crucis Christi

17 Tideman, *De stichting*, 167–169. For more details, see G. Brandt, *Historie der Reformatie en andre kerkelyke geschiedenissen in en ontrent de Nederlanden*, vol. 4 (Rotterdam: Bos, 1704), 434–437.

(cont.)

Delineatio		Confessio	
x.	De precatone Dominica, eiusque partibus	xiv.	De precatone et gratiarum actione, et speciatim de oratione Dominica
		xv.	De specialibus vocationibus, deque praeceptis ac traditionibus humanis
		xvi.	De cultu et veneratione Iesu Christi, unici mediatoris, deque invocatione sanctorum
viii.	De beneficiis Iesu Christi in foedere gratiae promissis. Ubi de praedestinatione, vocatione, iustificatione, electione, glorificatione etc.	xvii.	De beneficiis et promissis divinis, ac primo de electione ad gratiam, seu vocatione ad fidem
		xviii.	De promissis divinis, quae iam conversis ac fidelibus in hac vita praestantur, hoc est, de electione ad gloriam, adoptione, iustificatione, sanctificatione et obsignatione
		xix.	De promissis divinis ad futuram vitam pertinentibus, sive de mortuorum resurrectione et vita aeterna
		xx.	De divinis comminationibus, ac impiorum poenis, tum ad hanc, tum ad futuram vitam pertinentibus, puta reprobatione, induratione, excaecatione, deque aeterna morte et damnatione
		xxi.	De ministerio verbi divini, deque ordinibus ministrorum
xii.	De ecclesia Iesu Christi, eiusque externo regimine ac disciplina	xxii.	De ecclesia Iesu Christi, eiusque notis
xi.	De sacramentis Novi Testamenti, baptismo scilicet et sancta coena	xxiii.	De sacramentis, aliisque sacris ritibus
		xxiv.	De disciplina ecclesiastica
		xxv.	De synodis, seu conciliis, eorumque modo et usu

The structural agreement between these two documents is immediately obvious. Most of the differences that do exist concern minor variations in the overall logic of the argument, especially with regard to the *loci* on Jesus Christ and the church. It is only Vorstius’s chapter on the covenant between God and humanity that has no counterpart in Episcopius’s text. Apart from these items, the organisation and, to a large extent, the verbal similarities between the documents are striking, and call for an explanation.

For a common source for this format, one might at first think of a text such as the *Belgic Confession* of 1561, since Episcopius’s *Confession* at least was intended to lay out the doctrinal and ecclesiastical differences between the Remonstrant Society on the one hand, and the churches of the Synod of Dort on the other. The latter had, almost from the start of the conflicts of the 1610s, insisted that the *Belgic Confession* should be normative and binding.<sup>18</sup>

18 N.H. Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* [Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought] (Grand Rapids, 2007), chapter 5.

Both Vorstius and Episcopius can safely be assumed to have been intimately familiar with it.

A comparison between the texts shows that the *Belgic Confession* also contains many of the subjects treated in the *Delineatio* and the Remonstrant *Confessio*, and in a largely identical order. The *Belgic Confession*, like both the other texts, starts with the existence of God and his attributes (art. 1), then continues with Scripture as the perfectly sufficient source of knowledge about God (art. 2), written by divinely inspired men (art. 3) and followed by lists of the canonical and apocryphal books (artt. 4–6; not in *Delineatio*, but also present in *Confessio* 1 4–6); and so on. Whereas, however, the subjects included and the order of treatment may well be traditional (ultimately going back to Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*),<sup>19</sup> the *Belgic Confession* cannot explain the detailed agreements in terminology and argument between the other texts. Moreover, it does not feature the division into chapters, with practically identical headings, that is characteristic of both the *Delineatio* and the *Confessio*.

