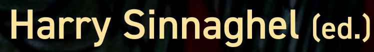
Harry Sinnaghel (ed.)

1523

THE FIRST MARTYRS OF THE REFORMATION

What has changed in the 500 years since the first martyrs of the Reformation?

ASP Academic & Scientific Publishers

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Edited by Harry Sinnaghel

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Table of contents

Preface 7

Chapter 1 – Historical context 9
Drs Harry Sinnaghel

Chapter 2 – Austin friars and Antwerp women: What did the Antwerp Augustinians do that led to women taking up their defence? 25
Dr Dick Wursten

Chapter 3 – Impact of the Reformation on the Counter-Reformation and contemporary Catholicism: the case of Antwerp 39
Prof Dr Guido Vanheeswijck

Chapter 4 – From Theology to politics: the impact of Protestantism on the development of democracy 55
Dr Guy Liagre

Chapter 5 – Protestant virtue ethics: tradition and contemporary relevance 77
Prof Dr Pieter Vos

Chapter 6 – Impact of the Reformation on Protestant–Jewish dialogue in Germany 93
Drs Jan Christian Pinsch

Chapter 7 – 500 years of Reformation; where do we go from here? 109
Prof Dr Johan Temmerman

Preface

On 1 July 1523, Hendrik Vos and Johan van den Esschen died at the stake on the Grand Place in Brussels. They were the first martyrs of the Reformation.

To mark the 500th anniversary of this event, the Faculty of Protestant Theology and Religion Studies in Brussels organised a colloquium to discuss what has changed in the 500 years since the first martyrs of the Reformation. This colloquium took place on 31 May 2023. This book includes the seven articles presented at this commemorative event.

First, Drs Harry Sinnaghel provides a short historical introduction to the political and religious context of the event on 1 July 1523: the actions and decisions that led to the first martyrs of the Reformation and why that occurred in Brussels.

In his contribution, Dr Dick Wursten explains that it was no coincidence that Hendrik van Zutphen, the prior of the Augustinian monastery in Antwerp, was arrested by the Inquisition in 1522 and then freed by a group of Antwerp women. In its service, in the way it celebrated Holy Mass, in the way it treated people pastorally, the first Augustinian monastery in Antwerp valued women. This can be explained because, independently of Martin Luther but inspired by him, they went back to the sources and discovered that in the Bible all men are equal, that women are human beings, and therefore they are equal to men before God and also in the eyes of the Church and in society.

Next, Prof Dr Guido Vanheeswijck describes the relationship between the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation. At first glance, we can imagine that these two movements were adversaries, enemies of each other, and that they did not understand each other. To a certain extent this is true, but Prof Vanheeswijck has set out to show in his article that, when we consider them at a deeper level, we will see that there are great similarities between these two movements, similarities that will eventually lead to the path of secularisation. And if we apply that today, we will see that both Protestants and Catholics face the same problems.

When we talk about Protestantism, we often speak about democracy. Democracy is not the direct offshoot of Protestantism but, according to

Dr Guy Liagre, the Protestant movement generated democratic impulses. And these impulses were translated in different ways in different Churches and in different countries. At the base was the general priesthood of believers who nurtured the democratic idea, and this idea was transformed in diverse ways in different countries around the world.

The article by Prof Dr Pieter Vos discusses the impact that the Reformation had on ethics. He focuses on one topic in particular: virtue ethics. His thesis is that the virtue ethics tradition has not been abandoned and did not simply disappear in the Reformed and Lutheran theology of the post-Reformation era, but it remains one of the most important sources for practising ethics.

When discussing the influence of the Reformation on Protestant–Jewish dialogue in Germany, we must face the fact that there is also a dark side to the Reformation, writes Drs Jan Christian Pinsch. He refers to the long history of anti-Semitism that goes back to the beginning of Christianity and which gained importance during the Middle Ages. During the Reformation period, 1523 is not only the year of the first martyrs, but also the year in which Martin Luther published his first 'Judenschrift' that 'Jesus Christ was born a Jew'. In 1543, Luther published 'On the Jews and their lies'. These anti-Jewish writings are a troublesome legacy that the Protestant Church has to deal with. Luther believed that the Jewish synagogues should be destroyed in honour of the Lord. Today, the Church knows better and has taken a clear stand against the continuing problem of anti-Semitism, but this process took many centuries.

In the seventh and final contribution, Prof Dr Johan Temmerman discusses the heritage of the Reformation with an eye to the future. He looks at the freedom and connectedness that we need to establish with the planet and with nature. This means we are free when we are connected. The second topic he raises is the need to believe in progress: faith must become trust in evolution. Finally, he suggests connecting the serenity of God with the theology of resilience. This means putting human rights above creeds.

After a historical introduction to set the scene regarding 1 July 1523, this colloquium dealt with the consequences of the Reformation in a number of diverse topics: secularisation, the role of women, democracy, virtue ethics and interreligious dialogue. It ended with a proposal for a way to move forward.

I wish you much reading pleasure!

Drs Harry Sinnaghel

CHAPTER 1

Historical context

Drs Harry Sinnaghel

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the political and religious context of the event on 1 July 1523. What actions and decisions led to the first martyrs of the Reformation? Who were these martyrs? And why were they executed in Brussels in particular?

Crisis in the religious orders

During the late medieval period, most religious orders were in crisis. The zeal for living according to the Gospel and the commitment to living in community were waning. Several factors can be attributed to this decline:

- the weak theological formation of the monks;
- the decline in ecclesiastical authority;
- the gap between higher and lower clergy.

The Augustinian order was also in crisis, and this revolved around two questions:

- How strictly should the discipline of the Augustinian order be adhered to within the monastic walls?
- What was the purpose of this discipline: one's own salvation or the salvation of the world?

Many religious orders were nostalgic about the old hermitic lifestyle. In response to this highly widespread spiritual laxity, reforming congregations were founded in many places.

So there emerged two movements in the Augustinian order: the Conventuals and the Observants. About one-third of the Augustinian monks in Germany belonged to the group of Conventuals and two-thirds to the group of Observants. Needless to say, serious tensions existed between these two groups. This was because

- the Conventuals were the defenders of the old customs; they wanted to preserve in their monasteries the accumulated exceptions and privileges;
- the Observants wanted to halt the decline of monastic discipline and to return to the original 'observance' of the rules that were characterised by the vow of poverty and pastoral care.

The Saxon province of the Augustinian order had taken the lead in that reform movement at the beginning of the 15th century (1422).[1] This movement of Observants in Germany is also known as the Saxon reform of the Augustinian order. Under the leadership of the second Vicar General, Andreas Proles (1426-1503), this reform movement expanded not only in the German countries, but also in the Low Countries.[2] Proles was succeeded by Johann von Staupitz (1468-1524).

In 1502, Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony (1463-1525) founded the University of Wittenberg; Johann von Staupitz was its co-founder.

Luther and the ramifications for the southern Low Countries

Now we consider what happened with Luther in Germany, and in parallel what the consequences were for the southern Low Countries,[3] in order to understand the context of the first martyrs of the Reformation.

1 The Observants of the Augustinian order comprised several congregations: about seven Italian, one Spanish and one Saxon. The Saxon order had considerable influence in Germany and in the Low Countries.

2 The Low Countries and parts of Germany belonged to the House of Habsburg. In addition to these political and economic links, cultural and linguistic relationships also existed between these areas.

3 During the Renaissance, the Low Countries roughly corresponded to the territories of present-day Belgium, The Netherlands and Luxemburg, including parts of northern France and western Germany (and excluding the independent Prince-Bishopric of Liège and the independent Principality of Stavelot-Malmedy). This region was also known as the Habsburg Netherlands and the Seventeen Provinces. From 1581, during the Dutch Revolt, the northern provinces of the

Martin Luther: 1505-1512

In 1505, the 21-year-old Martin Luther entered the Augustinian monastery adjoining the university in Erfurt. This monastery consisted of Conventuals, that is, the adherents to a strict monastic discipline that was gradually declining. Martin Luther followed this Conventual attitude.

Three years later, in 1508, Luther moved to Wittenberg to teach philosophy at the local university.

Johann von Staupitz, the Vicar General of the Augustinian order in Germany, wanted to preserve the unity of the order in Germany. Accordingly, in 1510, he sent two monks to Rome, one of whom was Martin Luther. They were to present the objections to the superior general of the Augustinian order in Rome and ask for advice on how to resolve the controversy in Germany. The superior general asked that all monasteries in Germany conform to the position of their Vicar General. But Johann von Staupitz was a follower of the Observants, the group that wanted to return to the original eremite life and to a stricter adherence to Augustine's Order Rule (the *Vita Apostolica*, life according to the Spirit of Jesus and the Apostles).

After this ruling by the superior general of the Augustinian order, the castle monastery at Erfurt, where Luther came from, adhered to the Convention position. Luther, on the other hand, did not follow the monastery's opposition, and instead submitted to the ruling of the superior general in Rome. Luther continued his studies and in 1512 he passed his doctoral examination at the University of Wittenberg. In that same year, he also became a professor there.

Antwerp

The Augustinian monasteries in the Low Countries[4] were part of the Belgian-Cologne province of the Augustinian order. The monastery of Enkhuizen

Low Countries were called the Seven United Provinces and the southern provinces the Southern Netherlands or the Spanish Netherlands.

4 Since the 13th century, the Augustinians had had monasteries in Maastricht (1254), Ypres (1263), Dordrecht (1275), Middelburg (1292), Ghent (1295) and also in Bruges, Mechelen, Leuven, Enghien and Hasselt (13th century), in Tournai (1319), Appingedam (1328), Haarlem and Liege (1489) and Enkhuizen (1496). See Jos E Vercruysse. (2007). De Antwerpse Augustijnen en de Lutherse Reformatie, 1513-1523. In *Trajecta: Geschiedenis van het katholiek leven in de Nederlanden* (dl 16). Redactie Trajecta vzw, p 195.

and several other Augustinian monasteries in the Low Countries[5] joined the Saxon reform and maintained close contacts with the Augustinians in Wittenberg.

In 1511, Augustinian monks from the monastery in Enkhuizen settled in Antwerp and founded a monastery and the Holy Trinity Church in 1513. There were eight Augustinians, led by Prior Johan van Mechelen,[6] who had studied in Wittenberg and had previously been the prior of Enkhuizen. The Augustinian monastery in Antwerp also joined the Saxon reform.

31 October 1517

The first five years after Luther became a professor at the University of Wittenberg were peaceful and quiet. In his first academic year, Luther lectured on the Psalms; in the second year on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and this Epistle stimulated Luther's theological work. Meanwhile, Luther studied the Vulgate and tried to reconcile Church teaching with Holy Scripture.

After the quiet period of five years, Luther ruffled feathers when he distributed his 'Ninety-five Theses' titled 'Disputation on the efficacy and power of indulgences' on 31 October 1517. At first, Luther sent this Ninety-five Theses as an appendix to a letter to Archbishop Albrecht of Mainz. In this letter, Luther expressed serious concerns about the preaching and the practice of indulgences under the responsibility of the archbishop and urged him to effect changes. In addition, Luther wrote another letter to his Diocesan Bishop Hieronymus of Brandenburg. Luther also sent his Ninety-five Theses to some colleagues. These Ninety-five Theses were also nailed to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg according to the custom for academic debate at the time. He wanted to initiate an academic discussion on open and unresolved questions regarding the theory and practice of indulgences.

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5 Johann von Staupitz looked in the Augustinian monasteries of Haarlem, Dordrecht, Enkhuizen and Ghent for students for the University of Wittenberg. So the Augustinian monasteries of Haarlem, Dordrecht and Ghent probably also joined the Saxon reform. See Vercruysse. De Antwerpse Augustijnen en de Lutherse Reformatie, 1513-1523, p 197.

6 Johan van Mechelen is also called Johannes van Mechelen.

26 April 1518

On 26 April 1518, the triennial meeting of the Augustinians in Heidelberg took place. Luther held polemical debates there among his Augustinian co-Observants. Johann von Staupitz, the Vicar General of the Augustinian order in Germany, supported Luther. It was not simply that no one could refute Luther; on the contrary, Luther received acclaim, sympathy and support. No one would contradict him, but also no one could. His theses articulated a widespread feeling in Germany of being exploited and drained by the Roman curia. As a result, his theses had an explosive force, which could not have been foreseen and which surprised even Luther himself. Fewer and fewer in Germany understood why it was necessary to support Rome financially. With the indulgence for St Peter's Basilica, Rome had gone too far, and that was the straw that broke the camel's back.

Two important people were present at the meeting in Heidelberg:

- Martin Bucer, who became a great supporter of Luther; and
- Johannes Eck, who became a strong opponent.

The Pope initially took little notice of Luther and his theses. But it was the German clergy led by Johannes Eck who informed Pope Leo X[7] of the seriousness of the situation. Consequently, by order of the Pope, commissions of inquiry were appointed to study Luther's works.

August 1518

In August 1518, Luther published the *Commentary to the Ninety-Five Theses* to defend himself against his theological critics and explain their meaning to Pope Leo X.

12-14 October 1518: Diet of Augsburg

Rome was concerned that Luther's teachings were undermining the doctrine of the Church and the authority of the Pope and therefore prepared a trial

7 Leo X, born Giovanni de Medici (Florence, 11 December 1475 – Rome, 1 December 1521), was Pope from 1513 to 1521.

against Luther. Luther received a summons from Pope Leo X to travel to Rome to answer charges of false teachings. This was the first step towards a possible trial for heresy. But Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony distrusted the Pope and he refused to let Luther travel to Rome. Instead, Luther would then be questioned by Cardinal Thomas Cajetanus during the Diet of Augsburg between 12 and 14 October 1518. The main topics during this Diet were actually the succession of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian and a tax to finance a crusade against the Turks. The succession of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian would be of great significance to the Reformation: Emperor Maximilian's own son, Philip the Fair, had died in 1506 and so a proposal was tabled to name his grandson, Charles, born in Ghent in 1500, as his successor.

The interview with Luther could hardly be called such: the cardinal did not want a debate; he only wanted to know whether or not Luther was obedient to the Pope. Ensuring papal authority and the Pope as the highest authority of the Roman Catholic Church was Rome's only concern. To respond to this question, Luther requested a night of reflection and the next morning, 13 October 1518, he composed a *Protestatio*,[8] in which he claimed to have written nothing contrary to Holy Scripture, the Church Fathers or papal decrees. It meant he could be accused only of error and not heresy. Luther returned to Wittenberg and published his *Protestatio* so that the general public could learn of his defence against Rome.

Luther's ideas about the greedy papacy and the overwhelming lust for power of imperial authority appealed to Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony and led him to support Luther, more from a political point of view than because of Luther's theological ideas, which Frederick the Wise did not actually agree with.

What were the consequences for Antwerp?

The most populous centres were bound to become the first to receive the reform movement.

Antwerp, as a world port and a cosmopolitan centre, was the city of particular importance to the Reformation. Within the city walls resided many foreigners who, in addition to their official duties, also had the opportunity to

8 A *Protestatio* is a declaration or a defence.

spread the new thoughts in wide circles. They enjoyed the privilege of being less harassed by the authorities, who, for the sake of trade, were inclined to turn a blind eye.

There a dense, rich and strong colony of foreign merchants and converted Jews who had fled from the Inquisition in the Iberian Peninsula was able to maintain a spirit of intellectual freedom. And the printing presses were ready to spread Luther's thoughts far and wide.

After Martin Luther had nailed his Ninety-five Theses on the door of Wittenberg's Castle Chapel on 31 October 1517, and published one reformatory writing after another in the following years, they soon also became widespread in the Low Countries. Antwerp was a cosmopolitan hub of trade and traffic and so it became the centre of new thought in the Southern Provinces of the Low Countries.

Luther's ideas and teachings penetrated the Low Countries in two ways: on the one hand, through German merchants who brought his writings from their homelands and, on the other, through internal contacts between the Augustinian homes in Wittenberg and Antwerp. The Augustinians in Antwerp were familiar with Luther's writings and some accepted his teachings.

In Antwerp, the book trade was very active and by the spring of 1518, Dutch translations of Luther's writings were already on sale. Besides its adherents among the Augustinians, the Reformation also had adherents among the citizens, both among the common people and artisans and among the wealthy and the magistracy.

12 January 1519

On 12 January 1519, the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian died. His grandson Charles became Emperor Charles or Charles V. As a result, an ultra-Catholic Emperor now ruled the Holy Roman Empire.

28 March 1519

On 28 March 1519, Luther wrote a letter to Desiderius Erasmus asking for his support. Erasmus, who was living in Leuven and Anderlecht at that time, replied two months later, though not without reservations. But he praised Luther's intentions and, moreover, informed Luther that he already had

several followers in these regions, notably Érard de La Marck, the prince-bishop of Liège, and the prior of the Augustinian monastery in Antwerp. This letter was soon published there.

15 June 1520

Based on the results of the commissions of inquiry, Pope Leo X issued the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* (Latin for '*Arise, Lord*') on 15 June 1520. In this bull, the Pope called on Luther to dissociate himself from what the Pope considered erroneous doctrine. The bull quoted 41 theses on the faith that Luther had published which the Pope labelled as erroneous.

10 December 1520

Luther responded to this papal bull by burning it together with some canon-law books on 10 December 1520.

3 January 1521

On 3 January 1521, Pope Leo X issued the papal bull *Decet Romanum Pontificem* ('*It pleases the Pope of Rome*') in which he officially excommunicated Martin Luther and his followers and declared them heretics. In addition, all Church officials were instructed to take strict action against them to defend the Catholic faith. Luther and his followers were thus permanently put under an ecclesiastical ban.

One notices how, within a few months, tensions rose and Luther's theses evolved from mere aberrations to heresies.

16-25 April 1521: Diet of Worms

At that time, an ecclesiastical ban was usually followed up by a State ban. Although the young Charles V wanted to be loyal to Rome, he had to consider the Elector Frederick the Wise of Saxony, who was protecting Luther. The emperor then decided to grant Luther a free interrogation at the Diet of Worms from 16 to 25 April 1521.

On 17 April, the first session took place. Luther was asked to recant 20 of his books. Luther refused to recant anything, but asked for a day's

adjournment. On 18 April, he declared that it was '*uncertain and dangerous to act against his conscience*'. It is not certain whether the phrase '*Here I stand and I cannot do otherwise. May God help me. Amen*' is Luther's, but it does illustrate his position.

After Luther's interrogation at the Diet of Worms in April 1521, Emperor Charles V issued the Edict of Worms on 26 May 1521. Luther was declared an outlaw; that is, he had become a persona non grata and no longer had civil and political rights. Legally, anyone could kill him. No one was allowed to shelter Luther, give him food or drink, or even offer help or sympathy. Furthermore, his books were banned: whoever possessed them would be punished. And anyone who agreed with his teachings would be persecuted. Also, in the Edict of Worms, Charles V called for Luther's writings to be burned everywhere.

May 1521 – March 1522

However, Elector Frederick the Wise had ensured that Luther was secretly kidnapped on 4 May and taken to the Wartburg in Eisenach.

There Luther lived for almost a year and spent his time there translating the New Testament into German. He used Erasmus's recent critical edition, the edition that would later be called *textus receptus*. Luther's translation was published in 1522.

On 9 March 1522, though, Luther left the Wartburg, despite the ban, without the leave of his Elector.

Meanwhile, what was happening in Antwerp?

Because of the rising tensions in Antwerp, the prior of the Augustinian monastery had to be replaced several times during a period of several years. Here is a list of the incumbents: in 1518, Jacob Proost[9] (Ypres 1486 – Bremen 1562) succeeded Johan van Mechelen as prior of the Augustinian monastery in Antwerp. Proost was born in Ypres and educated in the monastery of Haarlem. He studied with Luther at Wittenberg and earned a degree in Theology there in 1521. Returning to Antwerp, his preaching, like Luther's, focused on combating indulgences because in Antwerp Italian merchants

9 Jacob Proost is also known as Jacobus van Yperen, and later Præpositus.

had leased indulgences and they hired priests to advertise them. He had contacts with such great humanists as Erasmus.

Following the Edict of Worms of 26 May 1521, Lutheran writings were burned in Antwerp on 31 July 1521.

A few months later, on 6 December 1521, Prior Proost and several others were imprisoned and taken to Brussels, where, after a long struggle, he finally caved in and, on Sunday, 9 February 1522, recanted his errors during a worship service in the Church of St Gudula in Brussels; the notarised act of this was widely circulated.[10] However, he soon repented of his weakness and again preached in the spirit of the Reformation. He was arrested again, but he was able to escape and managed to reach Wittenberg. He was subsequently a preacher in Bremen from 1524 to 1562, and from there he performed Reformation work in East Frisia. Luther and Proost exchanged letters in a friendly tone, showing that their households knew each other well.

The preaching of the Gospel and Proost's preaching against the indulgence trade appealed to the monastics in Antwerp. As a result, the Augustinian monastery in Antwerp remained a centre of Lutheran preaching and the entire monastic community consisted of Lutherans.

As a result of the success of Luther's teachings and writings in Antwerp, Lutheran writings were burned for the second time in Antwerp on 6 May 1522.

Jacob Proost was succeeded as prior by Hendrik van Zutphen (c 1488-1524). As prior in Dordrecht, van Zutphen had already sided with Luther; had studied at Wittenberg and earned his degree in Theology there. In June 1522 he followed in the footsteps of Proost, becoming prior of the Augustinian monastery in Antwerp.