Be that as it may, the *Belgic Confession* played an important role in the emergence of yet another document containing a comparable list of subjects, namely a curious article of the *Utrecht Church Order* of 1612.<sup>20</sup> The city and province of Utrecht had been plagued by conflict among the Reformed communities since the 1580s, and these conflicts gradually became aligned with the Remonstrant and Counter-Remonstrant divide. The church order was drawn up at a specially-convened synod of the Province of Utrecht, and was aimed at bringing about the pacification of the province by providing an ecclesiastical organisation of such flexibility that it could accommodate all the parties involved. This aim, for all its ostensible complacency, was in itself biased, and the adoption of the Utrecht church order by the provincial authorities was soon generally recognised as a major Remonstrant victory.

This church order recognises the *Belgic Confession* as fundamental, but qualifies its authority by explicitly subordinating it to Scripture, on account of which the *Confession* may always be subject to revision (introduction, articles 3–4). The first chapter, dealing with the appointment of ministers (“Vande beroepinghe der pastoren ofte predicanen”), includes an article 4 on the examination of candidates for a particular position to scrutinise their doctrinal

19 Cf. *Harmonia confessionum fidei orthodoxarum et reformatarum ecclesiarum* (Geneva: Santandreas, 1581).

20 H.C. Rogge, “De Utrechtsche synoden van 1606 en 1612,” *Vaderlandsche letteroefeningen* 108 (N.S. 4) (1868), 811–845.

purity. Painstakingly avoiding the possibility of being seen to allow a role for the *Belgic Confession*, this article provides a list of theological topics which the candidate must be able to discuss satisfactorily on the exclusive basis of Scripture. The list of questions is as follows:<sup>21</sup>

Van Godt, zijn wesen en eygenschappen	On God, his nature and attributes
Van de H. Schriftuere, der selver volcomentheyt, claeerheyt, auctoriteyt ende seeckerheyt	On Holy Scripture, its perfection, clarity, authority and certitude
Van de werelt-scheppinghe ende regeringhe	On the world's creation and providence
Van de sonde, haren oorspronck ende cracht	On sinfulness, its origin and force
Van de wet ende den evangelio, mitsgaders beyder onderscheyt ende ghebruyck	On the law, the gospel, and their distinction and function
Van Iesu Christi persoon, ampt ende weldaden	On the person, office and benefactions of Jesus Christ
Van 't gheloove ende boetveerdicheyt	On faith and penitence
Vande rechtveerdichmaeckinghe des sondaers voor Godt	On the sinner's justification before God
Vande ghehoorsaemheyt des ghelooffs, liefde ende goede wercken, mitsgaders beloninghe der selver	On the obedience of faith, love, and good works, and their remuneration
Vande kercke	On the church
Vande ampten ende diensten by Christum inde selve in-ghestelt	On the ecclesiastical offices and services established by Christ
Van den dienst ende bedieninghe des H. Evangeliums	On the ministry and administration of the gospel
Van den H. Doop	On baptism
Van 't H. Avontmael	On the Lord's supper
Vande christelijcke discipline ende kerckentucht	On Christian discipline and ecclesiastical correction

If one compares this list of topics with the chapter titles of both the *Delinatio* and the *Confessio*, the latter two turn out to correspond closely to the items mentioned in the former. The relevance of this observation is immedi-

21 C. Hooijer, *Oude kerkordeningen der Nederlandsche Hervormde gemeenten (1563–1638) en het Concept-reglement op de organisatie van het Hervormd Kerkenootschap in het Koninkrijk Holland (1809)* (Zaltbommel: Noman, 1865), 396–397.

ately clear if one takes into account that Uytenbogaert was present as adviser to the Utrecht Synod, and was widely regarded as the church order's real author, notwithstanding his own emphatic denials. Even if he was not its author, he must have been very content with the order, since its approach to differences in opinion is in complete conformity with his own.<sup>22</sup>

It is theoretically and practically possible that the *Utrecht Church Order*, or at least its list of subjects for examination, was at the fountainhead of both the *Delineatio* and the *Confessio*; this would fully explain why both documents display an almost identical pattern. One can easily imagine a scenario in which Uytenbogaert, when he invited first Vorstius and then Episcopius to set up a founding document for the Remonstrant Society, provided each of them with the text of the church order, or at least the list of topics, to help them on their way.

As we shall see in the next section, however, the agreements between the *Delineatio* and the *Confessio* go much deeper than just a structural level. Numerous literal agreements suggest a direct literary relationship between the two documents that cannot be explained away by assuming the *Utrecht Church Order* to be a common source for both.

## 6 The Literary Relationship between the *Delineatio* and the *Confessio*

A comparison of the texts of the *Delineatio* and *Confessio* leads to the inescapable conclusion that there is a relationship of direct literary dependence between these writings, meaning that the author of one document must have used the other to compose his own.

Important differences do, however, exist between the texts. Whereas Vorstius in his *Delineatio* is extremely concise, Episcopius in his *Confessio* is much more elaborate, seeming to aim above all at precision and completeness, but also at a certain elegance of style. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that both men make essentially the same points, in largely the same order, with identical arguments and using comparable terminology.

Vorstius needed only three relatively brief sentences to make his point that true religion has at its foundation a belief that God exists and, as its unique and infallible rule, the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments. In con-

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22 Hooijer, *Oude kerkordeningen*, 379–380; Rogge, “De Utrechtsche synoden,” 835.

trast, Episcopus took four densely-printed quarto pages to make roughly the same points. Without going into too much detail, the following sample illustrates some of the agreements between the text of Vorstius's 1 1–2 (omitting only the *porismata*), and Episcopus's first sentence.

<i>Delineatio</i>	<i>Confessio</i>
I. 1. Vera religio est recta Deum colendi ratio, sub spe certa divinae remunerationis, in verbo Dei nobis patefacta, qualis nunc sola christiana est. 2. Huius primum fundamentum est credere Deum esse et remuneraturum eos qui ipsum exquirunt.	I. 1. Quisquis Deum rite colere et aeternam salutem certo atque indubie consequi vult, ante omnia ei necessum est ut credat Deum esse, et praemia largiri quaerentibus ipsum, ac proinde ad eam normam ac regulam se componat quam ab ipso vero Deo, legislatore supremo, traditam ac praescriptam, vitaeque aeternae promissione sancitam esse indubia fide constat.

In this example, the differences in style are most conspicuous. Vorstius presents concise *aphorismi* (*Vera religio est recta Deum colendi ratio*), while Episcopus offers elegant constructions within a relatively lengthy, full periode (*Quisquis Deum rite colere [...] vult*). In substance, however, their statements are identical.<sup>23</sup>

In some sections, the differences are of a similar nature, but smaller; compare, for instance, *Delineatio* III 2 with *Confessio* II 3:

23 Here, and in numerous other passages, both authors echo scriptural verses and traditional phrases. For instance, the phrase *credere Deum esse et remuneraturum eos qui ipsum exquirunt* in *Delineatio* 1 2 is a reference to Heb. 11:6 (more closely aligned to Beza's version in the *Confessio*). As such, it would not allow any conclusions with regard to the relationship between these texts, were it not for the fact that both authors have selected precisely this verse as the basic definition of the true religion—a decision marked out by Trigland as typically Remonstrant, and reprehensible; see J. Triglandius, *Antapologia, sive Examen atque refutatio totius Apologiae remonstrantium* (Amsterdam: Janssonius, Waesberge and Weyerstraete, 1664), 315b.



<i>Delineatio</i>	<i>Confessio</i>
Essentia Dei dupliciter hic consideranda est: partim <i>absolute</i> quoad naturales proprietates personis communes, partim <i>relative</i> , quoad ordinem originis et mutuam personarum inter se relationem	Ad naturam Dei quod attinet, scriptura dupliciter nobis Deum considerandum proponit. 1. Absolute ac communiter in attributis ipsius essentialibus, quibus nobis scilicet naturam ipsius spiritualem, et gloriosam maiestatem distinctis personis communem, quantum in hac vita fidei ac saluti nostrae satis est, nobis explicat. 2. Distincte ac relative in mysterio Sanctissimae Trinitatis, quod ipsarum inter se personarum internam ac mutuam habitudinem ac propriam quandam oeconomiam respicit

At other points, the *Confessio* is much more elaborate, but nonetheless shares phrases with the *Delineatio* to the letter; compare these excerpts from *Delineatio* v with excerpts from *Confessio* vi.