Van Zutphen's evangelical preaching had great appeal. On 29 September 1522, he was lured away from the monastery by a ruse and arrested at the Mint in Antwerp by the Margrave of Antwerp and imprisoned in the monastery of St Michael, no doubt with the intention of secretly transferring him to Vilvoorde overnight. Such was the vigilance and evangelical pride of the citizenry, however, that a crowd (some say several hundred, even several thousand) of women stormed the prison, freed him and brought him victoriously back to his own monastery. After that, he seized the opportunity

10 After the publication of the Latin text, *Anathematizatio et revocatio fratris Jacobi Praepositi, olim prioris Fratrum Heremitarum S. Augustini opidi Antuerpiensis*, a Latin–German edition was also published in Cologne.

to escape to Bremen, Later, he was succeeded in Bremen by Jacob Proost. Invited to go to Meldorf on the Elbe to preach the Gospel, van Zutphen was overpowered there on 9 December 1524 by a band of drunken peasants who had been instigated to do so and was cruelly murdered.

After van Zutphen, Lambert van Thorn[11] (Thorn 1490 – Brussels 1528) became the prior of the Augustinian monastery in Antwerp. The monks of that monastery continued to preach Luther's teachings. A few days later, on 6 October 1522, the 16 monks of the monastery were taken prisoner and transported to Vilvoorde and Hoogstraten. The interrogations led by the Inquisitor General Frans van der Hulst[12] resulted in most of them confessing and recanting their heresy; they were then taken to the Augustinian monastery in Dordrecht. It is certain, however, that Lambert van Thorn, the prior of the Augustinian monastery, Hendrik Vos[13] and Johan van Esschen[14] remained steadfast. They were transferred to Brussels. Their trial lasted nine months. They had a very hard time in prison. During those nine months, the Roman Catholic side tried everything to have them recant what they had confessed.

In October 1522, by order of Archduchess Margaret of Austria, the Augustinian monastery in Antwerp was disbanded and demolished, the altars of the Holy Trinity Church razed to the ground and the Hosts taken in solemn procession to another church. The Holy Trinity Church was transformed into a parish church – today's St Andrew's Church.

What happened in other cities in the southern Low Countries?

Lutheranism was introduced not only in Antwerp, but also in other cities in the southern Low Countries, especially where Augustinians had monasteries.

As early as 1518, Luther's writings had become widespread in Ghent. On 25 July 1521, an entire batch of these writings was burned publicly on the Vrijdagmarkt in the presence of Charles V. This was the first burning

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11 Lambert van Thorn is also called Lambertus van Thorn, Lambrecht Thorn and Lambertus Thoren.

12 On 23 April 1522, Charles V appointed Frans van de Hulst as Inquisitor General of the Low Countries. On 1 June 1523, he also received the papal mandate from Pope Adrian VI. In January 1524, Frans van de Hulst had already been dismissed for forgery.

13 Hendrik Vos is also known as Henricus Vos and Hendrik Voes.

14 Johan van Esschen is also known as Jan van den Esschen, Johannes van Esschen and Johannes van den Esschen.

of Lutheran writings in the southern Low Countries. However, this mass destruction did not threaten the survival of Luther's teachings in Ghent: Lutheranism there penetrated not only the working class, but also the upper bourgeoisie and the nobility, proving that Luther's teachings had reached all levels of society.

From the beginning, Bruges stood alongside Antwerp in the vanguard of the spread of Lutheranism. From 1520 the spread of this doctrine among the citizens of Bruges was widespread. The doctrine had a hold not only on the workers, but also on the well-to-do gatekeepers of Bruges. In 1521, on the basis of the Edict of Worms, a large number of Lutheran works were burned in public.

Brussels saw a Lutheran movement flourish from 1518 onwards.[15]

On 7 November 1519, the University of Louvain condemned justification by faith alone and the criticism of the merit of good works. This academic condemnation gave the Lutheran problem its full scope and decisive publicity. As a result, books by Luther were burned in public, and on 8 October 1521 about 80 copies were burned in Leuven.

The Prince-Bishopric of Liège was not part of the Low Countries and had enjoyed the privileges of political autonomy for centuries. Because of this, and also because it was in close proximity to Germany, Liège was also susceptible to Lutheranism. The Prince-Bishop of Liège, Érard de La Marck, may have expressed himself as somewhat of a reformist (in a general sense), but he was certainly not a Lutheran and, following the publication of Erasmus's letter to Luther of May 1519, hastened to make that very clear. On 17 October 1520, he issued an edict restricting Lutheran activities, making it the earliest edict to be issued against Lutheranism. But the nobility and bourgeoisie in Liège opposed the edict, stubbornly clinging to their privileges. The punishments for followers of the Reformation were usually public penance and fines and, in the worst scenario, banishment. The Edict of Worms of 26 May 1521 was in force in the Netherlands but not in the principality of Liège, which was outside the imperial jurisdiction. Therefore, on 17 October 1521, the Prince-Bishop of Liège issued an edict banning Luther's books.

15 See LE Verheyden. (1949). De Hervorming in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden in de XVIe Eeuw. Synode van de Protestantse Kerken, p 53.

1 July 1523: First martyrs of the Reformation

Here is a brief overview of the events in the southern Low Countries:

Spring 1518	The teachings and writings of Luther enter the Low Countries
7 November 1519	The Leuven faculty condemns Lutheran doctrine
26 May 1521	The Edict of Worms
25 July 1521	Book burning in Ghent
31 July 1521	Book burning in Antwerp
8 October 1521	Book burning in Leuven
December 1521	Imprisonment of Prior Jacob Proost
9 February 1522	Prior Jacob Proost recants his errors
6 May 1522	Book burning in Antwerp
June 1522	Hendrik van Zutphen succeeds Prior Jacob Proost
29 September 1522	Capture of Prior Hendrik van Zutphen
6 October 1522	Imprisonment of Prior Lambert van Thorn, Hendrik Vos and Johan van Esschen, among others
1 July 1523	Hendrik Vos and Johan van Esschen are burned in Brussels

The deviant teachings, the adherence to the 'Lutheran heresy', of Hendrik Vos, Johan van Esschen and Prior Lambert van Thorn are recorded and preserved in 62 articles. From this we can conclude that they were indeed followers of Luther. I provide the following examples of these teachings:

1. the papacy was not instituted by Christ;
2. the Pope has no power to forgive sins; only God can do that;
3. the Pope is a sinful man like all men, with no more power than any other priest;
4. Confirmation, priestly Ordination, Marriage and the last Unction are not sanctified by a divine promise and therefore cannot be considered Sacraments; only Baptism, the Lord's Supper and Penance are Sacraments instituted by Christ, communicating grace.

So it was clear that they could be condemned as followers of Luther under the Edict of Worms of 1521 issued by Charles V.

On Sunday, 1 July 1523, the pyre was erected on the Grand Place in Brussels. Of this we have an eyewitness account:

> Mendicant monks opened the procession, then professors from Leuven, abbots with their mitre and crosier, bishops, inquisitors, and judges. A large crowd was present.

First the desecration, reducing the condemned to the lay State, had to take place. This was performed by a bishop, while the monastic superior of the Minorites preached a sermon. The Prior Lambert van Thorn asked for a final period of reflection of several days. Then followed the two others, not yet 30 years old, and having already spent months in captivity.

> They remained strong and imperturbable; as the agony approached, their cheerfulness seemed to increase even more,

according to the eyewitness. The eyewitness then continues:

> Finally, Hendrik Vos and Johan van Esschen were led to the stake. Four confessors still tried to bring them to repentance. They begged and they threatened. But the answer was, '*We believe in God and in a Christian Church. But we do not believe in your Church.*' They delayed another half hour in lighting the wood. But they kept testifying that they wanted to die in the name of Christ. Then the flame struck the wood. They sang the profession of faith ... The rope that bound them was already scorched. There one of them knelt. He cried, '*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us.*' There were tears in the eyes of the confessors. One more time, '*You, O Lord, we praise*!' Then their voices choked in the flames.

Here ends the eyewitness accounts.

And so it was that the southern Low Countries provided the very first martyrs in the cause of the Church Reformation in the 16th century: Hendrik Vos and Johan van Esschen.

This horrific event left a lasting impression. Erasmus wrote about it in his letters and refuted the false rumour spread by the Inquisitor General Frans van der Hulst that the two had recanted at the last moment.

Luther was greatly moved by this event. In July 1523, he wrote a letter '*to the Christians in Holland, Brabant and Flanders*'16 who are the first to suffer harm and disgrace, fear and distress, prison and danger for Christ's sake. Impressed by the martyrdom of his followers from the southern Low Countries, Luther composed his first spiritual song, '*Ein neues Lied wir heben an*.'

As stated previously, Prior Lambert van Thorn asked for a final period of reflection of several days. After four days, he was transferred to the Steenpoort prison in Brussels, where he spent five years. He never recanted, and during those five years he was cared for by a group of Brussels citizens, some of them Lutherans. He died (some say was murdered) in 1528. Because he had died without repentance or confession, he was buried in unconsecrated ground on the Field of Gallows at Flotsenberg.

What were the ramifications for the southern Low Countries?

Hendrik Vos and Johan van Esschen were the first martyrs of the Reformation, but thousands more would follow in the subsequent decades. In addition, tens of thousands (some say hundreds of thousands) of Protestants fled abroad to the Northern Provinces of the Low Countries, Germany and England. The ultra-Catholic monarch Charles V died in 1558 and was succeeded by Philip II, who took an even harder line against the Reformation than his father had. Rome had to prevail at the cost of the suppression of conscience, the impoverishment of the population and a decline in trade, industry and agriculture, all of which were of minor importance to Philip II as long as heresy was eradicated. This cost the southern Low Countries dearly – and all because Philip II had vowed that he would rather reign over a wasteland than over a nation of heretics.

16 See Weimarer Ausgabe 12, pp 77-80.

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CHAPTER 2

Austin friars and Antwerp women: What did the Antwerp Augustinians do that led to women taking up their defence?

Dr Dick Wursten

Abstract

In the history of the Antwerp Augustinian convent women play a remarkable role. Their liberation of the prior when he was arrested by the Inquisition in 1522 is remarkable. I propose to reread texts produced by or emanating from the Antwerp convent to determine what motivated them: books published (and/or translated) by the friars, the 62 articles on which the condemnation of two friars was based, and several theological theses drawn up and/or defended by their priors (Jacob Proost and Hendrik van Zutphen) during their stay in Wittenberg in 1521. The first samples suggest that the Antwerp friars had strong opinions not only about the priesthood of all Christians – explicitly including women – but also about its practical implementation.

Inventio

The starting point of this article is a historical event that took place in Antwerp on the evening of 29 September 1522.[1] That evening, Hendrik van

1 The accounts of this event differ slightly from source to source (chronicles, contemporary letters, archives). Also, dates vary, which explains why there still is a lot of confusion about the arrest(s), deportation and trial of the Augustinian friars. Many documents (relevant extracts) can be found in Paul Frédéricq. (1900). *Corpus documentorum inquistionis haereticae pravitatis Neerlandicae, vol IV*, pp 80-160) (additions in the addendum of vol V (1902, pp 414-418). Excerpts online on https://1juli1523.procant.be/fredericq-corpus-documentorum-vol-iv/ (consulted 3 July 2023).

Zutphen, prior of the Augustinian – Austin – friars of Antwerp, was lured out of his convent and arrested by the Antwerp Magistrate, Nicolas Van Liere. He was placed in custody in a cell in the nearby Saint Michael's Abbey. The next day, he was transported to Vilvoorde in order to be questioned by the Emperor's inquisitor, Frans van der Hulst. Apparently – and this is where the tables begin to turn – some women had noticed what had happened and so they decided to act. That same night, in the dark, a multitude of women (estimates vary from at least 50 to more than 2 000[2]) stormed the monastery and liberated the prior. He returned to the convent, took shelter overnight with friends from the printers' milieu, and managed to flee the city. In the following weeks, two men, Adriaene and Aernde, and three or four unnamed women were arrested. The men were affiliated to the printing press and were qualified as 'bookbinders' in the accounts of the Antwerp Margrave.[3] They were pilloried on the Grote Markt, the men branded as heretics and then released. On 9 October, a woman, Margriet Boonams (a widow from

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References to these volumes are cited below as CD IV/V, followed by the number of the entry. Many of the sources excerpted by Frédéricq and his team can also be found – often with more detail and correctness – in the *Antwerps Archievenblad* (ed Pierre Génard), vol II (ch 11 'Ordonnances du Magistrat d'Anvers, concernant les troubles religieux du XVIe siècle', pp 308ff) and *id* vol VII (ch 2 'Personnes poursuivies judiciairement à Anvers, au XVIe siècle, pour le "faict de religion" – Liste et pièces officielles à l'appui', pp 114ff. Most trustworthy seems the succinct account in the *Excellente Chronike van Vlaenderen*. Although the bulk of this chronicle was written in Bruges, the section dealing with events from 1515 to 1529 is *de facto* an Antwerp chronicle. The Antwerp printer/publisher Willem Vorsterman published this chronicle in 1531, close to the events in both time and space. On this chronicle: Johan Oosterman. De Excellente cronike van Vlaenderen en Anthonis de Roovere. *Tijdschrift voor de Nederlandse Taal en Letterkunde, 118*, 22-33. The chronicle is digitised: https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/_dit004dits01_01/index.php. The events we are dealing with: vol 2, folio 13vo.

2 The numbers: 300 in the *Excellente Cronike* and *Antwerps Chronykje* (CD IV, nos. 97, 98). More than 2 000 in a letter of 5 November 1522, sent from Nurnberg by the papal orator, Francesco Chierigati, to Contessa Isabelle d'Este ('se fece uno exercito de più de doi milia donne, che armate di arme et de bastoni per forza lo andarno a liberare') (CD V, no 773). Hendrik van Zutphen himself relates the story in a letter sent from Bremen, 29 November 1522, to his predecessor, Jacob Proost (Probst) in Wittenberg. His rough guess: several thousands ('*aliquot mulierum milia*') (CD IV, no 110). Wolfgang Reichart (letter to JA Brassicanus, 25 November 1522) has the lowest number: more than 50 ('*plus amplius quingentae mulieres*'). Where he picked up the story is unclear (CD IV, no 109). The number of 'at least 300' is the one that makes it into subsequent historiography (eg JC Diercxsens. (1773). *Antverpia Christo nascens et crescens … vol III* (2nd ed), p 372): '*Inde tota Antverpia turbata fuit à mulierum improbarum plusquam trecentarum turba, quae monachum illum Augustinianum vî inde abduxerunt & reduxerunt in suum monasterium*.' Note the pejorative adjective (*improbarum*) to disqualify the women and the city-wide effect of their action (*tota Antverpia turbata fuit*)

3 CD IV, no 100, 101. In the *Antwerps Chronykje* no names are mentioned but the two are identified as 'a printer and a letter cutter' *('eenen Printer ende eenen Segelstecker*'; idem or similar in other chronicles). The accounts of the Margrave in *Antwerps Archievenblad*, vol VII, p 125 (bibliographical info, see note 4). In his letter, Van Zutphen also provides the name of the person who sheltered him after the escape, transcribed in the 17th-century edition (Kapp/Gerdes) as 'arrtmaes' (Aert Maes?). CD IV, no 110.

Mechelen), was arrested near the convent, loudly protesting the deportation of the Augustinians that had taken place only days before and brutally insulting the inquisitor and his assistants, who were evacuating the convent. On 13 October, Boonams was sentenced by the 'Vierschaer': banishment from the Marquisate of Antwerp on penalty of death, a sentence that in Antwerp was typically reserved for heretics.[4]

Dispositio

The event (fact) is well known: it can be found in any reputable history of the Early Reformation in the Low Countries.[5] However, it is generally treated as a *fait divers*, a jolly good story. I claim that it merits more attention. There is more to it, in terms of importance and political impact; and more in it, documenting Luther-inspired preaching and its impact on ordinary people, women in particular. In this article I attempt to dig a little deeper, asking the question: Why did women take the lead in the liberation of an Augustinian priest? Before I outline some promising directions for research that might shed some light on this issue, I think it is necessary to highlight just how exceptional the Antwerp uprising was.

Women's uprisings, or riots in which women also participated, were not special in Early Modern Europe. They were generally triggered by primary physical needs: 'A bread riot without women is an inherent contradiction', dixit Olwen Hufton, who did extensive research on the Role of 'Women in Revolution'.[6] But the fact that the Antwerp riot is *not* related to these needs, but rather to spiritual needs, does make it stand out. It is not special because *women* took the initiative, but because *women* took the initiative *for something other* than food. It has a spiritual connotation or – one might even say – it testifies to a theological stance taken by ordinary Antwerp people

4 CD IV, no 104.

5 *Unus pro pluribus*: The story is included in Ute Lotz-Heumann (Ed). (2019). *A sourcebook of early modern European history: Life, death, and everything in between* (ch 16: Uproar in Antwerp). Routledge. There Victoria Christman recounts the story and signals the potential of the event. She also highlights the gender aspect: 'Several chroniclers of the time discuss this event, and all place the number of women involved at around 300, suggesting an enormous group of loyal female followers, though none of them address the reasons for the make-up of this group.'

6 Olwen Hufton. (1971). Women in revolution, 1789-1796. In *Past and Present*, *53*, 90-108 at 95. It is a remark that seems universally valid and applicable to all times.

(*in casu* women). The objective of their action (freeing an Augustinian prior suspected of Lutheran leanings) links it to the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation and shows how the teachings of Martin Luther *cum suis* affected the lives of ordinary people, including women.

Before developing this line of enquiry a little further, a *caveat*: the priors of the Antwerp convent who were active between 1518 and 1522, Hendrik van Zutphen and Jacob Proost, were not simply 'pupils' of Luther, but rather his colleagues, or even fellow reformers. Both were experienced pastors. Antwerp was Hendrik's second priorship after he held a position at the Dordrecht convent from 1516 to 1519, when it joined the Saxon congregation and became 'Observant'.[7] When he left Dordrecht, he returned to Wittenberg (1520) to complete his studies in biblical and systematic theology. In October 1521 he replaced Luther during an important debate in the Wittenberg convent concerning the abolition of the Holy Mass.[8] In the summer of 1522, he travelled to Antwerp to become the new prior of the Augustinian convent. Analysing Hendrik's contribution to the debates following the Edict of Worms, Ulrich Bubenheimer, the eminent historian of the Early Reformation, does not hesitate to qualify Hendrik van Zutphen as 'the most important Augustinian theologian of the Wittenberg convent of that period', that is, while Luther stayed at the Wartburg.[9] Hendrik's predecessor, Jacob Proost (or Probst, Latin: Praepositus), was a close friend of Luther's, and after fleeing the Netherlands he lived in Wittenberg for two years, before becoming pastor (and later Superintendent) of the Church of Bremen.[10] Both

7 The last monograph about Hendrik van Zutphen is HA van Duinen. (2004). *Hendrik van Zutphen. Prior, reformator, martelaar. Bleskensgraaf*. Van Duinen nicely summarises all the available evidence and corrects the story about tensions in Dordrecht still dominating the earlier literature. See further JF Iken. (1886). *Heinrich von Zütphen* (Halle) and Th Kolde. (1879). *Die Deutsche Augustiner-Congregation und Johann von Staupitz* (Gotha).

8 Biblical Studies (*baccalaureus biblicus*): 11 January 1521; Systematic Theology (*baccalaureus sententiarius*): 11 October 1521. The discussion on the Holy Mass took place in Wittenberg just a few days after his promotion. For more on this debate, what was at stake and Hendrik's role in it, see note 10.

9 'Während [Gabriel] Zwilling der populäre Prediger war, der es verstand, seine Ordensbrüder und das "Volk" zu mobilisieren, war Heinrich mindestens in jenen Herbstwochen, als die Meßfrage im Augustinerkloster virulent war, offenbar der führende Theologe des Klosters.' Ulrich Bubenheimer. (1973). *Scandalum et ius divinum*: Theologische und rechtstheologische Probleme der ersten informatorischen Innovationen in Wittenberg 1521/22. *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Kanonistische Abteilung*, *59*(1), 263-342 at 342. Article republished (with some updates) in: Ulrich Bubenheimer. 2023. *Wittenberg 1517-1522. Diskussions-, Aktionsgemeinschaft und Stadtreformation* [Spätmittelalter, Humanismus, Reformation, no 134]. Mohr-Siebeck, pp 159-228.

10 The most recent summary of facts about his life is by J Kunzelmann. (1974). Geschichte der

were – of course – influenced by Luther, but they were also theologians in their own right. One should therefore not automatically equate their views and practices with Luther's opinions. In 1522 there was no 'Lutheranism' yet. The Reformation was a process, and an experimental and plural one at that. It was not at all clear which current in the manifold reformations would prevail. Of course, Luther was nevertheless absolutely a central figure, especially after the condemnation by Pope and Emperor in 1521 (Edict of Worms).

Back to the women's revolt. It was not only the talk of the town in Antwerp ('*tota Antverpia turbata*' dixit Fr Diercxsens more than two centuries after the fact in his 'History of Antwerp'); it resonated throughout Europe.[11] It was an outrage, a scandal: women, by force entering a male convent, liberating 'her majesty's prisoner', and seemingly getting away with it. We find accounts of it in the correspondence of many people of European stature, including Luther and the papal ambassador at the Reichstag of Nurnberg. Did this unheard-of story influence policymakers? Was a boundary crossed? Did it perhaps mortgage the very cautious overtures made at the Reichstag of Nürnberg, where the famous letter from Pope Adrian VI was read, offering apologies (!) for the abuses that persisted in the Church.