<i>Delineatio</i>	<i>Confessio</i>
v     1 Creationem statim excipit providentia, hoc est, cura et gubernatio rerum creatarum	vi    1 Creationem excipit immediate actualis Dei providentia (...) Est enim haec aliud nihil, quam seria et continua totius huius universi (...) inspectio, cura et regimen
v     2 Haec partim generalis est, quoad omnes creaturas, partim specialis, quoad homines, maxime pios et electos	vi    2 Est igitur haec partim generalis, quoad omnes creaturas, partim specialis, quoad angelos et homines, maxime vero quoad pios et sanctos.
v     5, <i>porisma</i> : Itaque nihil loci est in toto mundo vel caecae fortunae, vel fato stoico, quum neque ignorante, neque non curante, vel otiose spectante, nedum invito, aut simpliciter nolente Deo, quidquam uspiam fiat.	v     7 Nihil igitur uspiam temere aut fortuito fit in universo mundo, id est, Deo vel ignorante, vel non curante, vel ociose spectante, neque omnino reluctante, vel prorsus invito ac ne permittere quidem volente (...) 8 Itaque nec caecae Epicureorum fortunae ac brutae temeritati, nec ferreae ac fatali Stoicorum, Manichaeorum aut Praedestinatorum necessitati locus in mundo ullus per veram Dei providentiam (...) unquam relinquitur.

(cont.)

<i>Delineatio</i>	<i>Confessio</i>
ibid. Usus doctrinae est, ut in adversis patientes, in secundis grati simus, in futurum vero optima quaeque a Deo speremus.	ibid. Unde porro vere pii, de his omnibus recte informati in adversis quidem patientes, in secundis vero grati semper erga Deum redduntur, et praeterea in futurum quoque optimam in Deo fidissimo Patre suo, spem libenter et assidue reponunt.

These are but a few examples among many more. In fact, the further one reads in both texts, the more striking the agreements become, as in the case of *Delineatio* VI 5 and *Confessio* VII 5.

<i>Delineatio</i>	<i>Confessio</i>
Augetur tamen haec miseria propriis sive actualibus uniuscuiusque hominis peccatis, quippe quae et reatum nostrum coram Deo revera multiplicant, et mentem in rebus spiritualibus obscurant, imo excoecant, voluntatemque magis ac magis assuetudine ipsa peccandi depravant.	Praeter hoc peccatum sunt et alia propria, seu actualia uniuscuiusque hominis peccata, quae et reatum nostrum coram Deo revera multiplicant, et mentem in rebus spiritualibus obscurant, imo paulatim excaecant, denique voluntatem nostram magis ac magis adsueta-dine ipsa peccandi depravant.

Compare also the *porisma* to *Delineatio* VI 5 with *Confessio* VII 10, where both texts are almost completely identical.<sup>24</sup> Finally, it cannot be coincidence that both texts end with a chapter on the church's administration, and mention the role of a city magistrate to:

24 So also *Delineatio* VII 2 = *Confessio* VIII 3 (*Nam partim ad personam, partim ad officium ipsius pertinet. Respectu personae Christus est verus aeternusque Deus, et simul verus ac perfecte iustus homo in una eademque persona, quippe naturalis sive unigenitus ac proprius Dei filius in plenitudine temporis per operationem Spiritus Sancti verus et integer homo factus, atque ex Maria Virgine sine ulla peccati labe natus*); the rest of this chapter is also extremely similar; *Delineatio* X 4 = *Confessio* XIV 5.

externum ecclesiae regimen architectonice moderari, et publicum Dei cultum in ea sartum tectum conservare, ac proinde, quoties opus est, synodos convocare, in iisque praesidere, res tractandas una cum ecclesiastis proponere, suffragia libera rogare, sententiam una dicere, utque omnia in iis secundum Deum gerantur pro virili sua providere.

*Delineatio* XII 9 = *Confessio* XXV 3

rule the outward affairs of the church like a master builder, and keep the public service of God in good repair—and therefore, to convene synods as often as necessary; preside in them; set, in consultation with the ministers, the agenda; call for free votes; reach a common decision; and do their utmost to see to it that everything in them is conducted according to God's will.

These agreements justify the conclusion that either Vorstius used the *Confessio* for his *Delineatio*, or Episcopius used the *Delineatio* for his *Confessio*. This conclusion is valid, notwithstanding the fact that there are also many differences between the texts, some of them substantial. An analysis of these differences (which exceeds the scope of this article) would shed much light on the interpretation of the secondary text, as it would reveal in which points its author did not, or not entirely, agree with the model, leading him to either remove certain features or supplement others.

## 7 The *Delineatio brevis* as the Model for Episcopius's *Confessio sive Declaratio*

Now that it is clear that either the *Delineatio* was a model for the *Confessio*, or the other way around, it remains to decide which of these two possibilities is the more likely.

If Vorstius used the *Confessio* to compose his *Delineatio brevis*, he must have wanted to bring it back to a more manageable size. It is conceivable, for instance, that he wanted to rephrase it in the form of *aphorismi* and *porismata* in order to use it as teaching material in the ministry as a theologian that awaited him in Friedrichstadt.<sup>25</sup> The *Confessio* was finished in 1621, and

25 Compare the programme of disputations offered by Vorstius to the Count Arnold of Bentheim shortly after his appointment as professor in Steinfurt: *Idea totius S. Theologiae, duobus libellis distincta et iuxta seriem capitum seu locorum communium brevibus aphorismis*.

Vorstius was to have started his work in Friedrichstadt in 1622. A timescale of some months would certainly have been enough for him to produce a provisional text such as the *Delineatio brevis*.

There are, however, several objections to such an assumption. First, a psychological consideration may have some weight. Throughout his work, Vorstius had shown himself to have been an independent thinker, known for his fairness and friendliness but unintimidated by even the greatest authorities.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, he was Episcopius's senior, both in age and as a theological professor. It would simply not be in keeping with his personality and status to take the recent work of a young theologian as the starting point for his further career in Friedrichstadt.

Second, we are informed by Tideman that the final draft of the *Confessio* contained a reference to excommunication as the third and final step in the process of ecclesiastical discipline, and that a number of ministers who read the draft before it went to the press, had objected to the term.<sup>27</sup> The word does not occur in the printed version of the *Confessio*. Episcopius and Vorstius were commissioned to integrate the comments that came in from the ministers' review into the definitive text. In the *Delineatio*, however, the term *excommunicatio* does occur. It would be strange, to put it mildly, if Vorstius had first agreed to its removal only to reinstate it in his own abstract of the *Confessio*.<sup>28</sup> To assume that Vorstius made an abstract of Episcopius's draft before the comments from the reading committee came in, would narrow the timeframe for the composition of the *Delineatio* down to a possible, but extremely brief period of weeks.

Finally, if it was Vorstius's intention to reduce the bulk of the *Confessio*'s text, it is unclear why he would retain, for example, the detailed description of the

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*mis comprehensa, proposita ad publicam συζήτησιν aliquoties de ea instituendam in illustri schola Steinfurtensi* (Siegen: Corvinus, 1596).