It is at least noteworthy that the same Chierigati who read the Pope's letter also described the Antwerp uprising in a letter to Isabelle D'Este. His indignation at the Antwerp upheaval is clear, and his deep concern appears clear too: Is this what the reformation movement will lead to? Of course, no answers can be given, but the coincidence begs the question. The story of the Antwerp insurgence going viral explains the prompt and fierce reaction of Margaretha of Savoie, the Austrian Governess of the Low Countries: *Aux grands maux des grands rémèdes*!

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deutschen Augustiner-Eremiten, Dl 5: Die sachsisch-thüringische Provinz und die sachsische Reformkongregation bis zum Untergang der beiden (Würzburg). His friendship with Luther is apparent in their correspondence. Proost was married to a friend of Katharina von Bora. Unfortunately, there is no recent biography, so one has to be content (with critically reading) the account of HQ Janssen. (1862). Jacobus Praepositus. Luthers vriend en leerling (Kampen). Note: in the earlier literature friar Jacob is often surnamed 'Spreng', but this is erroneous. In Dutch he is Proost/Provoost; in German he is Probst or Propst; in Latin, Praepositus or Praepositi. In the register of Wittenberg University 13/5/1521 we read that 'Religiosus pater Jacobus Iperensis S Theologie lector et prior Antwerpiensis' was promoted to *baccalaureus biblicus*, with Andreas Bodenstein (Karlstadt) as president. On 12 July 1521 he received his theological licence also under Karlstadt's presidium. See O Clemen. (1900). Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte aus Büchern und Handschriften der Zwickauer Ratsschulbibliothek, vol 1. Berlin, pp 33-36. The theses he defended were included in a florilegium of Wittenberg theses, published in Basel (Adam Petri, 1521).

11 For the bibliographical references in this section, see note 2.

Within two weeks of the riot, the convent was sealed and a curfew was put in place around it, all Augustinians were deported, facing heresy charges, preaching outside parish churches was forbidden in Antwerp, and the governess herself came to Antwerp to assist in the solemn Procession of the Holy Sacrament and other *sacramentalia* from the defiled Augustinian convent to the Church of Our Lady. The women's action had such broad levels of support that the city government had to promulgate and reissue special ordinances to suppress insurgencies in or around the premises of the Convent.[12] This made the Antwerp uprising unique and worthy of closer study.[13] Women taking the law into their own hands in order to counteract a detention authorised and executed by the combined forces of Church and State was shocking as it shook the foundations of society, including gender roles in society. The 'powers that be' had been compromised.

Returning to the initial question: What caused the women to act on behalf of the prior? As mentioned previously, it must be related to 'what the Antwerp Augustinians stood for', both collectively as a convent and personally.[14] Something in the life- and worldview they embodied, propagated, preached and practised must have appealed to women in particular. Can we, 500 years post factum, still ascertain what triggered these women to act as they did?

12 *Antwerps Archievenblad* VII, pp 125-127, first time 13/10 (= the same day as the verdict of Margriet Boonams), repeated and extended 22/10. On 10/01/2023 Charles V ordered the demolition of the premises, except the Church itself, which had to be transformed into a parish church (nowadays the parish of St Andries). See CD IV, no 120.

13 Natalie Zemon Davis was the first to draw attention to 16th-century popular uprisings and other violent actions (also) triggered by religious motifs, and of the crucial role played in them by women. She did, however, not mention the Antwerp uprising, even though she focused on the violent character of religious uprisings in which women also play a role. They have a natural habitat in the 'wars of religion' that afflicted France in the second half of the 16th century. See Natalie Zemon Davis. (1975). *Society and culture in early modern France: Eight essays* (Stanford University Press), in particular the essays titled 'Women on top' and 'Rites of violence'.

14 The most recent study devoted to the Antwerp friars is that by Robert J Christman. (2020). *The dynamics of the early Reformation in their Reformed Augustinian context* (Amsterdam). Chapter 3 is entirely dedicated to 'The Antwerp Convent' (pp 48-73, with an extensive bibliography); there is also his article, 'The Antwerp martyrs and Luther's first song' in *Lutheran Quarterly*, *36* (2022), 373-389. See also Jos E Vercruysse. (2007). De Antwerpse Augustijnen en de Lutherse Reformatie, 1513-1523. *Trajecta*, *16*, 193-216 (English summary at the end).

Elaboratio

The scope of this article is limited to indicating research directions that could elucidate the state of affairs sketched above, grounded in facts. A number of texts, all produced by or originating from Antwerp Augustinian friars appear particularly relevant. They reveal what the Augustinians stood for: how they preached, how they viewed the common believers, how they reorganised their liturgical services, etc. This would be a first step towards understanding why Antwerp *women* took action and intervened, risking so much to save the life of Prior Hendrik van Zutphen.

Translations of Luther's writings published in Antwerp

The first of these texts are a number of Luther's books printed in the early 1520s in Antwerp near the convent, including some Dutch translations. These translations were published by Claes de Grave at the 'Onze Lieve Vrouwe Pand' at the 'Cammerpoorte'. They can be linked to the Augustinian friars. They are interesting because the translations are verbose and interspersed with digressions from the translator, who consistently introduces Luther as the 'honorable Doctor of Theology' and 'a fellow brother of the order of St Augustine'.[15] In one book he identifies himself as 'one of Luther's students'.[16] So it is certain that these translations are connected to the activities of the Antwerp Augustinians. Both the particular selection of Luther's works and some of the translation choices (including the digressions and elaborations) might indirectly yield information about the pastoral outlook and catechetical focus of the Antwerp Augustinians. Some initial sampling in one translation (*Ein Sermon oder Predigt von dem Ablass*, on Penance and Indulgence) immediately illustrates the potential. The tone is colloquial, and – compared

15 In Dutch: 'alderweerdichste doctoor in der Godheyt' and 'enen broeder van Sinte Augustijns orden'. Considering the dates, the name of Jacob Proost pops up as the most likely candidate.

16 'Overgest uiten Latijn in duytsche doer een sinen discipel' (collophon of the Dutch translation of Luther's *Tessaradecas* in Dutch: *Een schoon troostelijc en vruchtbaer boecxken …* (Claes de Graeve, Antwerpen, 22 January 1521). Claes de Grave's output of Luther's books (mostly short tracts) is considerable: Between 18 September 1520 and 13 March 1521 he published six books, of which two contain four tracts each. We find Luther's explanation of the Ten Commandments and the Penitential Psalms among the translations. As part of the tracts we find instructions on how to view the Eucharist, marriage, penance, the art suffering and dying – and, of course, Luther's famous *Sermon von dem Ablass und Gnade* (1518).

to the original text – there is a plus in pastoral attitude and concrete examples, and a minus in theological controversy.[17]

Notes of the interrogation of the monks that were burnt on 1 July 1523

These notes, published in Latin, appeared in print soon after the events. They recount the story of the public execution in great detail, but crucially also include 62 articles 'asserted by the friars': *Articuli asserti per fratrem Henricum &c.*[18] The articles and the positions taken in them mirror Luther's ideas on Penance, the Pope's authority (no more/no less than to preach the Word of God), the Holy Mass, Salvation, Grace and so forth. They show a thorough knowledge of Scripture, mature reasoning and even a careful consideration of each position: Asked whether he believes in Purgatory, the answer is that he has not figured it out yet[19]). Sometimes he prefers not to answer at all (for example, about the cult of saints). The liberty to think for themselves within the boundaries of Scripture is claimed again and again (echoing Luther's reply at the Diet of Worms: 'Here I stand'). The friars' conviction that all men are equal to God and thus also in the Church is given considerable weight. The asserted positions become remarkably audacious when 'the priesthood of all Christians' is concerned. Technically and theologically speaking, these articles deal with the sacerdotal office or ministry by which a human being is authorised to speak and act on God's behalf. These opinions are aired with conviction in four articles (12-15), culminating in the explicit statement that the general priesthood also includes women:

17 German (Ein Sermon oder Predigt von dem Ablass und Gnade (Wittenberg, Spring 1518) and Dutch (Een schoon onderwisinge hoe een kersten mensche warachteliken aflaet verdienen mach ... (Antwerpen, November 1520) juxtaposed at https://luther.wursten.be/heeft-luther-echt-de-95-stellingen-vastgenageld/een-schoon-onderwisinge-luthers-sermoen-over-de-aflaat-d-nl/ (accessed 12 June 2023). The verbose style of the translator is apparent by simply counting the words: Luther uses 1,525 words, the translator 2,478 to 'translate' (or should we say paraphrase?) Luther's original. The Digressions contain 368 words.

18 Strictly speaking, the articles are linked to Hendrik Vos only, but it seems safe to assume that they express shared convictions. Perhaps the '&c' after Hendrik's name in the title can be read as an indication of this state of affairs. Full title: *Historia de duobus Augustinensibus, ob evangelij doctrinam exustis Bruxellae, die trigesima Iunij. Anno domini M D XXIII* ([Basel], [1523]). Also included in this publication are: a short impression of the execution *Ex alia epistola*, then the *LXII Articuli*, followed by a long admonishing epistle addressed to an unnamed person who has recanted.

19 As an aside: this was also Luther's view in *Sermon von dem Ablass* (1518).

- 12. *Omnes homines sunt sacerdotes coram Deo.* (All men (human beings) are priests 'in the presence of' God.)
- 13. *Omnes homines possunt remittere peccata cujuslibet christiani, qui sciunt corripere fraternaliter proximum.* (Everyone can remit sins of any other Christian, that is to say: 'they who know how to rebuke the neighbour in a fraternal way.')[20]
- 14. *Mulieres possunt absolvere homines a peccatis, quod intelligit de Evangelica absolutione, quae continetur ibi: Si peccaverit in te frater tuus,* etc. (Women can absolve the sins of men; that's how he [Hendrik Vos] interprets the 'Evangelical absolution', as contained in the following verse: 'If your brother has sinned against you, etc.')[21]

This article is as simple as it is revolutionary. The principle of 'inclusive translation or exegesis' is applied to the biblical text in Matthew. The reasoning is a straightforward syllogism: All human beings can pronounce God's forgiveness authoritatively (Matthew 18:18). Women are human beings. Ergo, women can pronounce God's forgiveness authoritatively.

- 15. *Potestas Evangelica contenta ibi, 'Quorum remiseritis peccata', est potestas communis omnibus hominibus.* (The Evangelical authority contained in the following verse: 'Whose sins you shall forgive' is an authority common to all human beings.)[22]

The authority to give absolution of sins (to 'bind and unbind sins') is explicitly bestowed on both women and men, *en passant* including the right to 'admonish' a sinner (sub voce: a woman is entitled to correct a man). Professing this theological concept unequivocally, suggests that the inclusive view on the general priesthood of all Christians must have been elemental

20 The articles seem to reflect a discussion between the friar and the inquisitor on Matthew 18:15-18. In no 13 this verse is already implicitly present. It becomes explicit in no 14.

21 Matthew 18:15-18: 'If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the Church. But if he refuses even to hear the Church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. 18 Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'

22 The quotation is from John 20:23, where the risen Christ says to his followers: 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained.' This is the Johannine parallel to Matthew 18:18 (where the terms are 'bound' and 'unbound').

to the Antwerp friars.[23] We can safely surmise it must have permeated their pastoral work, outreach and preaching. It does not appear far-fetched to suggest that this outlook on women and their role in a Christian society might have had an impact on the women who assisted at services and heard sermons in the Church of the friars. They were taken seriously, both as human beings and as women: equal rights before God and thus in the Church. This was a unique experience at the time, especially when it was proclaimed and preached with more than words alone.

The duality in Christ's Body consisting of 'clergy' and the 'laity' (two-storey Church) is levelled down by this theologoumenon.[24] The hierarchical Church is transformed into a 'horizontal community of brothers and sisters', a 'congregation'. Luther rendered '*ekklesia*' by using the word 'Gemeinde' (Community, Gathering). People are no longer dependent on the dispensation of Grace by ordained priests; they themselves *are* the Church, or become the Church when they assemble around Christ. The effect on gender roles is secondary yet far-reaching, comparable to the effect Luther's teaching had on the German peasants – a sudden emancipation and corresponding changes in self-esteem and self-value. The position, functioning and office (*ministerium*, *officium*) of both men and women in the community of believers needed to be redefined and redistributed, leading to changes in their interrelationship. The new outlook differed radically not only from the Roman Catholic view (ecclesiology), but also from the predominant view of society (the public role in society, politics).

23 That the *sacerdotium* is bestowed on all men was also one of the articles Jacob Probst had to revoke (no 27: 'Omnes layci sunt sacerdotes,' published in *Anathemalizatio et revocatio fratris Jacobi Praepositi …* (Antwerp, Willem Vorsterman, 1522). Interesting – in both corroborating and differing – is the almost simultaneous revocation of heretical opinions by Korneel de Schrijver (Cornelis Grapheüs, the Antwerp City Secretary). He wrote: 'Omnes laici sunt sacerdotes; sicut illi, qui consecrati sacerdotes dicuntur, ita quoque omnes laici consecrare possent venerabile sacramentum, quamvis peccarent, si eis non daretur licentia consecrandi, exclusis tantum faeminis et pueris.' I note: 1. Grapheüs does not focus on the sacrament of the 'absolution' but on the Eucharist ('omnes laici consecrare possent venerabile sacramentum'); 2. He explicitly excludes 'women and children' (Frédéricq, CD IV, no 74).

24 Telling: in the *discussion paper* on the Holy Mass – discussed below – van Zutphen blames precisely this distinction for all the evils in the Church, the 'original sin' of the Church so to speak.

Wittenberg texts linked to the Antwerp theologians (in particular with regard to the Holy Mass)

The Antwerp Augustinians have left behind several other texts. Six of the friars studied in Wittenberg[25] and defended several theses to obtain their academic and theological degrees. Some of these sets are preserved, in particular those by the two priors, Jacob Proost and Hendrik van Zutphen. A close reading of these works in their proper context could yield insights not only into their theological ideas, but also in their general conception of the way in which a Church (communal and liturgical) should be reorganised.

One set of theses appears particularly promising: in Autumn 1521, Hendrik van Zutphen presided over a conference organised by the Wittenberg Augustinians concerning the possible reform of the celebration of the Holy Mass (Last Supper). Normally, Luther himself would have taken the lead, but as he was still hiding at the Wartburg (Junker Jörg), Hendrik took his place. The substitution itself attests to the position of van Zutphen among the Wittenberg friars). The discussion paper is alleged to have been drawn up by Hendrik and was sent to the superiors of the Augustinians (after further discussion and amendments). It still exists.[26]

In the paper, Hendrik, on behalf of the Wittenberg Augustinians, begins by labelling the duality in Christ's Body (the Church, consisting of 'clergy' and 'laity') as the root of all evil, the Church's original sin. This was a position that was also prominent in the 62 *articuli asserti* of 1523 (see above): this two-storey Church, hierarchically organised, should be transformed into a horizontal community of brothers and sisters, a 'congregation'. The people *are* the Church, or become the Church when they assemble around Christ. We

25 Next to Hendrik van Zutphen and Jacob Proost *Germania sacra* mentions the names of: Christoph Blackhoffen, Cornelius Bester, Hadrian, Johannes Aumann, Johannes van Mechelen, Johannes Umaus, and Nikolaus Jodoci. Fritz Bünger & Gottfried Wentz. (1941). *Das Bistum Brandenburg 2* (Germania Sacra, AF Abt 1: Die Bistümer der Kirchenprovinz Magdeburg) (Berlin), pp 447-496.

26 The text is known as *Positiones contra missam privatam*. It is more of a discussion paper than a set of theses. The statements are unnumbered. They are published in JE Kapp. (1727-1733). *Kleine Nachlese einiger größtentheils noch ungedruckter, und sonderlich zur Erläuterung der Reformationsgeschichte nützlicher Urkunden*. 4 vols (Leipzig), vol 2, pp 484-493: 'XXII: Heinrich von Zutphen Sätze wider die Privat-Messe, aus dem von Spalatino rubrierten Msto.' Superscript by Spalatinus: '1521. Contra Missam Privatam Heinric Zutphanienn.'
Subscript by Spalatinus: 'Der Augustiner zu Wittenberg positiones von der Meß. 1521.' Online: https://1juli1523.procant.be/positiones-contra-missam-privatam-1521_/ (accessed 12 June 2023). There the 'theses' are numbered for easy referencing.

can take this quite literally: in the article, it goes without saying that all people should 'communicate' *sub utraque specie*, with both with bread and wine.

Less than a year after writing the discussion paper, Hendrik was arrested and then liberated by the Antwerp women. Is it far-fetched to suppose that Hendrik would have practised what he (and the Wittenberg Augustinians in Luther's absence) preached? If so, then the Augustinian Church in Antwerp in 1522 might have been a place where all persons attending Mass would have received Holy Communion, bread and wine: patricians and plebeians, men and women! This alone would already explain why '*tota Antverpia tumultuata*' was and why the Imperial Inquisitor wanted to arrest him.

In the same paper, a revolutionary theological view on what the Eucharist really is about comes to light: 'Neque enim ut tu communices Christo per fidem solum, quam ut tu per charitatem communices proximo, videtur haec communio instituta.' (Not that you in person may communicate (are united) with Christ through faith, but that you communicate (are united) with your neighbour through love, that's why this Communion seems to be instituted.)[27] The discussion about the elements (trans- or consubstantiation, symbolic) was not dominating the debate about the Eucharist yet. It is understood as being a memorial to Christ's sacrifice. It has to be celebrated because Christ ordained it. In celebrating it, the communion between the believers is formed: they are bound together by love. A few lines earlier (no 34), Hendrik had formulated it succinctly: 'Sic quippe ad fidei & charitatis communionem est dominica cena instituta.' (So it is clear that the Lord's Supper is instituted for the communion of faith and love.) During the same period, that is, before Luther returned to Wittenberg during Lent 1522, Philippe Melanchthon celebrated Holy Supper together with his students, sharing bread and wine. One of Hendrik's promotors, professor Andreas Bodenstein (better known as Karlstadt), not only relinquished his professor's robe, but also his privileges and prerogatives as a priest. Just call me 'brother' Andrew,' he said, 'because that is what I am.'[28]

Are we seeing a glimpse here of how the Eucharist might have been celebrated at the Augustinian convent in Antwerp? Or at least how it was conceived and talked about? 'Sharing bread and wine' rendered all persons

27 Source: see note 8; there no 36. This one is also quoted in JF Iken (1886), *Heinrich von Zütphen*. (Halle), p 22, where it is qualified as a 'bedenklicher Satz'.

28 For these events and a proper contextual appreciation of them, see Bubenheimer, 'Scandalum et ius divinum' (see note 9).

present into spiritual brothers and sisters. In a way, this view of the Holy Eucharist resembles what is now called an 'Agapè meal'. The effect of this kind of celebration on gender roles is secondary and unintentional, but nevertheless far-reaching. One could compare it to the – also unintended – effect Luther's 'equality of all men before God' had on the German peasants living in total serfdom to their lords. This new outlook differed radically from the Roman Catholic way of presenting the Mystery of Faith: Holy Communion, exclusively celebrated by the clergy, theatrically staged as a mysterious rite at the Altar. It also deviates from an implicit societal perspective, viewing the Church as a community of equal human beings (a 'Gemeinde') is not anodyne. It transforms the Church into a social laboratory, one that experiments with an inclusive form of living together.

These often-forgotten texts (presented above) merit further interrogation from a theological point of view (that has been done), but crucially also from a pragmatic, ethical, and societal perspective, looking for the effect these theological statements had on the ordinary life of ordinary people once they were put into practice.

In a city such as Antwerp, in 1521-1522, the undoubtedly cautious and tentative implementation of these theological ideas in Church life might well have been experienced as a new wind blowing through the Church by the men and women attending services in the Augustinian convent. They offered a window of opportunity for women to participate in communal life and to speak out and take the floor, similarly to men, or at least as equals. If this were the case – and I think I have uncovered at least some elements pointing in that direction – we might begin to understand why a group of women took action the moment the ruling powers tried to silence the Augustinian prior who embodied this new life option.

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CHAPTER 3

Impact of the Reformation on the Counter-Reformation and contemporary Catholicism: the case of Antwerp

Prof Dr Guido Vanheeswijck

Abstract

What was the short-term impact of the Reformation and what was its influence in the long term? Against the backdrop of this distinction, I put forward the thesis that, whereas initially a strong opposition between the Reformation and its counterpart was experienced, in the long run both the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation became two variants of what Charles Taylor coined the 'Reform', inevitably leading to a growing secularisation of Western society. But let us first return to the situation before the split between Protestantism and Catholicism and focus on the place in the Low Countries where it all began: the Augustinian monastery and the Church of Saint Andrew in Antwerp.

Situation in Antwerp before 1523

In 1516, Antwerp was standing at the threshold of its Golden Age. The port city in Brabant was rising as an internationally renowned economic metropolis, attracting countless new residents in the wake of foreign business figures and bankers. Moreover, this economic growth was accompanied – and even promoted – by the spread of the Renaissance humanism that was gradually shaping the cultural face of Antwerp in a variety of ways.

Parallel to its economic rise, the city on the Scheldt was also growing into a centre for the art of book printing and from the early 16th century, Antwerp served as a magnet for the guild of book printers. Between 1500 and 1540, the majority of their works consisted of religious and liturgical books, although textbooks also formed an important share. It goes without saying that the remarkable presence of book printers in the city necessarily had repercussions for education.

Originally, the Augustinians had been the primary providers of education. Between 1510 and 1515, the renowned humanist, Joannes Custos Brechtanus, taught Latin at the school affiliated with the Augustinian monastery in Antwerp. Brechtanus was a member of the 'Observant Augustinians' of the Saxon Congregation who held more strictly to the original rule of Saint Augustine than the ordinary (Conventual) Augustinians. At the heart of the Augustinian order, criticism arose concerning abuses within the Catholic Church and the Augustinian school in Antwerp would quickly become a breeding ground for Lutheran ideas, which would also gain followers in Antwerp's Christian humanistic circles after 1517.

Young people from Antwerp who found the humanistic notions appealing, and who therefore wished to further their studies, set out for Leuven, which was close by, or for Cologne or Orléans. At the same time, they became dissatisfied with the old universities – seeing them as bastions of classical scholasticism – and sought alternative forms of education that would be more amenable to humanistic innovation. This quest for new and alternative forms of education is likely to have been fuelled primarily by the need to reconsider Christianity, accompanied by a sensitivity to encouraging the use of the vernacular.

The gradual advance of criticism of the Latin Vulgate – which had served as the standard version of the Bible for centuries – invoked the appearance that traditional theological interpretations could no longer stand up to a thorough analysis of biblical pericopes, and this feeling steadily amplified the call to translate the Bible into the vernacular. The controversy surrounding the legitimacy of these translations would initially generate profound spiritual divisions among the European humanists. Eventually, however, the Bible translations (eg the High German of Luther's translation, the Dutch of the *Statenbijbel*) would spark the breakthrough of the national cultural languages and usher in the gradual decline of Latin.

Apparently in contrast to the gradual decline in the use of Latin and the growing dissatisfaction with clerical habits and ordinances during the 16th century, along with an increasing interest in vernaculars, renewed interest in ideas from the Antiquities was emerging at the same time. In its earliest form, the Italian Humanism of the Renaissance manifested itself as a Platonian movement against the scholasticism of the late Middle Ages, which had been dominated by Aristotle. Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino propagated a Platonic vision in which human beings demanded the freedom to shape their own lives. Their influence gradually spread throughout all of Europe. Erasmus (particularly through Lorenzo Valla) would develop into a key figure of this European form of humanism in which attention to human freedom (a classical notion) was accompanied by a new Christology – an alternative interpretation of the role of Christ.

First reactions to a paradigm shift

This blending of a revived return to classical sources and an alternative interpretation of Christian faith would prove to be explosive. It would ignite a major paradigm shift in European thought, even though Erasmus and other humanists probably did not see themselves as innovators. Their passion was for the literary masterworks of ancient times, as much as for the proper understanding of the Bible. Halfway between the end of the Middle Ages and incipient Modernity, they were to some extent the last representatives of a European culture that they knew was imperilled and which they therefore stubbornly defended.

Although Erasmus and the Christian humanists in Antwerp continued to pose the metaphysical 'questions' of yore, they no longer identified with the 'answers' of their predecessors and the scholastic methods they had used. Hence, the primary argument that Erasmus and his humanistic allies put forward in advocating the study of the three languages (Latin, Greek, Hebrew) was not purely philological. They wished to use such studies to explore the actual sources of the Christian ideology which they held to be true.

The tragedy of Erasmus and, by extension, Christian Humanism was that they were overtaken by their own times. As they were arguing for a culturally unified Europe in which knowledge of the ancient sources and the biblical scriptures would elevate humankind, Christian Europe was disintegrating.

It became divided into two camps, which would soon come into mortal conflict with each other. Precisely Erasmus's humanist critique, inspired by the Antiquities, would break open the one unified European Christianity and call Martin Luther's Protestantism into being.

Erasmus himself had probably never considered the remarkable similarities between the rise of Protestantism and the breakthroughs of new science. In both cases, a speculative form of rationality, typical of medieval scholarship, was exchanged for a largely empirical and historical approach to concrete facts. This new approach no longer involved a search for an ultimate explanation for the essence of reality. Instead, it shifted the attention to a concrete explanation for the operation of particular matters and specific events. In other words, the new rationality, which was present in the Reformation and the new science, was more involved in seeking insight into the causes of things than into their ultimate goal or their deepest essence:

> The reformation and the scientific movement were two aspects of the historical revolt which was the dominant intellectual movement of the later Renaissance. The appeal to the origins of Christianity, and Francis Bacon's appeal to efficient causes as against final causes, were two sides of one movement of thought(Whitehead, 1925, p 8).

The questions that occupied the great minds in the period between 1515 and 1540 concerned how this new stream of thought should be treated. How can the new be integrated into the old? What can be preserved of the centuries-old tradition? Alternatively, should the new be allowed to break through completely, leaving the old definitively behind? These were questions of capital importance, particularly now that we can consider them at a distance of 500 years and understand how the new stream of thought entailed a true paradigm shift.

All of these questions covered the most diverse domains. Scientists and philosophers wondered whether every form of purposefulness in nature should be rejected. Theologians were searching for alternative phrasings of the ancient truth. Church leaders and high-level politicians argued about the unity of the Church and the sustainability of the old European structure. A measured response to all of these questions called for peace of mind in order to assess the situation as well as possible. However, on 7 November 1519, only two years after Luther's charge against the indulgence racket, the university

in Leuven resolutely condemned Luther's Reformist teachings and allowed no opening for the possibility of reconciliation.

How was the situation in Antwerp in the mean time? The charismatic prior of the Observant Augustinians in Antwerp, Jacobus Præpositus (Jacob Proost), whom Luther jokingly nicknamed *das fette Flemischen* and who had once been his student in Erfurt, was particularly successful in proclaiming the latter's propositions. The Observant Augustinians of the Saxon Congregation in Antwerp could also appreciate the Lutheran ideology after Luther (also an Augustinian) had posted his Ninety-five Theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg in 1517.

Around 1519, Antwerp's Augustinian monastic community consisted almost entirely of 'Lutherans', and they were able to excite a substantial share of the city's inhabitants. Proceeding from a deep religious passion, Luther's ideas were propagated and distributed. Moreover, the intensive commercial contacts between Antwerp and Germany ensured the rapid dissemination of Luther's writings and ideologies. The city council initially adopted a moderate attitude towards the new ideas. Because the mayor and aldermen of Antwerp were primarily interested in economic and commercial matters, they sought to keep the trading climate as open as possible and they were therefore reluctant to censure the private opinions of their citizens (especially those of the wealthy).

Reaction of Catholic Church and government in Antwerp and Brussels

Such tactical reticence was entirely foreign to the members of the Church government. To them, the monastery was a heretical 'den of thieves', which called for the most drastic action possible. As a consequence, the Augustinians in Antwerp would soon enter a long and terrible history of persecution, confessions (often coerced), retractions of these confessions and new condemnations. On 13 July 1521, the first book-burning took place on Antwerp's Grote Markt: 400 books by Martin Luther went up in flames. The onlookers included Emperor Charles and his counsellors.

The atmosphere became progressively polarised both ideologically and politically. Because the Emperor had no confidence in the diocesan inquisition, he appointed layman Frans van der Hulst as a general inquisitor on 23 April

1522. On 29 September that same year, Van der Hulst arrested Hendrik van Zutphen, the successor to Jacob Proost in the Augustinian monastery. On the same day of his appointment, Van der Hulst had the City Secretary, Cornelius Grapheus, interrogated, because he had written a Luther-inspired text, and he forced Grapheus to read his retraction publicly on the Grote Markt in Brussels and to throw his manuscript into the fire (Prims, 1938, p 550). Although Erasmus described him as 'the best man in Antwerp' and labelled his inquisitors as 'rabid idiots', Grapheus was summarily dismissed as the City Secretary. The story would end in 1523 on the Grote Markt in Brussels, where two Augustinian friars, Hendrik Voes and Jan van Essen from Antwerp, were executed for their heretical ideas and became the first martyrs of Protestantism in the Low Countries.

The Inquisition continued to take drastic action. In 1523, the government closed the Augustinian monastery and deconsecrated the church – all reminders of the rebellious 'den of thieves' had to be erased. In a final convulsion, a few Augustinians attempted to organise Lutheran faith meetings in the vicinity of Antwerp. On 30 July 1525, the former Augustinian Nicholas from Ypres delivered a Lutheran sermon from a small boat. He was arrested; one day later, he was bound in a sack and thrown into the Scheldt at *Het Steen*.

As indicated, the attraction of Lutheranism to the Augustinians was not exclusively a matter of religion. It was also framed within a broader general climate of humanism. The humanistic circle in Antwerp, which surrounded City Clerk Petrus Ægidius and City Secretary Cornelius Grapheus, maintained close contacts with Desiderius Erasmus, which in turn brought them into contact with Dürer and other artists. It was from within their humanistic inspiration that the humanists of Antwerp who held official functions found it quite difficult to adopt a stance that would allow them to maintain a balance between their deepest convictions and preserving their status, and even their lives.

As an illustration of this shaky balance, Gillis and Erasmus were unable to prevent the Augustinians' persecution. According to Erasmus, the popular Jacob Proost 'was about the only one in the city who was still preaching about Christ – the rest just turned up with what they thought was entertaining chatter in an attempt to part people from their money' (Pleij, 2011, p 103). Erasmus's sympathy for Proost nevertheless failed to impede the latter's

arrest, despite or just because of his great, but (for many of his contemporaries) controversial reputation.

This diversity of positions – particularly towards Luther – attested to the vastly complex cultural, religious and political situation that initiated the paradigm shift on the threshold to the 16th century. As early as at the end of the second decade of this 'golden' age for Antwerp, however, there was apparently no longer a place for a nuanced attitude that could do justice to such complexity. There was no longer any hope of a compromise between Lutherans and Catholics and of a deepening of Christian inspiration – which had been the original dream of the humanists.

Instead of finding similarities between Catholics and Lutherans, the various ideologies became more deeply entrenched in their own propositions. Finally, the 'golden' age of Antwerp ended in tragedy in 1585: then the ideological war of propositions turned into a 'real' war. Even as early as 1536, the year in which the 'prince of humanists', Erasmus, departed this life, the legacy of the Antwerp humanists had already been forgotten. Three years before, Pieter Gillis had died, the Augustinians, Jacob Proost and Hendrik van Zutphen, had fled the city and City Secretary Grapheus was allowed to return to his birthplace on condition that he definitively renounced his Lutheran sympathies. The nuanced critique of the Christian humanists, in response to the paradigm shift that had affected not only the Church but also the entire society, would ultimately lead to horrible religious wars that would re-divide the region of the Netherlands and the European territory as a whole.[1]

Council of Trent and Counter-Reformation

As indicated, these voluntary or coerced confessions, retractions, new condemnations and executions, the ambiguous behaviour of printers and the gradual polarisation between the Church and secular bodies of authority, on the one hand, and the dissidents, on the other, were the terrible symptoms of a deeper problem. How could the old world-view and the old State structure be reformed without losing what tradition had regarded as being of value?

1 I have elaborated on the situation of Christian Humanism in the 16th century in Guido Vanheeswijck 2019.

How could ecclesiastical abuses be amended without causing a division in the Church? How could the new interpretations be incorporated into the existing model? How could one return to the spiritual sources of Christianity without undermining the values of the European Christian tradition?

After 1540, in its attempt to resist the rise of both Protestantism and the new science, the Catholic Church partly adopted the rational method of both new streams, while distancing itself from the old rationality which it had shared with the classical antiquities. Despite paying lip service to its medieval tradition of rational debate in theological affairs, after the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church no longer sought a rational foundation for its truth, which – analogous to classical Greek philosophy – had provided an ultimate goal as a final perspective. Instead of such a quest, it sought to confirm its own truth in dogmas and propositions that were no longer discussed but which were presented as unchangeable and infallible 'truths' that were disseminated through catechisms and other manuals (Toulmin, 1990, pp 113-116).

In the fourth book of his *History of the Council of Trent 1545-1563*, the Venetian theologian and historian, Paolo Sarpi, wrote that the papal legates who had chaired the Council had ordained the following in 1551:

> That the divines ought to confirm their opinions with the holy Scripture, Tradition of the Apostles, sacred and approved Councils, and by the Constitutions and Authorities of the holy Fathers, that they ought to use brevity, and avoid superfluous and unprofitable questions, and perverse contentions. … This order did not please the Italian Divines; who said it was a novity, and a condemning of School-Divinity, which, in all its difficulties, useth reason, and because it was not lawful [ie, by this decree] to treat as St Thomas [Aquinas], St Bonaventure, and other famous men did. … Though many complained hereof [ie, of the Decree] yet it prevailed but little, because generally the Fathers [ie, the Bishops] desired to hear men speak with intelligible terms, not abstrusely, as in the matter of Justification, and others already handled (Whitehead, 1925, p 9).

This shift from a speculative rationality ('vague terms') to a measurable rationality ('comprehensible terms') undoubtedly resulted in major scientific progress. By rejecting the search for an ultimate goal as illegitimate, however, a high price was paid. The substantive debate concerning the meaning and scope of that final goal was largely paralysed for the sake of tactical considerations. With this 'tactical' intervention, however, the Council of

Trent did not reduce but instead increased the contradictions between Catholics and Protestants.

The substantive ideological discussion was already so polarised that it would inevitably lead to a century of religious wars, first in France, then in the Netherlands and the German territories and, finally, in England. When the war-weary Europe concluded the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the tried-and-true strategy of paralysing any ideological discussion was nevertheless continued. From that time on, Catholics and Protestants were assigned territories in which they could spread their own visions, undisturbed by any difficult questions and, even less, by criticism from the other camp.

Protestantism and Catholicism after 1648

So far, this has been a description of the short-term evolution. But what about the evolution of Protestant and Catholic ideas in the long run? The description of all its ramifications is beyond the scope of this article, therefore I have chosen only two aspects: first, the disenchanting impact of the Reformation in contrast to the baroque enchantment with the Jesuit Counter-Reformation; second, the disciplining effect of both movements on Western culture.

Was the Reformation disenchanting?

Regarding the first question, historians such as Robert Scribner and Alexandra Walsham have exposed, by means of a causal–genealogical analysis of Protestantism, Weber's thesis of the 'disenchantment of the world' as a false interpretation of what really has happened. According to Scribner,

> the explanation for the apparent plausibility of the thesis resides less in the nature of the Reformation of the sixteenth century and more in its historiography. [...] It was the Enlightenment that first interpreted the Reformation as part of a long-term process of rationalization and secularization, an interpretation further reworked by the historiography of the nineteenth century until it reconstructed our modern view of the Reformation (Scribner, 1993, p 492).

His conclusion was, therefore, unambiguous: 'It may turn out that the disenchantment of the world played a marginal role in both the developing history of Protestantism and the advance toward the modern world' (Scribner,

1993, p 494). In similar vein, Walsham proclaimed that 'the disenchantment thesis may have nearly run its course and be approaching the end of its natural life' (Walsham, 2008, p 528).

To underpin their standpoint, Scribner and Walsham revisited a number of historical facts. Obviously, the devil maintained a privileged place in Protestant theology and practice alike. Far from desacralising the world, Lutheranism and Calvinism remained apocalyptic and eschatological and even saw world history as a cosmic struggle between the divine and the diabolical (cf Scribner, 1993, p 483). Moreover, Protestantism also maintained rituals, sacred time and holy places so that the boundaries between the sacred and the secular remained highly porous (cf Scribner, 1993, 484; Walsham, 2008, pp 510-512).

Whereas pre-Reformation Christianity believed that certain human actions, good or bad, could provoke supernatural intervention in the natural world – for instance, the birth of a deformed child as punishment for human sin – Protestants significantly 'broadened the notion by insisting that the material consequences of moral failures were … applicable to the failings of the population at large'. This broadened notion of divine punishment–reward became constitutive of Protestant disciplinary prohibitions and obligations and generated a moralised universe, with the effect of increasing anxiety: 'Indeed, anxiety may even have been increased by awareness of the omnipresence of a sacred order in and among the secular' (Scribner, 1993, p 486; cf Walsham, 2008, pp 515-516).

Apart from the notion of a moralised universe that functioned as a less sacramental but more general variant of an enchanted world, the similarity between Catholicism and Protestantism was also obvious in other respects:

> If we were to lay a Protestant template on that […] of Catholic belief, we would find one nestling inside the other like a pair of angle brackets. The relationship of Protestant to Catholic was *a matter of degree* … because it was positioned in the same force-field of sacrality [emphasis added] (Scribner, 1993, p 491; cf Walsham, 2008, pp 516-517).

Even if Protestant theology were to adopt a rhetoric of enlightened rationality and explicitly attack the basic presuppositions of the Catholic economy of the sacred (sacraments were reconceptualised as signs, the Eucharist was seen as the memorial of Christ's sacrifice rather than its re-enactment), it was

also clear that theology is not a static body of doctrine but one responsive to cultural alterations. This responsiveness was often prone to leading to a process of syncretism with popular beliefs (Scribner, 1993, p 493; Walsham, 2008, pp 510-517).

On the basis of these historical data, both historians claimed that Protestantism was itself deeply enchanting and moralising. However, there was one important proviso in their argument. Notwithstanding their claim that Protestantism was as enchanting as Catholicism used to be, both Scribner and Walsham emphasised the central difference between Catholicism and Protestantism with regard to the structure of sacrality and enchantment:

> What difference did the Reformation make to this complex and subtle structure of sacrality? The radical point of departure associated with Martin Luther … resides in their understanding of *the absolute sovereignty and otherness of God, so that it was impossible for human beings to gain any knowledge of the divine by merely created means*. This viewpoint destroyed the basis for sacraments and sacramentals, indeed for any kind of ritual by means of which this-worldly symbolic action could have any transcendental efficacy. All sacred action flowed one-way, from the divine to the human [emphasis added] (Scribner, 1993, p 482).

Therefore, Alexandra Walsham concludes that, in spite of the strong resemblances between popular Protestant and Catholic belief, 'none of these observations should be allowed to eclipse the fact of long-term change' (2008, p 528).

If we allow, then, for the long term, the conclusion must be that the meticulous scrutiny of historical sources shows a multi-layered result. Even if the historical sources demonstrate convincingly an enduring sensitivity to a mixture of the sacred and the profane in popular Protestantism, this does not contradict the main thrust of the interpretation that the Reformation has played a significant role in the disenchantment of the world. Despite historical findings that the Protestant Reformation itself was not disenchanting, the fact remains that the Reformation initiated an unintentional process in the long run that was to lead to the disenchantment of the world.[2] At best, the historians' detailed analyses demonstrate that the teleological paradigm in

2 Cf the title of Brad Gregory's monograph, *The unintended Reformation. How a religious revolution secularized society* (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012).

which Protestantism itself is equated with modernisation, secularisation and progress proves to be untenable.

Discipline in relation to a '*Deus absconditus*'

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber reminded his readers that the understanding of the absolute sovereignty and otherness of God was not the original reformed view of God. Whereas in Calvin's work the concept of a *Deus absconditus* received more weight, Luther adhered to the concept of a Loving Father.[3] In the evolutionary process of Western culture, the latter concept, albeit inherent in the New Testament, tended to be forgotten. The former became predominant and eventually gave rise to the secularisation of the West.

How did that happen? During the Middle Ages, theologians had gradually transformed the biblical view of 'Go as Love' into the metaphysical concept of 'God as the Creator of order'. By mingling ancient metaphysics with the Jewish–Christian idea of creation, theologians viewed God as an omnipotent creator of a well-ordered universe. This confidence in the trustfulness of nature was based on a twofold conviction. For one thing, there was the Platonic conviction that natural order was determined by a basic structure of ideas (philosophical *realism*). For another, there was the Christian–Neoplatonic belief that God had transformed this ideal order into reality. This double conviction had evaporated in the philosophy of *nominalism* by the end of the Middle Ages.

Inspired by the spirit of the Franciscan order, William of Occam emphasised that the Christian God is not an Absolute Impersonal Essence (as in Aristotelian philosophy) but a free, willing subject who is able to create whatever he has in mind. Accordingly, there is no guarantee of an ideal structure in which man feels at home. In Occam's view, ideas are but linguistic constructions ('*nomina*') and reality is reduced to a collection of individual particular things. This principle of parsimony has become famous

3 Max Weber, 1988, p 92 wrote: 'Beide, Luther und Calvin, kannten eben im Grunde ... einen doppelten Gott: den geoffenbarten gnädigen und gütigen Vater des NT. ... und dahinter den "Deus absconditus" als willkürlich schaltenden despoten. Bei Luther behielt der Gott des Neuen Testaments ganz die Oberhand, weil er die Reflexion über das Metaphysische, als nutzlos und gefährlich, zunehmend mied, bei Calvin gewann der Gedanke an die transzendente Gottheit Macht über das Leben.'

as ‘Occam’s razor’. Luther, in the wake of Occam’s nominalism, took distance from the medieval Catholic theology and its metaphysical reflexion on God.

However, Occam’s razor has a double edge. His original intention was to purify Christian belief by emphasising the awareness that we can never fully understand what we believe: God is an incomprehensible, omnipotent mystery. However, God’s mystery gradually became man’s alibi to devote his full attention to the enquiry of nature in order to create an environment in which he could feel at home. Accordingly, the three central ideas of nominalism have gradually been modified. Initially powerless, man made himself, out of bitter necessity, into an autonomous agent. The world, full of unpredictable capriciousness, gradually became subsumed under man-made natural laws and so became more and more mechanised. And the Almighty God was first presented as a master designer with his back to his creation (‘deism’), and in the end disappeared: a mechanised world was no longer in need of the hypothesis of a creating God.

Reform and the road to secularisation

Many historians of culture have highlighted the role of the nominalist concept of the incomprehensible, hidden God in the evolutionary process of Western culture. The Canadian philosopher Taylor – in particular in *A Catholic Modernity? (CM)* and *A Secular Age (SA)* – has combined the impact of this nominalist concept with an analysis of the genesis of a cultural phenomenon that he coins the ‘Reform’ to make clear how both Protestantism and Catholicism have been moving in the direction of secularisation.