26 See, for instance, the characterisation by Vorstius's opponent Jacob Trigland, in his *Kerckelycke geschiedenissen, begrypende de swaere en bekommerlijcke geschillen, in de Vereenigde Nederlanden voor-gevallen, met derselver beslissinge, ende aenmerckingen op de Kerckelycke Historie van Johannes Wtenbogaert* (Leiden: Wyngaerden, 1651), 574b: "Een man wel van sonderlinghe gaven, gheleertheit, welspreeckenheyt, modestie etc., de welcke hem by een yeder wel konde aenghenaem maecken, maer ondertusschen van een slibberich verstant, die voor eenige jaren de Sociniaensche boecken al te gierich ende te naerstich gelezen hebbende, eenige vreemde opinien uyt de selve inghenomen ende de manieren van spreekken by de Socinianen gebruyckelijck hem selven al te familiaer gemaect hadde."

27 Tideman, *De stichting*, 170.

28 Objections were also made against *litaneorum ... dies*, which is present in the *Declaratio*, but replaced by *supplicationum ... dies* in the *Confessio*.

magistrate's role in convening synods (XII 9, quoted above),<sup>29</sup> or make such stylistic changes as in the section on sin (VI 5, also quoted above).

By contrast, we know that Uytenbogaert asked Vorstius to draft a foundational document for the Remonstrant Society before Episcopius began working on it (see above, section 4). Uytenbogaert may have provided him with the list of topics derived from the *Utrecht Church Order* on which candidates for the ministry had to be examined. It may be conjectured that Vorstius denied the request, but was still curious to know how Episcopius was getting on with it. It would fit well within this line of events if Vorstius had declared himself unable to deliver a complete text, but nonetheless contributed a sketch such as the *Delineatio*, with the recommendation that someone else (for instance, Episcopius) should take it as a starting point to produce the desired document. Episcopius then appears to have greatly augmented Vorstius's sketch (while also leaving out certain passages and emphases), improved it stylistically, and presented the result to the members of the Society.<sup>30</sup>

## 8 Conclusion

In this article, it has been argued that Conradus Vorstius wrote his *Brief Outline of the Christian Faith* in 1620 as a sketch for a Remonstrant Confession, at the request of the Remonstrant Society's leader, Johannes Uytenbogaert, who in turn forwarded it to Simon Episcopius. On the basis of this sketch, Episcopius composed his famous *Confession or Declaration*, published the following year. Whether Episcopius used other sources besides Vorstius's sketch (e.g., the *Belgic Confession*) has not been the subject of this contribution. In the 1630s, someone with access to Vorstius's papers (Vorstius himself had died in 1622) found the sketch, and decided to have it printed, apparently unaware that it was never intended for publication.

This proposed reconstruction of events suggests that Vorstius's sketch (in turn perhaps inspired by Uytenbogaert's list of topics for the examination of

29 In the Preface to the *Apologetica exegesis*, Vorstius requested the States of Holland to make sure that academic freedom was conserved "in good repair" (*ut ... libertas ... sarta tecta in ecclesia Christi conservetur*); they should, he adds a little bit further, take care to keep their right to do so *sartum tectum*. It seems that Vorstius had a certain predilection for the phrase *sartus tectus*. This would confirm the priority of Vorstius's text.

30 If this reconstruction is correct, it would confirm Mellby's suspicion, *Conrad Vorstius*, 95: "Wohl stammt die (...) 'Confessio Pastorum Remonstrantium' nicht von ihm, und doch erinnert so vieles darin an seine Lieblingsgedanken, dass man wohl annehmen darf, er ist bei der Ausarbeitung mitthätig gewesen."

students compiled for the Utrecht church order of 1612) was crucial for the production of the Remonstrant Confession, and truly provided Episcopius with the input and impulse he needed to start work on it (and finish it within a few months). Further study is needed to show to what extent Vorstius's theological views, which, as expressed in the sketch, go well beyond the five articles of the Remonstrance, have stamped the *Confession* and the further development of Remonstrant theology in matters of substance, and what the real import of Uytenbogaert's words was when he wrote to Vorstius: "Episcopius has closely followed in your footsteps."