When coining the term ‘Reform’, Taylor refers not merely to the Protestant Reformation, but to the more general picture of social and cultural changes that have pervaded modern society – that is, not only Protestant but also Catholic communities. He relates the Reform not only to the dominant position of a nominalist view of transcendence, but also to its disciplinary consequences in Christian society:

> Briefly summed up, Reform demanded that everyone be a real, 100 per cent Christian. Reform not only disenchants, but disciplines and re-orders life and society. Along with civility, this makes for a notion of moral order which gives a new sense to Christianity, and the demands of faith. … It induces an

> anthropocentric shift, and hence a break-out from the monopoly of Christian faith (*SA*, p 774).

Actually, the Reform became a mixture of both an authentic effort to purify Christianity and a negation of the biblical message. On the one hand, modern Western society – breaking with the structures of medieval Christendom and inspired by the biblical message – embraces the declaration of human rights. Owing to a growing sensitivity to the affirmation of 'ordinary life' – basically under the influence of Protestantism – the Reform has generated attention regarding the immanent aspects of daily life. The goal of the Reform for every believer was to renew society so as to become 100 per cent Christian and to discipline every individual in that perspective.

On the other, by stressing the importance of 'ordinary life' in combination with a nominalist view of God, the openness to transcendence gradually diminished and eventually disappeared. Owing to the gradual disappearance of an openness to transcendence, the order that eventually arose out of the spirit of Reform

> was not a network of agape, but rather a disciplined society in which categorical relations have primacy, and therefore norms. … The irony is that it somehow turned into something quite different; … Perhaps the contradiction lay in the very idea of a disciplined imposition of the Kingdom of God (*SA*, p 158).

The image of a disciplined society is characteristic of reformed and counter-reformed societies alike. However deep the initial gap between Calvin's and Loyola's ideas, they shared the same ideal of leading a disciplined life '*ad majorem Dei gloriam*' ('to the greater glory of God'). Accordingly, modern culture cannot but have an ambiguous relationship to the original biblical inspiration:

> in modern, secularist culture there are mingled together both authentic developments of the gospel, of an incarnational mode of life, and also a closing off to God that negates the gospel (*CM*, p 16).

According to Taylor, the Protestant reaction to medieval modes of relationship between transcendence and human flourishing has played a central role in this evolution. The medieval *symbiotic* relationship between monks or nuns

and the laity – where the ascetic activity of monks or nuns is believed to enable the flourishing of everyday believers – was put aside by the Reformers' attack on the supposedly higher vocations. The Reformers' *purist* view, where the ascetic ideals of renunciation were seen as goals for everyone's human flourishing, eventually led to its opposite: owing to the reformist critique of all 'higher vocations', the importance of transcendence diminished in favour of an affirmation of ordinary life (*CM*, pp 21-22).

As a consequence, the domain of 'immanence' was expanded so as to include most of what was formerly regarded as 'transcendent'. What got lost in this evolution towards secularisation was the 'transformation perspective' inherent in religious experience:

> In the Christian case, this means our participating in the love (agape) of God for human beings, which is by definition a love which goes way beyond any possible mutuality, a self-giving not bounded by some measure of fairness. We grasp the specificity of this belief only by taking it from two sides, as it were, in terms of what it supposes as a supra-human power (God), and in terms of what this power calls us to, the perspective of transformation it opens (*SA*, p 430).

The idea that agapeic transcendence and human flourishing could go together and even reinforce each other (the 'transformation perspective') became incomprehensible to the majority of Western people (*CM*, pp 21-22).

500 years of Reform: Where do we go from here?

If there is any plausibility in this reconstruction of the history of Reform, Christians – Protestants and Catholics alike – are confronted with the same challenge today: How to implement our faith in God's agapeic transcendence in combination with the affirmation of ordinary life:

> In Christian terms, if renunciation decentres you in relation with God, God's will is that humans flourish, and so you are taken back to an affirmation of this flourishing, which is biblically called agape (*CM*, p 22).

But how do we find subtler languages to make these original Christian terms – transcendence enhancing human flourishing – comprehensible and credible again?

It was this challenge that our common forebears, the Antwerp Augustinians, were coping with at the threshold of the modern age. On 1 July they paid for their courageous efforts with their lives: the time was not ripe for open discussions. Five centuries later, with greater freedom than was granted to our Christian–humanistic predecessors and building upon their inspiration, we can now dare to call a halt to ideological polarisation and bring into being the active pluralism between different interpretations of the Gospel of which they could merely have a distant dream.

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CHAPTER 4

From Theology to politics: the impact of Protestantism on the development of democracy

Dr Guy Liagre

Summary

The premise of this contribution is that it is a different question to ask in an analytical way 'How did the Reformation influence democratic developments?' than to ask in a normative way 'How can Protestantism continue to influence our societies today?' I offer some thoughts on the first question. The path from theology to politics has been complex and varied at different times and in different places. I touch on the question of the common priesthood of believers and also discuss the meaning and development of the terms 'Reformation' and 'democracy'. The question is whether there are any connections to be noted and, if so, which?

Protestant commemorations

A few years ago, I published an article on the history of the first Protestant martyrs (Liagre, 2015). It focused on Johannes Voes and Hendrikus van den Esschen, who have since gained a place in the *Ökumenisches Heiligenlexikon* (www.heiligenlexikon.de). The article describes their deaths and the history of the reception of this historic event in contemporary 16th-century literature. It notes the fierce reaction from Luther, who composed the poem *Ein neues Lied wir heben an* after the two young martyrs were immolated in Brussels (Lucke, 1923). It also covered the special Brussels celebration of

this event 400 years later, in 1923 (see also Weiss, 1923; Weis & Houssiau, 2011). We have now reached another centenary. As between the Reformation commemorations of 1617, 1717 and 1817, the focus has been adjusted (Berg, 2016; Wendebourg, 2016). Whereas the first two commemorations of the Reformation were largely confessional, the 1817 jubilee was framed in the ideologies of liberalism and nationalism (Howard & Noll, 2018). Meanwhile, in the 21st century, we have passed the time when the study of Protestantism pitted the plurality of the Reformation and other Christian traditions against each other (Ryrie, 2016). Historiographical and ecumenical perspectives have changed and memory is mutating in an ongoing reconstruction (Davie, 2000; cf also the contribution of G van Heeswijck to this colloquium). This volume in commemoration of the events in 1523 deals with some aspects of the social impact of Protestantism and its self-understanding (as this article does) and also with the events themselves (eg D Wursten's contribution to this colloquium).

Faith that shaped the modern world

On the occasion of the commemoration 500 years of the Reformation in 2017 Alex Ryrie, Professor of Church History at Durham University, published *Protestants. The faith that shaped the modern world* (Ryrie, 2017). He follows the line taken by earlier historians, namely, the idea that Protestantism (partly) shaped the modern world and modern thought. All sorts of changes (liberalism; industrial revolution; capitalism) have, according to Ryrie, at least some of their roots in Protestantism. But the Protestant Reformation did not have a precisely determinable impact on democracy (also Kingdon, 1990, p 54),[1] but a generally observable one. Sometimes Protestantism was a promoter of democracy, sometimes not. Until the 19th century, Protestants often rejected democracy in favour of monarchy or theocracy. But they later promoted democratic forms of voting and used the extension of the franchise and modern tools such as political parties to increase their influence in society (an update in Freston, 2004).

1 'Pouvons-nous conclure que Calvin et le calvinisme ont créé à eux seuls la démocratie et qu'ils furent à l'origine des révolutions démocratiques modernes telles que la Révolution française ? Non certes. En revanche, nous pouvons dire avec assurance que le calvinisme a marqué une étape décisive de l'évolution de la chrétienté vers la démocratie en créant un gouvernement représentatif.'

Structure of this article

Based on these observations, this article poses the analytical (rather than normative, future-oriented) question of whether and how the Reformation influenced democratic developments (Bosse-Huber, Fornerod & Gundlach, 2015, pp XI–XII). It begins with the history of the reception of the Reformation in the 19th century. An interlude briefly describes the religious map of Europe from a democratic perspective, followed by a description of the three levels of distribution of Protestant thought. A third section opens with a terminological discussion of the concepts of democracy and Protestantism; it then introduces the discussion of democratic research paradigms, distinguishing between Lutheranism and Calvinism (the two most well-known currents) before drawing some summarising conclusions.

Importance of Brussels

The article quoted above (Liagre, 2015) was one of a series of about 15 articles on the history of Protestantism in Brussels published by the author in the journal of the *Royal Historical Society of Flemish Brabant and Brussels*.[2] Other contributions that related to this period focused, among other things, on the so-called inventor of the English language, the Bible translator William Tyndale, who was publicly strangled and burned at the stake in Vilvoorde (Liagre, 2009), and on Francisco de Enzinas, the Protestant reformer and apologist. He was imprisoned in the '*vrunte*' (the 'amigo') in Brussels and completed a translation of the New Testament into Spanish (Liagre, 2018). It is in the context of the memory of the first martyrs a reminder of the importance of Brussels (a Calvinist republic in the 1570s) during the early Reformation (Liagre, 2018*). In the 19th century, as described in the next paragraph, the city also played a central role in the process of ideologising the history of the Reformation for the purposes of liberal political democratisation propaganda (Liagre, 2006b, 2006c).

2 The journal, *Eigen Schoon en De Brabander*, initially focused on the region of Flemish Brabant. Through a series of publications on Protestant life in Brussels, the focus was extended, including Brussels.

New focus in the 19th century

Since the French Revolution, Europe had experienced democracy as a possible form of organisation for large states. It was no longer an academic concept or a political form only in marginal and unimportant regions such as the Netherlands or Switzerland. Both theoretical and practical debates were marked by democratic impulses and formed the core of the Protestant–liberal (interlinked with democratic freemasonry) anti-clerical struggle (Liagre, 2017/2). As early as the years immediately preceding 1848, contacts were established in Brussels that led to joint initiatives between German and French democrats, often originating in Protestant families (Sartorius, 1995). This is not the place to discuss the importance of the cooperation between the two groups; however, it should not be underestimated, nor should the role of freemasonry[3] By the 1830s, anyone who identified with liberal and reformist causes could find a home in one lodge or another. This was true particularly of liberal protestants in Continental and Catholic Europe, where the condemnation of the French Revolution remained a centrepiece of the right (Liagre, 2014). The democratic struggle was increasingly affecting society, as a result of which the democratic concept evolved. It lost what it had referred to in the past: (1) the focus on ‘pure’ or ‘direct’ democracy; (2) the restriction to small states and simple forms of society; and (3) the opposition to aristocratic or monarchical organisations (Maier, 2021). On this last point, the *Meyers Konversations-Lexikon* made the interesting observation that representative democracy ran the risk of creating aristocracy itself or of falling into anarchy (Meyer, 1846, p 135).

Identitarian mythological narratives

Democratisation and building a national identity went hand in hand. Identitarian myths (new identitarian mythological narratives) were needed in the 19th century to consolidate political institutions and constellations, underpin identity and foster a sense of national belonging (Tollebeek, 1990;

3 A general remark: Margaret Jacob paralleled freemasonry’s emergence with the rise of the public sphere and Britain’s new secular civic culture, and concluded that freemasonry was not only a by-product of Britain’s developing constitutional democracy, but also a bit player in the birth of modernity itself (Jacob, 1981).

Morelli, 1996, pp 7-21; Slembrouck & Blommaert, 1996, pp 243-258; van der Woud, 1998). The British-Czech philosopher and social anthropologist Ernest Gellner launched in this regard 'the best-known modernist theory of nationalism' (O'Leary, 1997). For him, challenged by other sociologists, it is nationalism that produces nations, not the other way round (Gellner, 1983). In a process of national mythologisation and identitarian creation of nation-states, the 16th century was staged in identity myths. It served as a reservoir of national liberal identity (Liagre, 2005). Examples of these translations include works by Michelet, Quinet, Schiller and Beethoven. It was transposed by the French translation of the works of Marnix of St Aldegonde, published in Brussels in the middle of the century (Liagre, 1999, 2017). A dominant approach has been to link the democratic form of government with the spirit and history of Protestantism in the historical determination of democratic antecedents. This comparison (initially made popular by De Tocqueville's book on America) also gained popularity for polemical purposes in the ranks of (anti-democratic) Catholic traditionalists (Maier, 2021, pp 9-10). The use on both sides indicates the multi-faceted nature of the subject.

History denationalised

Until the 1970s and 1980s, traditional historiography tended to approach the nation-state as an absolute category of analysis. Reconceptualisations, however, gradually led to its decentralisation, replacing it by transnational history, broadly defined by Akira Iriye as 'the study of movements and forces that cut across national boundaries' (Iriye, 1989; Schilling, 2001; Katnik, 2002; Iriye, 2004, p 213). The perspective is no longer national, but, as studying freemasonry also shows, one of exchanging and transmitting ideas and networks. An important question for the future arose in this context. In *La fin de la démocratie?* Jean-Marie Guéhenno argues that the era of the nation-state came to an end in 1989, after a period that began in 1789 (Guéhenno, 1989, p 10). He wondered if it was really possible to build a democracy without nations (pp 15-36). This question is of European relevance and of overriding importance to the nationally organised European Protestant Churches, but I will leave it at that for the moment (Liagre, 2015b).

European perspectives

Modern democratic ideas were born on European soil. Paradoxically, and in spite of the European idea, nationalism is still growing. Hence the importance of the question I have just raised about the relationship between democracy and the nation-state. Spreading, embedding and strengthening a transnational democratic mindset across national borders has proved difficult because each nation (compare, eg, the French and Dutch democracies) gives it its own colour. Nevertheless, Europe (even Switzerland is opening up cautiously) is moving slowly from *homo nationalis* to a new concept of citizenship: the European citizen (Liagre, 2015b, p 15). However, it is also a fact that the development of modern democracy has been uneven from one country to the next. The history of democracy in France, Switzerland and the United States (the last of these exported by Protestants and Freemasons from Europe) goes back as far as 1790. Although examples of Muslim-majority democracies exist, they are, admittedly, relatively few. Debates about the alleged incompatibility between Islam and democracy, of course, are long-standing. While aspects of the 'democratic deficit' in the Muslim world can certainly be debated, a focus on the lack of democracy among these countries draws attention away from the fact that several do qualify as democracies. Here I will only note that democracy in any form in the Muslim bloc did not take root until the 1990s (Kubicek, 2015, pp 1-34) – a crude snapshot, but one that raises significant socio-religious questions (Liagre, 2015b, pp 35-36).

At the second level, we need to compare the Christian confessions. Orthodoxy is the last to arrive. Although Greece has been democratic since 1900, with a few eclipses, it has been a parliamentary republic only since 1975. Has the aspect of the autocephaly of the Orthodox Churches, with its strong emphasis on subordination or on the indissoluble link between State and religious power, been a factor in the delay of the move towards religious and social pluralism and, ultimately, democracy? (Prodromou, 2004). Again, I shall leave this question for further consideration.

Complexity of the question

The subtitle of this contribution points to Protestantism's complex role in developing the principle of democracy (Woodberry, 2004, p 47). Hence

the circular movements in this article. They highlight aspects, point out problems and act as exercises in thinking, since the Protestant influence on democratic developments has varied at different times and in different places (Vlas & Gherghina, 2012) – even to the extent of sometimes supporting the establishment of brutal regimes and anti-democratic movements such as Cromwell, apartheid, Nazism and other authoritarian regimes. Nevertheless, there is compelling evidence of a causal relationship between Protestantism and early democratic theory (Woodberry, 2004, p 47). Statistical research suggests that a strong and consistent link has existed between the proportion of Protestants in a society and its level of political democracy (Woodberry, 2004, p 49). With the exception of Switzerland, the most democratic (also the most prosperous) countries on the European map are located in the Protestant north. However, as we have seen, democratic thought did not spread everywhere in the same way and it is difficult to draw direct historical–genetic lines from the 16th century to the present (Sallmann, 2015, p 210). However, as we shall see in the next paragraphs, the influence is there.

Reformation and Counter-Reformation

In the previous section I wrote about Protestant and non-Protestant countries. However, the word 'Protestant' covers a variety of views. As a catch-all term, it can explain several situations that are in fact different and have different underlying socio-political and theological dynamics (Davie, 2000, pp 5-23; Liagre, 2011). Protestantism began as a small stream and ended in hundreds of smaller and larger meanders of varying and sometimes opposing theological depth and colour. Part of the ambiguity in the different historical processes leading to modern democracy lies also in the understanding of the term 'Reformation'. Does it mean innovation and breaking new ground? Or does it also mean returning to and rediscovering earlier political forms in the spirit of a 'renaissance'? (*ut infra*) (Davie, 2000, pp 5-23)? These are complex questions to answer. The fact is, however, that under the influence of a historicising worldview and as a result of the jubilee celebrations of 1817, the term 'Reformation' took on a (polemical) historically defined meaning as a synonym for the Reformation period in opposition to the Roman Church. Leopold von Ranke divided it into the Reformation of the first half and the Counter-Reformation of the second half of the century, implying a mere

reaction to Protestantism but neglecting the reform within Catholicism. This view has therefore repeatedly been the subject of criticism (Lotz-Heumann, 2001; see also the contribution of Guy Vanheeswijk to this colloquium). In 1946, Hubert Jedin, a Swiss Catholic scholar, proposed the compromise terminology of Catholic Reform and Counter-Reformation (Jedin, 1946). In 1958, the dichotomy of Reformation and Counter-Reformation was radically changed by the Catholic historian Ernst Walter Zeeden, who emphasised that Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism all began to build modern, clearly defined confessional Churches in the second half of the 16th century. At the heart of each of them was an identical process of '*Konfessionsbildung*' (Zeeden, 1958, 1965, 1985). Heinz Schilling, a Protestant scholar who researched the interaction between Calvinism and Lutheranism in north-west Germany, wrote of confessionalisation, arising out of his criticism of the negative and anti-modern implications of the term 'Counter-Reformation' (Schilling, 1992). Subsequently, the discussion was extended to include the entire social and political system, along with the religious and ecclesiastical sphere, into a paradigm of 'social history' (Reinhard, 1981). Viewed from this perspective, it had a dynamic political and social dimension: 'Confessionalisation' and '*Sozialdisziplinierung*' (Reinhard, 1983, p 268; Schulze, 1987; Schilling, 1992, p 208). This dynamic dimension of the *ecclesia semper reformanda* (a formula probably introduced by Jodocus van Lodenstein) was lost, however, because the word 'Reformation' gradually acquired a static meaning and became detached from a diachronic development.

Levels of transfer

Starting from the 16th century, the spread of Reformation ideas or ideals can be divided into three forms: primary, secondary and tertiary diffusion. Primary dissemination was through Martin Luther's ideas (top-down) and those of others (eg Anabaptist bottom-up) (Blok, 2006).[4] Once again, however, this is indicative of the complexity of the issue, since one product of the Lutheran studies over the past decades has been wide disagreement about the political tendencies of his ideas. One group has tended to identify Luther with

4 One can name Anabaptism as a primary Reformation movement and Calvinism as a secondary Reformation movement of the second generation. Blok writes on the shift of Anabaptism from an oral to a written culture and consequently from a lost to a materially preserved culture.

strings of democracy and individualism associated with the Reformation, while another has taken an opposite position, namely, that his ideals directly fostered State absolutism in politics and State control of Churches (Sheldon, 1956). My contention is that, despite these disagreements and despite Luther's non-democratic tendencies, it is undeniable that his central idea that the conscience of the individual matters was largely responsible for the eventual emergence of modern democracy. It also created tensions between individual rights and social or political unity. If Luther himself was on the side of the German princes and conservative forces, his writings helped to promote a more democratic culture with the emergence of a new middle-class person – an independent, autonomous individual with freedom of moral choice, independent and responsible in his opinions and actions. In many countries, however, the German reformer was not the direct source of Reformation-inspired democratic ideas. Their reception was through secondary propagators, such as John Calvin, who transplanted theological insights into specific (political, ecclesiological, social) areas of application. Finally, examples of tertiary diffusion are the applications and adaptations of Protestant ideals (eg the Masonic impulse in American democracy). These can be found in all kinds of practical areas and movements (Bullock, 1996).

The term 'democracy'

We have seen that the concept of democracy has been subject to a variety of temporary and fleeting definitions. For a long time it referred to a way of organising government, not to an ideal of freedom and justice. The contemporary understanding, however, is that of a representative (parliamentary or presidential) system based on free elections crowned by certain ethical values legitimised by law. As a consequence, the interpretation of the concept of democracy can always be questioned and problematised (Alexander, 2006). For example, the issue of the death penalty, which was at the top of the democratic agenda in the second half of the 19th century, can be raised. Europeans sometimes vehemently condemn the death penalty in Islamic countries, but in a country such as the United States different standards are applied. And moral outrage accompanies the reintroduction of the death penalty in democracies, but not its existence (and application) in other democracies – as if a death penalty that is democratically decided

on by a majority is of a different order from that imposed by a centralised policy or a dictatorship. Ethicality is therefore measured by the relationship between democracy and authority or power, with the hidden prejudice that a good democratic tree cannot bear bad democratic fruit. If, as Jacques Delors said, it is true that democracy (itself an idealistic rather than a purely political construct) is a matter of the soul, it also means that it is not only a political, but also an ethical concept (Hogenbrink, 2015). So the question of how we deal with this also remains permanently open.

Democracy and cosmology

After what I wrote above, it is clear that since the ancient Greeks, the concept of democracy (a terminological amalgamation of *demos*, δῆμος-, people, and *-kratein*, κρατειν, rule) has evolved in many different forms and guises (Julia, 1984, pp 61-62). It also became apparent that the social form is still in a state of evolution worldwide. We can also express it philosophically. If one can assume a number of socio-political observations and presuppositions, what is called the essence in ontological terms is a changeable core with certain characteristics as a principle of unity and definition. The visible and changeable form is therefore not an additional one. The core of democracy is in the creative process. In this process, given elements begin to interact in new and ever-changing ways. According to the American philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead, 'theories' – which is also the case with the concept of democracy – 'are built upon facts; and conversely the reported-upon facts are shot through and through with theoretical interpretation' (Sturm, 1979, p 375). For Whitehead, history cannot 'be devoid of any reliance on metaphysical principles (without conceivable alternative and applicable in this and every other world) and cosmological (the attempt to describe the present order of the world in terms of principles which are special exemplifications of the most general, that is, metaphysical, principles) generalisations' (Whitehead, 1979, pp 138, 441).[5]

One of his followers, Max Wildiers, contrasted the medieval worldview as a total vision that could not be questioned with the constant evolution and

5 The subtitle of his magnum opus *Process and reality* (a combination of metaphysics and cosmology) is therefore misleading, as he subtitled it *An essay in cosmology*.

change of the modern worldview. The world is a process of becoming and this process of becoming is reality itself. Contrary to the classical worldview, it is never about fitting human beings into a fixed (cosmic) order (Wildiers, 1973). Consequently, a political theory (par example democracy) cannot be understood apart from considerations of cosmology. Most important for Whitehead and Wildiers is the idea that the world and human beings are in a process of development. Furthermore, everything in the world is in relation to everything else. That is to say: each thing affects the other in some way, even though immediate events may be independent of one another. In short, the world – and world history – as a whole is an organism, a living universe animated by creativity. This implies the primacy of democratic plurality (Cobb, 1982). In modern nation-states, each nation is; on the one hand, autonomous and responsible for its own democratic model, but, on the other, not completely independent. It is possible to identify common features, though.

Research paradigms

In the past, Church history was often separated from secular history and was part of the history departments of theological faculties. Fortunately, this is changing. Research points to the important interplay between social and religious factors, also underlining the fact that '*Le regard porté par le chercheur modifie la réalité qu'il élabore pour l'étudier*' (The view taken by the researcher modifies the reality that he develops in order to study it) (Bost, 1999, p 11). This is not new, since historical paradigms shift and have come upon us in successive and sometimes crushing waves during the last two centuries (*ut supra*). For example, we have already mentioned anticlerical liberalisms and the instrumentalisation of protestant history.[6]

6 We find a Flemish example of it in *Het Geuzenboek* by Louis-Paul Boon. Boon's magnum opus recounting the events during the 16th century is valuable only insofar as it offers an alternative to the Flemish-Catholic assessment of the 16th century in the Low Countries, and served as a critical corrective to the Dutch-Protestant view of this period. And this is no small achievement. The evolution in the views of Protestantism and the Revolt of the Netherlands begins in folk songs, martyrologia, memoirs and later chronicles (Crespin and Van Braght, among others). Literary works by Guy de Brès, Marnix of St Aldegonde, William of Nassau and others complemented them. Then followed memoirs and, in the 17th century, chronicles. In the 18th century, authors such as Voltaire, Schiller, Goethe and Charles de Coster took up the torch. In the 19th century, liberal and republican thought came to the fore, and after 1960 one current concentrated on socio-economic

Theology and democracy

Viewed sociologically, religion is essentially reducible to meaning-making. Therefore, Protestantism as a theological movement is also a sociological phenomenon (Geerts, 1973). In the 16th century, it was characterised by an organisational structure and a pattern of leadership. Like actual new religious movements, the 16th-century Reformation took specific positions in opposition to the established social, political and religious powers. It is not difficult to see, therefore, that a linear monocausal explanation divorced from the social context fails to capture a complex reality. Alternative frameworks that are more sensitive to the contextual factors and the agency of actors through which religions shape political outcomes and vice versa are needed to make progress in understanding the systematic impact of (Protestant) religion on democratisation. It is a matter of looking at the ways in which basic democratic ideas have been applied: the work of insemination. Here the researcher enters into a kind of triangular relationship in their attempt to prevent history from belonging to the past. They enter into a conversation with the concept of democracy itself, which in turn enters into a conversation with other concepts (or the same concept in a different political and social context with shifting cosmological understandings) and with the environment, leading to the creation of a conversation of interpretations. Democracy has thrived on its relationship and interaction with culture. It is instructive (and stimulating) to note how the same relationship has been – and in some parts of the world still is – lived in different ways. In post-Covidian terms, we might also say that we should be on the lookout for the epidemiological nature of the Reformation's impact on the concept of democracy.

Luther and modern Europe

The continuing history of the Reformation should be understood as one element in a whole socio-political cluster without measuring the past against the present. Neither Luther nor the early reformers (Calvin and others) were democrats in the actual sense of the word. If you had told Luther that he would

research with a focus on the living conditions of the urban proletariat; another current stressed the struggle against bureaucratisation and royal absolutism. Only relatively late did historians who linked socio-historical elements to religious tensions come to light (Goosens, 1996).

lead the world towards (our modern) democracy, he would have choked on his beloved German beer, and for good reason. He and his followers were not trying to reshape the world: they were trying to save it. They thought the end was near, and they had a gospel to preach. And as Luther insisted: All human authority is provisional and conscience can be bound only by the Bible. If he helped to democratise and accelerate the way we discuss ideas, it was because he, more than any other early modern writer, turned the new technology of print into a fast-paced medium for debate and argument. He initiated a process of conscientisation and democratisation by shifting, through his writings, the locus of authority from the Church to the individual believer – even while his writings tended towards authoritarianism.

Calvin and modern Europe

Calvin, for his part, was not afraid to say 'Kings have a mandate from God' and 'represent his person' among the people. Kings were the vicars, the lieutenants, of the Lord. With this in mind, he developed a set of biblical principles for ordering the Church and the City (Oberman, 1988, pp 28-31). Far from being isolated from the concrete context of life, the principles were discovered in a living situation and very much mirrored the situation in Geneva. Calvin developed his doctrine of the ministry in this interplay between the experience of political life and biblical exegesis (Biéler, 1959). It led Heiko Oberman to the challenging formula '*Sola scriptura civitate inspirate*' – Scripture alone, but interpreted in the light of the City (Oberman, 1988). In contrast to Lutheranism, Calvinism was from the outset an urban religion. Calvin's position seems entirely circumscribed by medieval ecclesiastical culture. It subordinates the political, social, legal and economic to the supernatural criteria of revelation. His distance from later Calvinism is striking. He was as far removed from Puritanism as he was from the reformed Protestantism of the post-Industrial Revolution, as André Biéler has shown in his dissertation (Biéler, 1959). Just as it is impossible to know how much Calvin contributed to the development of what came to be known as capitalism, so it is impossible to know about democracy. With his doctrine of ministry, however, he provided at the intersection of two periods an impetus for change (Biéler, 1959).

In view of the transformation of reality, Luther and Calvin had no intention of reducing transcendence to the inner-worldly. Lutheranism in the first generation and Calvinism in the second both sought to preserve a common transcendental ideal inherited from the Middle Ages, despite the differences between the two founding branches. Culture had to be bibliocratically shaped by the Church, but subsequently this process of establishing democratic regimes did not proceed at the same pace everywhere. The question that arises is this: Is there somewhere an impetus that leads to fundamental social change in the sense of slow democratisation?

Between democracy and aristocracy

Protestantism does not necessarily cause democratisation. However, cross-national research shows that Protestant developments have made a significant contribution to global democratisation. This explains why this topic was chosen for this colloquium. But the road was long and arduous. In August 1520, three years before the first martyrs were burned in Brussels, Martin Luther published an *Open letter to the Christian nobility of the German nation* concerning the reformation of the Christian State (Luther, 1966). In it he preached a programme of political and social reform and outlined a framework for educational, judicial and social renewal (Todd, 1965, pp 235-238). His original vision was of an ideal society without government where God in Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, would guide life and living together. But experience taught him that the vast majority of humanity was a rapine troop of wild animals and only physical force could keep them in line (Mönnich, 1980, p 143). For Luther, there would be no need for a government if everyone were to do what God wants: to have love for one another. According to his theology, Christ dwelt in human beings through the work of the Holy Spirit as a guide for life and co-existence, and his grace was extended to all who believed. It was primarily through this theological idea of the universal priesthood of all believers that he provided the impetus for democratisation. However, even this did not happen overnight. In his early years, he supported the congregation's right to judge all doctrine and the appointment and dismissal of teachers (Sallmann, 2015, p 211). However, he did not introduce the universal priesthood as the basis for the internal order of the Church. Later, in fact, he adopted a more reserved attitude towards it.

But the principle was established. Although Calvin and Zwingli later argued for a more aristocratic form of government, rejecting both democracy and monarchy, the penetration of the principle was unstoppable.

I mentioned previously that recent empirical evidence shows that Protestant countries are more democratic than predominantly Islamic and Catholic states (Woodberry, 2004, pp 47-61; Tusalem, 2009). The Protestant countries became democratic before the other Christian countries and they also escaped the totalitarian experiences of the 20th century, with the exception of partly Catholic Germany (Lessay, 2002). Alongside Lutheranism, parts of Europe – notably the Swiss, Dutch, Scots, some Germans, some Hungarians and Czechs, and a small but significant minority of French – were drawn to a more rigorous version of Protestantism by Zwingli and Calvin (Davie, 2000, p 16). However, to assume that political arrangements and changes necessarily followed directly would be a mistake. In different parts of Europe, particular arrangements of political order have been established through a variety of accommodations, largely dictated, as we have seen, by particular historical circumstances (Liagre, 2013). However, in the countries mentioned, the importance of an emerging democratic order can be seen in the course of subsequent developments. Some of the most important results of the Protestant influence are, according to Rollin Tusalem, (1) the rise of religious pluralism (from its inception, the Reformation fragmented the religious landscape); (2) the development of democratic theory and practice; (3) the development of civil society; (4) the spread of mass education (the first modern movement for compulsory State education came from the Protestant Reformation);[7] (5) printing and the origins of a public sphere; (6) the reduction of corruption; and (7) economic development (Tusalem, 2009).

Some examples

To conclude, here are three concrete examples of the fluctuating but persistent influence of the democratic idea in Protestant circles, to which hundreds more could be added.

7 The Reformers aimed at being mainly religious pedagogues, able to provide people with a Christian education based on the Bible (*Sola Scriptura*), Christ (*Solus Christus*), God's Glory (*Soli Deo Gloria*), Faith (*Sola Fide*) and Grace (*Sola Gratia*). Only these fundamental principles, without good deeds, could bring justice, freedom, happiness, and moral and spiritual education. https://www.thecollector.com/how-protestant-reformation-shaped-modern-education/ (consulted 18 April 2023).

John Knox, the Scottish radical and former student of John Calvin in Geneva, wrote in 1558 that 'all men are created equal' (Knox, 1994, p 119). Few Protestants at the time agreed, and even Knox meant something very different from what we understand equality to mean today. But British and Scottish history has been permeated by this undertone and a generation after Knox Scotland's King James VI accused his Protestant subjects of plotting a democratic form of government (Craigie, 1944). Ryrie observed that it was a false accusation: 'This was a false accusation. They were in favour of the monarchy, good order and social stability' (Ryrie, 2017, p 60).

The example of the Levellers in one of the most turbulent periods of English history, between 1642 and 1651, is also an interesting one (Smith, 1990). This political movement preached the ideas of equality and collected tens of thousands of signatures on petitions in London pleading for religious tolerance, the right to vote, sovereignty and political freedom. Along with freedom of religion and equality before the law, the Levellers demanded that Parliament be elected every two years by something not too far removed from universal male suffrage (Ryrie, 2017, p 118).

A final example comes from the United States, where Protestant religious ideas, nurtured by freemasonry, shaped American democracy (Bullock, 1996). In 1828, Andrew Johnson, a non-denominational future president (the United States has had only two Catholic presidents), made democracy a virtue, saying:

> The voice of the people is the voice of God ... The Democratic party ... has undertaken the political salvation of man, and sooner or later the great work will be accomplished. In the political world it corresponds to that of Christianity in the moral world (Hudson, 1974, pp 2-3).

As Johnson suggests, America's democratic adventure and its religious adventure went hand in hand.

Conclusions

Obviously, this article is too short to do justice to all aspects of the question – it would take a book just to explore its various components. I have focused on only some elements of the transition from theology to politics and the

relationship between the Reformation and democracy. I have identified some key elements and indicators of Protestant influence in the democratisation of our societies. There were also some points of paradox: for example, that democracy does not require the separation of State and religion (Fox, 2016). Jonathan Fox describes the multiple religious economies that characterise Western democracies, where secular and religious political forces compete to influence government policy on religion. The mention of paradoxes of course brings to mind the title of the collection of essays, 'The democratic paradox' (Mouffe, 2000). The Belgian political scientist and philosopher, Chantal Mouffe, highlighted in this work the constant tension between the liberal principle of individual rights and every democratic society's need for social and political cohesion. It is precisely this irresolvable tension between individuals and society that keeps democracy alive; there can be no perfect consensus or harmonious collective will. Debate is the most powerful and perhaps the only democratic tool. It shapes the democratic process. But antagonism is the key word. When the German philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer, was 90 years old, a journalist asked him if he could sum up his philosophy in one or two sentences. He answered: 'I have no doubt that I can. The other might still be right.' That's a good Protestant and democratic way to respond. A democracy should be plural. Consensus alone is not enough; it is only the result of a negotiation that has to take place again and again, and is therefore by definition temporary – there can never be a final result.

We have seen in this article that Lutheranism and Calvinism (other Protestant groups and movements such as Quakers, Baptists and newer Protestant movements were not discussed) each in their own way vectored a democratic State (and Church!) organisation. The question, however, is how far we are allowed to – and can – stretch the principle of the Reformation. The Reformation is *semper reformanda*. Democratic influence is *creatio continua*. Moreover, not all Protestant groups were advocates of democratic forms of Church, State or society. The Protestant Churches did not have an umbrella organisation, nor did they have a supranational structure. They were confessional, regional or national in their organisation. An important lesson from this is that to capture the specific role of religion in democratic or political change, it is necessary to move away from the dichotomy of locally determined State–religion relationships and to consider interactions more broadly. If we want to look to the future, we should also ask whether increased individualism among Europeans led to a decline in Protestant religiosity and

a decrease in political influence, as Colin Crouch has argued (Crouch, 2000). This is not the place to go into the question in detail, but research into the influence of religion on politics in the West is growing (Fox 2008, 2012, 2016).

The overall conclusion is that religion can influence democratic transition either positively or negatively. To this end, the idea of the universal priesthood of the faithful has certainly made a positive contribution. The history of this basic protestant principle has taught us the lesson that democratic tradition lives by the grace of change, of renewal – not just a bit of cosmetic surgery – a Botox here and a liposuction there. It lives by the grace of innovation and is preserved by change. This requires us to rethink our democratic assumptions and foundations, because the conquest of democracy is not a moment's work: democracy is hard to win, but easy to lose. From its beginnings in ancient Greece, it was a work in progress. And it still is '*semper reformanda*'.

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CHAPTER 5

Protestant virtue ethics: tradition and contemporary relevance

Prof Dr Pieter Vos

Abstract

This chapter argues that the Protestant tradition is not opposed to virtue ethics but rather a valuable and viable exemplification of it. This is demonstrated by drawing on sources of the post-Reformation theology of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries which reveal that virtue and the cultivation of the virtues were crucial in Protestant ethics. Furthermore, it is argued that the Protestant theological tradition has particular contributions to offer to a contemporary virtue ethics. Contrary to other views on virtue ethics, in a Protestant perspective with its insistence on human sinfulness and grace it can be acknowledged that the moral life often exhibits virtues alongside moral flaws or even deep-seated vices, without the pursuit of a virtuous life being abandoned.

Introduction: Protestant virtue ethics?

Since Elizabeth Anscombe (1958) first raised the matter, Alasdair MacIntyre (1984) and others have initiated a revival of virtue ethics in philosophy. In theology, Stanley Hauerwas (1975, 1981) began to think of the Christian moral life in terms of character, virtue, community and narrative. Since then, Protestant theologians have shown a growing interest in an ethics of virtue. Several of them, such as Gilbert Meilaender (1984), Richard Mouw (1990) and Eilert Herms (1992), corrected the common view that Protestants have no place for the virtues at all, but nevertheless presuppose that their approach

to virtue ethics is contrary to the Protestant tradition or a supplement to this tradition. Mouw (1990), for instance, stated: 'My main concern in this book is to set forth a case for divine command ethics in the comprehensive sense' (1990, p 2), that is, a 'divine command' into which virtue ethics is incorporated. According to Herms (1992), 'In protestant orthodoxy the concept of virtue didn't play any prominent role' (1992, p 126). For his part, Meilaender (1984) made a strong case for Luther's emphasis on grace, which always makes virtue a secondary category. Whereas theological virtue ethics is considered to be completely at home in the Roman Catholic tradition, Protestant ethics is considered an ethics of divine law and of human obligations and responsibilities, at most with the exception of Friedrich Schleiermacher and the liberal theology of the 19th century. Hauerwas (1975), for instance, developed his initial research into an 'ethics of character' precisely as an *alternative* to a Protestant command ethics by returning to the classical virtue ethical representatives Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. They gave him the instruments that Protestant authors lacked, in his view, to develop an understanding of character formation and the cultivation of the virtues. Jennifer Herdt (2008) has argued that early Protestantism developed a 'hyper-Augustinian' view with an over-emphasis on divine agency, which transforms human agency into a stance of pure passivity – which resulted in the loss of the traditional Thomistic conception that grace can work through ordinary processes of habituation. According to these views, if virtue ethics were to be developed along Protestant theological lines, a profound *revision* of core concepts would be needed. In itself, the Protestant tradition therefore does not seem to offer much that could contribute to developing a virtue ethics.

Even more severe is the criticism that the Reformation has been a major factor in the final abandonment of virtue ethics, paving the way for a modern deontological ethics and consequentialism as its counterpart. According to this view, the characteristically Protestant account of the Ten Commandments as the ordering of the moral life encouraged an emphasis on principles, rules, obligations, duties and prescriptions. MacIntyre (1984) famously argued that the Reformation inaugurated a process that led to the breakdown of what he called 'the teleological view of human nature' (1984, p 54), a perception that formed the underlying framework of virtue ethics and its eudaimonistic conception of the good life in both antiquity and Christianity. In line with MacIntyre, Brad Gregory (2012) has argued more recently that the Protestant

rejection of the authority of the Roman Church and the resort to Scripture as the only source created an open-ended range of rival truth claims about the biblical message. This led to 'bitter disagreements among early modern Christians about the objective morality of the good' (2012, p 188).

According to these influential interpretations, the Reformation inaugurated a decline of virtue ethics and its teleology by breaking with the view that human nature as an image of God (*imago Dei*) has access to the good and can habituate the virtues, devaluing ancient pagan virtue ethics and over-emphasising divine grace.

Unfortunately, various Protestant theologians and philosophers consciously or unconsciously contributed to this narrative in their criticism of the concept of virtue. Neo-Calvinists and dialectical theologians, for instance, rejected the anthropological scope of 19th-century liberal theology, including the concept of 'Christian and civic virtues', and instead regarded the Reformation's doctrine of justification not just as prior to but also as opposed to the concept of virtue. In particular, the implied element of the selfishness of virtue as it focused on human perfection and its capacity for meritorious action was criticised, as was the anthropological presupposition of a relatively autonomous existence independent of God (Herms, 1992).

500 years after the Reformation started in the Low Countries and continued even after the first Protestant martyrs died for their faith in Antwerp in 1523, the question I would like to ask is this: Did the Reformation indeed inaugurate a break with the moral tradition in which a shared understanding of the good and the good and virtuous life played a crucial role? In this contribution,[1] I do not develop counter-arguments against all the criticisms mentioned; instead, I show that the post-Reformation theology of the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries, including that of a number of Reformed theologians working at universities in the Low Countries, has not abandoned virtue ethics at all. On the contrary, virtue ethics formed one of the crucial elements of Protestant ethics. This suggests that the break of the Reformation was not at the level of a shared moral framework but primarily at the level of understanding the gospel of grace and what this means for the Christian moral life as understood within this moral framework. Secondly, I argue that the Protestant theological tradition has particular contributions to offer to a viable contemporary virtue ethics. I will show in particular how

1 What follows is partly based on my monograph: Vos, 2020, especially chapters 4 and 7.

the insistence on human sinfulness and grace in Protestant views of the moral life results in an articulation of moral growth in which moral excellence is possible, even though imperfection is still part of one's character.

Protestant ethics in continuity with tradition

Although the theology of the Reformation is significantly distinct from and even opposed to late medieval Aristotelianism, this theology still reveals the basic characteristics of virtue ethics, that is, understanding morality in terms of an ethics of the good life. It also entails considering moral qualities that are generally viewed as virtues that are necessary for living the good life and somehow considering human nature as having been created and being in need of redemption as a source of moral knowledge. In fact, there was much more continuity between the teleologically structured Christian medieval view of life and Protestant views of natural law, virtues and the good than is suggested in the dominant interpretation. New historical–theological research indicates not only that Aquinas played a significant role in Protestant theology (Svensson & Van Drunen, 2018), but also that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, as the source book of virtue ethics *par excellence*, still offered a crucial ethical framework in post-Reformation Reformed scholastic theology (Sinnema, 1993; Svensson, 2019; Vos, 2020). Of course, this does not mean that no changes took place in the understanding of the good and the virtues, in particular in the understanding of law and grace. Yet the Reformers, and especially the post-Reformation theologians, developed their ethics in relative continuity with the multifaceted tradition of medieval virtue ethics, either in an Aristotelian shape or in a Scotist account, or even in a more Augustinian way. The tradition of Reformed orthodox theology has often been explored, but until now scholarly attention has been devoted almost exclusively to doctrine. As Luca Baschera (2013) observes in his overview, Reformed ethics in the era of Reformed orthodoxy is almost completely untravelled terrain.

I provide a brief overview of this field, ordered from three kinds of writing on ethics that can be traced in Protestant works during this era: commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethica Nicomachea,* philosophical writings on ethics, and ethics treated as part of larger dogmatic works.

Protestant commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethica Nicomachea*

First, historical–theological research has demonstrated that the Reformation did not lead to the abandonment of Aristotelian ethics. This becomes immediately clear from the fact that Aristotle's *Ethica Nicomachea* continued to function as the main ethical textbook in the curricula of Lutheran and Reformed academies and universities. Although the dominant Aristotelian framework of sciences gradually came to be contested in the modern era, this did not affect the status of the Aristotelian model in both the Catholic and Lutheran and the Reformed universities and academies of the 16th and 17th centuries. Following the classical tripartite division of the *artes* into physics, logics and ethics, courses in these fields generally followed an Aristotelian model, including the widespread practice of commenting on Aristotelian texts. As Richard Muller (2001) indicated, the Renaissance brought about not the removal of Aristotle but a demand that better (Greek) texts should be used (in new editions of the *Ethica Nicomachea* Protestant theologians regularly cooperated with humanists). Furthermore, the practice that grew out of the medieval tradition of commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics* continued not only during the Renaissance but also in these Protestant universities and academies. Manfred Svensson (2019) lists no fewer than 46 Lutheran and Reformed commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics* between 1529 and 1682! No generation of Protestant theologians passes without a new set of commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics* emerging. In short, the exposition of this work continued to form the backbone of moral education.

This widespread practice of commenting on Aristotle's ethics is contrary to the impression one gains from the position we find in the early views of the Reformers – Luther in particular – which may explain the influential view that Protestantism does not entail much virtue ethics. Whereas Luther had lectured four times a week on Aristotle's *Ethics* in his first years at Wittenberg before the Reformation, after 1517 he advised the university to discard it completely, together with Aristotle's other works. According to Luther (1966, p 201), Aristotle's

> book on ethics is the worst of all books. It flatly opposes divine grace and all Christian virtues, and yet it is considered one of his best works. Away with such books! Keep them away from Christians.

Luther's renunciation of Aristotle and his proposed complete revision of the curriculum that follows from it is often regarded as something that actually took place, but this was not the case: Aristotelianism continued to dominate the *artes* programme. And although Aristotle's *Ethics* disappeared from the curriculum for several years, Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560), who had the task of teaching ethics in Wittenberg, started to lecture on it again. The textbooks he developed on ethics and other disciplines were in fact compendia of Aristotle's works. Melanchthon (1850) acknowledged the gap between the theology of Christ and Aristotelianism. However, based on the distinction between law and gospel, it was possible to see philosophy, including ethics, as 'part of the divine law that is about civil morality' (1850, pp 277-278). Melanchthon lectured at least eight times on Aristotle's *Ethica Nicomachea*, which culminated in his commentary, *In ethica Aristotelis commentaries*, published in 1529 and extended as *In primum, secundum, tertium, et quintum ethicorum commentarii* in 1532. This work, since republished in numerous editions, had a great influence on theologians from new generations. In sum, Melanchthon believed that Protestant education in ethics should be grounded in the study of Aristotelian virtue ethics. And since the use of Aristotle was properly based on the distinction between law and gospel, Luther could not have had anything against it.

Theologians in Lutheran and Reformed universities and academies followed Melanchthon in treating ethics as a philosophical discipline, based on a reading of Aristotle's ethics and very often resulting in a published commentary. To give but one example: Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562), a former Augustinian monk educated as an Aristotelian scholar at the University of Padua and an important Reformed theologian, also delivered a series of lectures on Aristotle's *Ethics* from 1554 to 1556 at the academy of Strasbourg. His extended commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics* remained unfinished, but was posthumously published in 1563 as *In primum, secundum, et initium tertii libri ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum commentarius*.

Distinguishing true philosophy such as Aristotle's from corrupt philosophy such as that of the Epicurians, Vermigli (2006, p 13) stated:

> Since true philosophy derives from the knowledge of created things, and from these propositions reaches many conclusions about justice and righteousness that God implanted naturally in human minds, it cannot therefore rightly be criticized: it is the work of God.

He acknowledged, on the one hand, the human being's natural ability to understand the good and, on the other, that this ability is a divine gift. God 'endowed our minds with light and planted the seeds from which the principles of all knowledge arose' (2006, p 7). Yet natural knowledge needs to be distinguished from revelation. Grace relates to nature just as restoration does to creation:

> The goal of philosophy is that we reach that beatitude or happiness that can be acquired in this life by human powers, while the goal of Christian devotion is that the image in which we are created in righteousness and holiness of truth be renewed in us (Vermigli, 2006, p 14).

In sum, Protestant universities and academies in the 16th and 17th centuries taught ethics in the faculty of the arts as a philosophical discipline, taking Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as the most important textbook and ethical framework, and correcting it by citing references from Scripture where needed. This practice stands in great continuity with a broadly conceived Aristotelian tradition of virtue ethics.

Works in (philosophical) ethics

Along with these commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics*, Protestant theologians gradually developed their own (philosophical) ethics. In 1577, Lambert Daneau (1530-1595), working with Theodore Beza at the Geneva academy, published the first independent Reformed ethics, entitled *Ethices christianae libri tres*. His *Ethices* was part of a larger project in which he wanted to found all philosophical disciplines on Scripture rather than on classical works. At first sight, Daneau's approach of developing ethics solely from Scripture as the source of all knowledge is opposed to the trend of early Reformed ethics. Yet it is important to note, as Sinnema (1993) observed, that Daneau's ethics, although based on Scripture, is still to be regarded as a *philosophical* rather than as a theological discipline. In his approach to the sciences, Daneau followed the classical tripartite order of philosophical disciplines and published a *Physics,* a *Politics* and an *Ethics.* As he stated: 'In the science of ethics, if we wish to think truly about the principles of our actions, we ought to philosophize from the Word of God' (quotation from Sinnema,

1993, p 22). In Book 1 of his *Ethics* he offers an anthropological basis, with a clear influence of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which he frequently cites, but primarily based on the Word of God. In Book 2 he treats the precepts of human moral action based on the Decalogue and in Book 3 he deals with the virtues and vices that correspond to the precepts of the Decalogue. Daneau's Christian ethics was primarily based on Scripture:

> The precepts of this so wholesome instruction cannot be drawn better or more safely or, I also add, more blessedly than from the Word of God himself, and especially from the part of it that is commonly called the law of God or the Decalogue (quoted in Sinnema, 1993, p 24).

However, this is not at all in contrast to virtue ethics, since the final part of his works is devoted entirely to the virtues. Daneau shared with his contemporaries the view that the human being is created in the image of God and that remnants of the *imago Dei* have survived in the rational soul after the Fall. A general moral knowledge of the original righteousness, which was grafted in Adam's mind, has survived in fallen man, and this enables us to discern between good and evil and to understand certain moral precepts. A natural disposition such as *synteresis* – understood as the disposition of the human mind by which we apprehend the basic principles of behaviour – is acknowledged, but at the same time it needs to be 'reformed' since it has been corrupted by the Fall. Therefore, divine law is the final norm for moral action. The Decalogue is identified as the natural law: 'This law of God is called natural, because before it became written down in human laws, it flourished in human minds' (quoted in Sinnema, 1993, p 30).

More in line with Melanchthon, Bartholomaeus Keckermann (1572-1609) treated ethics as a philosophical discipline in its own right in his *Systema ethicae,* from 1607. This book was the product of his lectures on ethics at the Gymnasium of Danzig. His ethics is largely Aristotelian in nature, but it does not consist of a commentary on the ten books of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Instead, Keckermann systematises the content of Aristotle's work according to a logically determined method in his own system. As Sinnema (1993) points out, he regarded himself as being the first to produce such a *systema ethicae*.

Another example of a Reformed philosophical ethics is Franco Burgersdijk's *Idea philosophiae moralis*, published in 1623; Burgersdijk worked as a professor at the University of Leiden.

Ethics as integral part of dogmatics

A different presentation can be found in those Reformed authors who treat ethics within major dogmatic works, not simply in a single chapter among other *loci* on the Ten Commandments (*de lege*) but in a much more extensive way, namely, as a second part following the dogmatic first part of their work. In this approach ethics is explicitly treated as a *theological discipline* – theology being considered a practical rather than a speculative discipline. Peter Ramus (1515-1572) was the first to set the standard for this approach by defining theology as the doctrine of living well and dividing his *Commentariorum de religione christiana* into two sections: one on faith and a second on the actions originating from faith. But this still did not result in a fully fledged part on ethics. A good example of a more comprehensive work is that by the German theologian, Amandus Polanus (1561-1610), who published his *Syntagma theologiae christianae* in 1609. This work consists of seven volumes on doctrine (the things to be believed, *credenda*) and three volumes on ethics (the things to do, *agenda*). As Bachera (2013) demonstrated, Polanus treated ethics, including moral virtue, not from the perspective of the natural human being but exclusively as pertaining to the regenerate believer.

Approaching ethics as a theological discipline within major dogmatic works was especially common in the era of high Reformed scholasticism of the 17th century, a period in which all-encompassing theological systems were developed. Other examples of this approach are Peter van Maastricht's (1630-1706) *Theoretico-practica theologia*, published between 1682 and 1687 in the Netherlands, and William Ames' (1576-1633), *Medulla theologiae,* of 1627. In this latter work, this English Reformed theologian, who worked as a professor in Franeker, treated ethics as the second part of one systematic–theological book after having dealt with faith. Although Ames rejected the direct use of Aristotle's ethics in theology, this does not mean that he did not use Aristotelian and Thomistic categories; he did so, for instance, in his book, *De conscientia, et eius iure vel casibus* of 1630.

According to Ames (1639 [1630]), human conscience – literally understood as *conscientia* – 'to know together with' – is the instrument by which natural law is known by human beings. In line with medieval scholastics, Ames stated that by means of God's gift of conscience the human being knows 'together with God' (1639 [1630], p 4) the divine judgements upon human actions. Therefore, conscience or *synteresis* is the natural disposition of the human mind by which it apprehends the general principles of natural law. Ames distinguished between the *apprehension* of natural morality as a universal human intellectual trait and the actual *application* of that knowledge to the evaluation of specific actions. Although natural conscience is capable of the apprehension of moral principles in general form, the application of those principles is corrupted at a variety of levels by sin. This explains why in practice *synteresis* can be hindered by sin from acting. Therefore, Ames regularly points to the clarity of biblical moral instruction.

Furthermore, in his *Medulla theologiae* Ames construes a system of virtues ordered from the two tables of the Decalogue and summarised by Christ in the double love commandment. The second table of the Decalogue is interpreted according to the virtues of justice and charity. Therefore, the language of command, obligation and obedience is harmoniously related to that of virtue, disposition and even perfection. As in the Thomist tradition, Ames (1968) defined virtue as 'a condition or habit by which the will is inclined to do well', and stated that it is called a *habitus*

> because it is in general a state of mind of various degrees of perfection. It is called a habit not only because one possesses it but also because it makes the subject behave in a certain manner, that is, it moves the faculty, which otherwise would not be moved, toward good (1968, p 224).

Virtues and flaws: a Protestant contribution to virtue ethics

Our brief investigation indicates that the ethics of Reformed scholasticism developed in great continuity with medieval scholasticism, its morality of the good and the virtues that make the good life possible. Aristotelian ethics continued to be the backbone of ethical education in Protestant universities and academies throughout the 16th century and remained an important point of reference in the Protestant scholastic works on ethics in the 17th

century. At the same time, the emphasis on biblical revelation as the main source and criterion is distinctive in these Protestant accounts, but this does not result in the general abandonment of Aristotelian virtue ethics.

Now the question that remains is this: What specific contributions can Protestant theology and ethics offer to contemporary virtue ethics? Although several relevant aspects could be explored here – for instance, the impact of what Charles Taylor (1989, p 211) called 'the affirmation of ordinary life' on the perception of virtue and the role of virtuous exemplars or the specific connection between virtue and law, which may be a bridge between premodern virtue ethics and modern deontological ethics – I limit myself to one challenging theme: the issue of *exemplary virtuous people showing moral flaws* or, more generally, the experience that most people often display of *mixed character traits*.

In the life of exemplary persons, great virtues regularly appear to exist alongside deep-seated vices. Think, for instance, of Martin Luther King, who was exemplary in his commitment to justice and civil friendship, his forgiveness of his enemies, his prudence in his work for social justice, his self-restraint, his perseverance, and his courage to the point of martyrdom. But he nevertheless saw himself, and was seen by others, as a person whose character was flawed in important ways. This is about not some incidental acts but patterns of activities that should be regarded as vices, such as repeated extramarital intercourse and the mistreatment of women, which apparently coexisted with his exemplary virtues. This case of what Jean Porter (1995) calls 'the flawed saint' seems to be in contradiction to the classical thesis of the unity of the virtues, which holds that anyone who possesses one of the cardinal virtues in the full sense necessarily possesses all of them. In Porter's analysis it becomes clear that neither classical virtue ethics nor Aquinas's understanding of the thesis can fully match up to this problem.

In my view, Augustine offers a convincing alternative in his radical understanding of the nature of sin and grace, which is followed in Protestant accounts of virtue ethics. Augustine's account of 'the unity of the virtues' can do justice to the persistence of flaws and vices in the virtuous life. Augustine offers an illuminating argument in his letter 167 – a letter to Jerome in the year 415 – consulting this biblical translator and exegete on the statement made in James 2:10: whoever keeps the whole law but offends in one point becomes guilty of all. Augustine points to the problem of the unity thesis, that is, that it makes moral formation and conversion from vice

to virtue difficult. If we are to have either all the virtues or none of them, the consequence will be that we must acquire all the virtues at once. In contrast to this interpretation, Augustine provides the defence that it is possible to grow into virtue by advancing from darkness into light and, through habituation, gradually proceeding from vice to virtue. This view, according to which it is assumed that a person can possess a virtue and a vice at the same time, enables Augustine to avoid the unacceptable consequences of the thesis of the unity of the virtues without relinquishing their interconnection altogether. By allowing the coexistence of contrary dispositions, virtue and vice, it is possible to accept that the virtues all remain bound together but also that this does not exclude the presence of sins and vices in the individual human being. As Langan (1979) demonstrates, Augustine distinguishes the interconnection thesis from the identification thesis, that is, that the virtues are various expressions of one quality: love. The moral life of the Christian is understood as the progressive development of love, which is the one quality that underlies the activity of all the virtues and which no one can possess fully and perfectly in this life. Augustine (2004, pp 101-102) summarises his argument in this way:

> Virtue is the love by which one loves what should be loved. This is greater in some, less in others, and not at all in still others, but it is not so perfect in anyone that it cannot be increased in him as long as he lives. But as long as it can be increased, then of course that which is less than it ought to be comes from a vice. Because of that vice *there is not a righteous person on earth who will do good and not sin* (Eccl 7:21). Because of that vice *no living being will be righteous in the sight of God* (Ps 143:2).

From this Augustinian perspective, it is possible to explain the phenomenon of the flawed saint in whom love is more present than in most of us but who is still not perfect. In some respect it may even be (almost) absent, as the example of King exemplifies; yet it is still possible for it to grow until God completes it in the life to come. As Augustine (2004, p 101) avers:

> We can correctly say, 'Greater love is found in this person than in that one', and 'Some love is found in this person and none in that,' . . . and we can say of a single person that he has greater chastity than patience and greater chastity today than yesterday if he is making progress, and that as yet he has no continence, but does have no small amount of mercy.

Protestant scholastics understand gradual habituation and the persistence of moral flaws in a similar way. Vermigli (2006, p 222), for instance, states that 'men cannot be blessed by themselves alone since their nature was flawed from the beginning'. On the other hand, he wrote that

> when we have been restored and reborn, however, we cooperate with the grace and spirit of God and acquire the habits of the virtues by which we are repaired and made better every day. For this reason Paul urged the Philippians [2:12] to work out their own salvation (2006, p 337).

To give another example, Ames (1968) affirms the thesis of the unity of the virtues, understanding the cardinal virtues to be 'four conditions necessarily required in the disposition that deserves the name of virtue' (1968, p 228). Of these four conditions, justice 'orders and constitutes virtue', prudence 'directs it and frees it from error', fortitude 'strengthens it against misfortune', and temperance 'makes it pure and defends it against all allurements' (1968, pp 229-230). According to Ames (1968, p 231), there can be no such thing as degree *in virtue itself*:

> There is no virtue which at least in application does not extend itself to all things contained within the compass of its object. He is not temperate who is moderate in one lust but indulges in others.

However, he adds (1968, p 231),

> in respect of the *subject* a particular virtue may be stronger in one person than in another, either because of apter natural disposition, or more frequent use, or more perfect judgement of reason, or finally because of a greater gift of God.

Moreover, the virtues can increase by daily use and exercise: 'To the extent that the acts of virtue, or contrary vices, are more intent, more frequent, and more continual, they bring about either an increase or diminution of virtue' (1968, p 231). In stating it thus, like Vermigli, Ames adopts an Augustinian view according to which we can grow in virtue while at the same time being flawed in various ways.

In conclusion, this Augustinian–Protestant account may have a liberating, merciful effect, whereas, in contrast, the virtue ethical ideal can

have an unmerciful aspect to it due to the constant pressure arising from the interpretation that human beings *have to* be as virtuous as possible, while in practice it is impossible to be so perfect. Neither classical nor Thomistic and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is able to deal well with shortcomings in the virtuous person. In a Protestant view, in contrast, it can be acknowledged that the moral life of most people exhibits virtues alongside moral flaws or even deep-seated vices without the pursuit of a virtuous life being abandoned. This does not discourage us by our believing that we are completely abandoned to our own failures. Instead, we are lifted up time and again by divine grace in continuous renewal, which puts us in the wide space of divine goodness that is present for us despite our failures and flaws. This is simultaneously both realistic and encouraging. In this way, the radical nature of the divine grace and human failure of the Reformation can play a promising role in a viable contemporary virtue ethics.

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CHAPTER 6

Impact of the Reformation on Protestant–Jewish dialogue in Germany

Drs Jan Christian Pinsch

Abstract

Martin Luther's first 'Judenschrift' of 1523 is the starting point with which to focus on the relationship of the Churches of the Reformation to Judaism. The article raises the question of how Protestantism in Germany, given the centuries-long experience of anti-Jewish hostility that reached its negative peak in the Shoah, shapes this dialogue in line with the teachings of the Reformation today.

History of Christian hostility towards the Jews

From the beginning, Christians were separated from Judaism, because with a faith in Jesus Christ as the crucified and risen Son of God, Christianity could not exist within Judaism. The situation changed, however, when a small sect developed into the State Church of the Roman Empire in the 4th century. Since then, Christianity has been in a superior position. Wilhelm Schwendemann expresses the situation in the Middle Ages as follows: 'The fear of Jewish people and the practice of Jewish religion was a central motive of medieval hostility to Jews'[1] (Schwendemann 2017, p 238). The Jews, a numerical minority in society, were attributed with magical powers because a basic understanding of Jewish religiosity was lacking and was also considered superfluous by the Christian majority. And yet the aversion

1 If a German-language source is given, the quotation is a translation by the author.

towards the Jews could also be justified theologically: the idea had spread that Jews were endowed with an indefinable guilt for the death of Jesus. Schwendemann continues that the First Crusade of 1096, which triggered a mass murder of the Jewish population, was decisive in bringing about a change that led to stronger hostility towards the Jews (cf Schwendemann 2017, p 238). Although Jews and Christians co-existed peacefully, during the Crusades often no distinction was made between Muslims and Jews in the fight against the so-called non-believers.

From the 12th century onwards, the idea that the Jews were to blame for the death of Jesus came to the fore: the Jews were identified with Judas, who had sold Jesus Christ for 30 pieces of silver. Judas personified and illustrated the 'betrayal' of the Jews. Trond Berg Eriksen explains that

> although only a few church representatives were actively involved in the massacres, their propaganda called for the rejection of the Jewish religion and tirelessly pointed to the alleged historical and religious guilt of the Jews' (Eriksen/Harket/Lorenz, 2019, p 46).

The charges that were previously completely unknown suddenly appeared in several places at the same time. Another popular accusation was that the Jews were guilty of violating the Host. Schwendemann writes:

> Especially in the late Middle Ages, the persecution and destruction of entire communities was motivated by the report about alleged desecration of hosts. In addition, the refutation of the apparent disbelief of the Jewish population strengthened their own faith in the presence of Christ in the bread and wine, and cemented their inherently fragile Christian identity vis-à-vis biblical Judaism (Schwendemann, 2017, pp 238-239).

This is interesting because it is what we call *religious othering* today: group membership is defined by the exclusion of others, and as a result of a moral claim to exclusive representation, those whose membership is denied are disqualified and excluded.

The accusation of the desecration of the Host was closely connected to the characterisation of the Jews as Christ killers and was therefore a direct recourse to the accusation of ritual murder. Allegedly, the Jews despised the body of Christ – the Host. In some cases, there were even accusations that Jews practised the ritual murders of Christian children on Pesach. Eriksen

views the charge of the murder of Christian boys as a repetition of a New Testament event: the murder of children in Bethlehem. These accusations were new motives for anti-Jewish propaganda that began in 1146, around the time of the Second Crusade. Eriksen writes:

> The new quality of these accusations in 1146 was that Jews were accused not only of having committed such atrocities a long time ago – everyone 'knew' this – but that they were still committing the same atrocities. Thus, not only were they to blame for something that had happened at the beginning of the reckoning, they were also attributed a being that had not changed since the murder of the innocent boys in Bethlehem and the murder of Christ in Jerusalem. This was the ideological prerequisite for the attacks in the 12th century (Eriksen, Harket & Lorenz, 2019, pp 44-45).

Among the well-known medieval stereotypes of demarcation is the cliché of the Jewish lender, combined with the still-valid prejudice of the special affinity of Jews to money. The line of reasoning here also goes back to the alleged traitor, Judas, who had received 30 pieces of silver as a reward for the 'betrayal'. Jews who took up this profession in the absence of most alternatives were exposed to a disgraceful usury – the so-called '*Judenzins*'.

In the middle of the 14th century, the plague (also called 'Pestilence' and 'Black Death') afflicted large parts of Europe. In 1347 it started in Turkey, Greece and southern Italy and then spread to Spain, France, Switzerland and southern Germany, before spreading further into northern Germany and eastern Europe in 1349. Karl Heinz Burmeister speaks of an extraordinary scale – about 25 million victims – and a disease that 'we didn't know, for which we didn't know any help' (Burmeister, 1999). By 1348, there were the first plague deaths in Spain and France. People started looking for culprits and the first attacks against Jews began. Burmeister explains:

> It was thought to be possible to see that the Jews were far less likely to be infected by the plague than the Christians. So, the Jews seemed to be on their guard and to know exactly where the risks of infection lurked. And the simplest solution was to accuse them of having poisoned the wells (Burmeister, 1999).

There was an obvious reason for this, however: hygiene and medicine had a much higher value among the Jews than among the Christians. Since there were numerous doctors among Jews, it was easy to find any poisons

during house searches. It was said the poison was from Jerusalem and was harmless to Jews but deadly to Christians. Confessions were enforced by torture, starting in Switzerland between 15 September and 18 October 1348 (cf Burmeister, 1999).

Martin Luther's writings '*That Jesus Christ was born a Jew*' (1523) and 'On the Jews and their lies' (1543)

Some 200 years after the plague, Martin Luther responded to these accusations:

> Such a desperate, raging, poisoned thing is about these Jews, as these 1400 years have been and still are our plague, pestilence and all misfortune. Summa, we've got real devils on them. That's all it is. There is no human heart against us ... This is what they learn from their rabbis in the devil's nests of their schools (Luther, WA 53, pp 371-372).

Looking at the historical context of Luther's anti-Jewish writings, Helene Albers explains:

> By 1500 the Christian hatred of the Jews was greater than ever before, for the art of printing enabled the rapid spread of anti-Jewish incitement, and so the Jews were once again expelled ... In 1516 and 1517, there were even attempts to expel them from the whole empire. Previously, in 1510, 36 Jews had been burned in Berlin for alleged desecration of hosts (Albers, 2017, p 321).

In the course of the 15th century, almost all major cities and many of the largest territories expelled Jews. At the beginning of the 16th century, the anti-Jewish climate was particularly strong. Regarding Martin Luther and the Jews, two writings are most important: '*That Jesus Christ was born a Jew*' of 1523 and 'On the Jews and their lies' of 1543. Schwendemann writes about Luther's early Jewish writing, '*That Jesus Christ was born a Jew*', that it was new to the Reformation to treat Jewish people in a humane and friendly manner (cf Schwendemann, 2017, p 244). However, this can be justified by the goals of the reformers in Wittenberg. Schwendemann explains that Luther and the other reformers in Wittenberg assumed that the rediscovery of the liberating

message of the Bible – the doctrine of justification and Christian freedom – would become so attractive to the Jewish population that there would be an immense conversion of Jews to Protestantism. This was Luther's goal, and so he demanded that the Jewish people be treated appropriately humanely and kindly (cf Schwendemann, 2017, p 244).

This excerpt makes Luther's intention quite clear:

> It is hard at first, let them suck milk first and first recognize this man Jesus as the right Messiah. Then they should drink wine and learn that he is a true God. ... Therefore my request and counsel would be that they be dealt with cleanly, and that they be instructed from the Scriptures, and that some of them may come near. But if we drive them only by force, so that they are immediately taken to be dogs, what good shall We do for them? ... If one wants to help them, one must not practice the law of the Pope but of Christian love on them and accept them kindly. … I'll leave it here this time until I see how I've worked (Luther, WA 11, p 336).

Andreas Pangritz speaks of a 'gentle variant of Christian mission to the Jews', but also emphasises that in the context of Luther's further theological development, his last sentence can also be understood as a threat (Pangritz, 2014, p 5). However, it happened that the expected conversion of large parts of the Jewish population to Christianity did not take place; but Luther did not lose sight of this goal for a long time and therefore opened up something of a kind of social participation for the Jewish population. At first he renounced the usual calumnies such as Host desecration, ritual murder or well poisoning, and he even opposed them. The Jewish religion was the wrong choice for Luther from the very beginning. Albers writes:

> Luther, and with him many Christian theologians in the 16th century, including Erasmus of Rotterdam, were convinced that Judaism was a false doctrine rendered superfluous by Christianity. After all, Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah whom the 'stubborn' Jews persistently refused to acknowledge (Albers, 2017, p 321).

For Luther, Jews who continued to refuse conversion were dangerous blasphemers. Owing to the reception of the anti-Jewish writing, '*Der gantz Jüdisch Glaub*', by Antonius Margaritha, the final turnaround happened

in 1530. Rumours about Jews who supposedly converted Christians finally brought about his reversal.

The central excerpt of 'On the Jews and their lies' (1543) comprises seven instructions to the authorities on how to deal with the 'damned people of the Jews':

> First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools ... This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians ... Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed ... Third, I advise that all their prayer books and Talmudic writings, in which such idolatry, lies, cursing, and blasphemy are taught, be taken from them ... Fourth, I advise that their rabbis be forbidden to teach henceforth on pain of loss of life and limb. ... Fifth, I advise that safe-conduct on the highways be abolished completely for the Jews. For they have no business in the countryside ... Sixth, I advise that usury be prohibited to them, and that all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them ... Seventh, I recommend putting a flail, an axe, a hoe, a spade, a distaff, or a spindle into the hands of young, strong Jews and Jewesses and letting them earn their bread in the sweat of their brow sense (Luther, WA 53, pp 522-523).

The transitions from Luther's early to his late writings about the Jews are illustrated in the book *Basic knowledge of Judaism* by Andreas Nachama, Walter Homolka and Hartmut Bomhoff:

> Luther's attitude, however, changed radically when he realized that the new Lutheran form of Christian preaching did not in any way lead the Jews to convert to Christianity. This conversion, however, would have been a welcome proof of the correctness of Lutheran theology in comparison with the traditional Roman doctrine. In 1543, out of anger at the alleged evil will of the Jews, the Reformer formulated in his pamphlet 'On the Jews and their lies', that the fundamental error of the Jews was their belief that their election already justified them before God (Nachama, Homolka, & Bomhoff, 2018, pp 594-595).

Albers sums it up as follows:

> Many anti-Jewish stereotypes of that time can be found here: Jews are devils in the flesh, blasphemers, murderers, usurers; their rabbis seduced Christians to turn away from the true faith. Luther asked what Christendom should do with this 'rejected, vaporised nation of the Jews?' He recommended to the authorities seven drastic measures of repression, which amounted to the 'total

> religious and social impoverishment' of the Jewish minority: their synagogues and schools should be set on fire, their homes destroyed, they should be 'put under a roof or stall' like the 'Gypsies'. He wanted to forbid them to practice their religion and profession, to abolish their free passage, instead expropriate them and force them to hard labour (Albers, 2017, p 317).

Nazis and Luther

'First, to set fire to their synagogues or schools.' Almost 400 years later, synagogues burned in Germany. The *Reichspogromnacht* marked a temporary climax in the State-controlled discrimination and violence of the Nazis against the Jewish population, leading to their open persecution, which later led to the Shoah. The majority of the German population not only looked away, but also took an active part in it. The Protestant Bishop of Thuringia, Martin Sasse, of the German Christians (*Deutsche Christen*) declared:

> On November 10, 1938, Luther's birthday, synagogues burn in Germany. ... At this hour we must hear the voice of the man who, as the German Prophet in the 16th century, began as a friend of the Jews, who, driven by his conscience, driven by experience and reality, became the greatest anti-Semite of his time, the warner of his people against the Jews (Sasse, 1938, p 2).

On 6 May 1939, the 'Institute for Research and Elimination of Jewish Influence on German Church Life', also known as the 'De-Judaisation Institute' (*Entjudungsinstitut*), was founded. Repeatedly, the State's fight against the Jews was also 'legitimised' theologically with references to Luther. In the film, *The eternal Jew* (*Der ewige Jude*), the Jews were compared to rats, the animals that often brought the plague in the Middle Ages.

Stephanie Lerke and Jan Christian Pinsch point out:

> Even if no direct line can be drawn from the anti-Judaism of the Middle Ages to the racial anti-Semitism of National Socialism, Luther's hatred of Jews ... proved to be connectable for modern anti-Semitism. In the writings of the reformer, the National Socialists also found the supposed instructions for action for the *Reichspogromnacht* (Lerke & Pinsch, 2020).

The National Socialists' invocation of Luther repeatedly led to attempts to equate Luther and Adolf Hitler (eg by Siegfried Leffler, the founder of the

'De-Judaisation Institute'). It must therefore be clearly emphasised that this is an appropriation and misuse of Luther, despite all the connecting factors. But to absolve Luther entirely of anti-Semitism is also problematic in view of the drastic consequences of his demands for the life and limb of Jews. Pangritz writes that it has

> become customary among Christian theologians to speak of 'anti-Judaism' rather than 'anti-Semitism' when referring to religiously motivated hostility toward Jews. ... The suspicion arises, however, that the neat distinction between racial anti-Semitism and religiously motivated anti-Judaism is intended to trivialize the latter. As if it made a difference for the persecuted out of which motives the perpetrators act. And ... : Luther occasionally did indeed call for the 'eliminatory' act. Therefore, I prefer to speak of 'anti-Semitism' also in Luther's case, but I remain aware of the fact that historically (and also in Luther's biography) there were and are different varieties of anti-Semitism (Pangritz, 2001, p 3).

Current research on anti-Semitism, which usually lists anti-Judaism as the first manifestation of anti-Semitism (cf Bernstein, 2020, pp 40-41), confirms the assumption that a clear distinction between anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism is an artificial separation.

First proclamations of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* after 1945

Christoph Strohm writes that the day of liberation on 8 May 1945 was not perceived by many Germans at first, neither by most Christians nor by the population as a whole (cf Strohm, 2019, pp 111-112). In addition, there were the major problems that people had to face in the immediate post-war period: fundamental questions of survival in the face of widespread destruction, displacement and the loss of their next of kin were at the forefront. According to Strohm, the perception of being a victim came to the fore, so that it was difficult to gain agreement among Christians to confess guilt in the face of one's own failure during the Nazi era. For many people it was initially about their own survival; the question of guilt was not decisive for them, and for many the 'Jewish question' had also disappeared with the Jews. In October 1945, however, a clear declaration of guilt was called for. The

World Council of Churches visited Germany and showed its readiness for reconciliation. Prior to this, a 12-member Council of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (EKD) had been formed in August 1945 at a 'Church Leaders' Conference' (*Kirchenführerkonferenz*) held in Treysa, before the EKD was officially founded in 1948. Expectations were high for German Protestants to acknowledge their own complicity in Nazi crimes, but there was disagreement about this among Protestant Christians in Germany. Thus the document titled 'Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt' (*Stuttgarter Schulderklärung*) that Hans Christen Asmussen, Otto Dibelius and Martin Niemöller finally drafted represented a compromise. Its central statement is:

> We did fight for long years in the name of Jesus Christ against the mentality that found its awful expression in the National Socialist regime of violence; but we accuse ourselves for not standing to our beliefs more courageously, for not praying more faithfully, for not believing more joyously, and for not loving more ardently (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 1945).

From today's perspective, it is hard to understand why the 'Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt' provoked controversial reactions, including extreme opposition and rejection. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt accuses the declaration of not actually going far enough, because a Christian obligation to the Jews was left unmentioned, as was Hitler's name (cf Marquardt, 2003, pp 256-257). In fact, large sections of German Protestants never tired of trying to reconcile Christian beliefs and Nazi ideology. And yet, from today's perspective, the 'Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt' is still a groundbreaking document in the reorientation of the Protestant Church in Germany.

On 8 August 1947, the still existing Brothers' Council (*Bruderrat*) of the EKD, which had emerged from the Brothers' Council of the Confessing Church (*Bekennende Kirche*), published the 'Darmstadt statement on the political path of our people' (*Darmstädter Wort zum politischen Weg unseres Volkes*). Compared to the Stuttgart Declaration of Guilt, some new approaches become clear. With its critical examination of Protestant nationalism, the assertion of German superiority over all other peoples and Lutheran understanding of authority, the document is much more politically concrete; but the mention of the Church's guilt towards the Jews is still missing.

A year later, the Brothers' Council of the EKD tried to fill this gap with the 'Message Concerning the Jewish Question' (*Wort zur Judenfrage*).

And, indeed, it states that the Church is 'prohibited from seeing the Jewish question as a racial or national problem'. But the rest of the explanation is highly problematic, especially from today's perspective. This is because, even if a concrete distancing from anti-Semitism takes place here for the first time, the theological substance continues to convey a traditional anti-Judaism: 'By crucifying the Messiah, Israel has rejected its election and destiny.' It is the old pattern of the rejection of Israel, based on the old charge of the alleged murder of Christ. The Lutheran doctrine of substitution, that the people of Israel excluded themselves from salvation because they rejected Christ as the Messiah, comes into play here – with all its devastating consequences. 'At the same time, the community is waiting for the erring children of Israel to take up the place that God has denied them,' it continues, adding that the Jew is the 'erring brother who is determined for Christ, whom she loves and calls on.' Here a call to mission to the Jews is expressed unchanged. Despite the experiences of the Holocaust, anti-Judaist thinking persists (cf Evangelische Akademie im Rheinland, 2019).

Changes in Protestant–Jewish relationship

The Holocaust represents a turning point, but it took another three decades before the relationship with Judaism was actually readjusted in the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*. It was the state synod of the *Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland* in 1978 that was the first to deal with the historical necessity of establishing a new relationship between the Church and the Jewish people. The Church did this for four reasons: first, the recognition of Christian joint responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust in addition to the ostracism, persecution and murder of the Jews in the Third Reich. The second reason is the new biblical insights into the lasting significance of Israel's salvation history (eg Romans 9-11), which have been gained in connection with the *Kirchenkampf*. Third, the recognition that the continued existence of the Jewish people, their return to the Promised Land and also the establishment of the State of Israel are signs of God's faithfulness to his people. And, finally, the willingness of Jews to meet, learn together and work together despite the Holocaust (Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland, 1980).

Two years later, the result was the synodal resolution 'On the renewal of the relationship between Christians and Jews' (*Zur Erneuerung des Verhältnisses*

von Christen und Juden). The declaration contains eight statements that were intended to lead to a reconsideration of the Church's relationship with Israel. It says, among other things:

> We confess with dismay that Christianity in Germany shares responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust. … We believe in the enduring election of the Jewish people as God's people and recognize that the Church has been included in God's covenant with his people through Jesus Christ. … We believe that Jews and Christians are each called to be witnesses of God before the world and before one another; that is why we are convinced that the Church cannot perceive its witness to the Jewish people as it does its mission to the world of nations (Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland, 1980).

All of this finally leads to this statement:

> For centuries the word 'new' in the interpretation of the Bible was directed against the Jewish people: the new covenant was understood as opposed to the old covenant, the new people of God as the replacement of the old people of God. This disregard for the permanent election of Israel and its condemnation to non-existence have repeatedly characterized Christian theology, church preaching and church action to this day. In doing so, we are also guilty of the physical annihilation of the Jewish people. … That is why we deny that the people of Israel have been rejected by God or have been overtaken by the church (Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland, 1980).

This was an important step, but only the declaration of a single national Church. Therefore, 20 years later, the memorandum 'Christian and Jews III' (*Kirchen und Juden III*) is groundbreaking in that it comes to an important conclusion:

- As Christians, we recognise the wrong way of our previous thinking and acting towards the Jews in view of the Shoah.
- As Christians, we face the consequences of such misconduct when we realise that the Shoah irrevocably means a deep turning point in the relationship between Christians and Jews.
- We allow ourselves to be on a new path of judgement and action because of the call to repentance of the Shoah.

And here follows what is probably the most important sentence of the entire document:

> Israel remains God's chosen people, although it has not accepted the belief in Jesus as its Messiah (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland, 2002, pp 166-167).

Even if we have already heard something similar in the synodal resolution of the *Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland*, this statement is significant both in its clarity and since it is now an official declaration of the entire *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*.

Burdensome legacy of the Reformation

The statue of Martin Luther in Wittenberg wore a yellow blindfold on 9 November 2015, the anniversary of the *Reichspogromnacht*, one day before Luther's birthday. Friedrich Kramer, then director of the Evangelical Academy of Saxony-Anhalt in Wittenberg and today provincial bishop of the *Evangelische Kirche in Mitteldeutschland*, had created it for him – as a demarcation and protest against Luther's hatred of the Jews. In the Middle Ages, many representations of the synagogue as the personification of Judaism were blindfolded, because the idea was that the Jews were blind to the message of the gospel. Two days later, the Synod of the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* distanced itself from the anti-Jewish statements of Luther and other reformers by publishing *Martin Luther and the Jews – a necessary reminder on the occasion of the Reformation anniversary*. The document summarises the historical insights of the EKD:

> The Reformation aimed to reform the church by the power of the gospel. This rarely gave rise to a new way of regarding the Jews. The Reformers operated within a tradition of anti-Judaic thought patterns, the roots of which reached back to the early church. … It is our responsibility to clarify how we deal with the anti-Judaic statements made during the Reformation period and the history of their impact and reception. We ask to what extent they fostered a generally anti-Judaic attitude in Protestant Churches and how this can be overcome today. Engaging with Martin Luther's attitude towards the Jews takes on exemplary significance in this process. … We recognise the part played by the Reformation tradition in the painful history of 'mismeeting' (from Martin

> Buber's '*Vergegnung*') between Christians and Jews. The far-reaching failure of Protestant Churches in Germany with regard to the Jewish people fills us with sorrow and shame. The horror at such historical and theological aberrations and the awareness of our share of guilt in the continued suffering of Jews give rise to a special responsibility to resist and oppose all forms of enmity and inhumanity towards Jews today (Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany, 2015).

Conclusion

Anti-Semitism is diverse and has a long history that stretches back to the beginnings of Christianity and gained importance during the Middle Ages. The Reformation period, especially the year 1523, played a central role in this. However, the claim that Luther, as he expresses himself in the writing 'That Jesus Christ was a born Jew', is still to be understood as a 'friend of the Jews', cannot be sustained. On the contrary, the teaching of the Reformation also had its share in it with the talk of the 'freedom of the Christian' (*Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*), which proclaimed God's justification only through 'his beloved Son Jesus Christ' and at the same time meant a rejection of works that were clearly Jewish in character. Luther initially spoke positively about Jewish people, but only because he wanted to convert them to Christianity. The Jewish religion was the wrong choice for Luther from the very beginning. When the conversion failed, he formulated open hatred of the Jews in his writing 'On the Jews and their lies' (1543). The Nazis also appropriated Luther and his writings and were able to fall back on existing anti-Semitic ideas. The EKD writes:

> It is not possible to draw simple continuous lines. Nevertheless, in the 19th and 20th century, Luther was a source for theological and ecclesial anti-Judaism, as well as for political anti-Semitism (Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany, 2015).

Until today, the issue of Martin Luther and anti-Semitism is a burden on the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*, which has taken a clear position in the face of the continuing problem of anti-Semitism.

Meanwhile, this remains a challenge: the number of anti-Semitic crimes in Germany is at a high level and, unlike the EKD, not all Protestant

representatives have distanced themselves from anti-Judaism and the mission to the Jews. In addition, the Protestant–Islamic relationship also still needs to take clarifying steps. Unlike the writings on the Jews, Luther's polemics against Muslims (eg 'On war against the Turk', 1529) have not yet been widely critiqued. A sensitisation and rapprochement, however, is promised by the 'Position paper on Christian-Islamic dialogue' (2018), in which the EKD writes that

> it regards dialogue between religions – thus also with Islam – as part of the open-ended learning curve of the Reformation. At the same time, this approach makes it clear that such a dialogue was not always present, possible or even desired during the now 500-year-old history of Protestantism. Dialogue between people of different faiths is essential for the peaceful and constructive shaping of life together in a pluralist society (Evangelical Church in Germany, 2018, p 3.

Luther believed that the destruction of Jewish synagogues was something to be done 'in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians'. He explained it as follows: 'But because they curse us, they curse our Lord also; if they curse our Lord, they curse God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth' (WA 53, p 539). And so Luther was actually convinced that it would please God if harm were done to his chosen people. The belief that the Jews had lost their destiny and that their election had passed over entirely to Christianity influenced the teachings of the Reformation and persisted in the following centuries. Today the Protestant Church knows better: the attacks against the Jews were also attacks against God, and the Christians did not take the *place* of Judaism, but instead took the *side* of Judaism.

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CHAPTER 7

500 years of Reformation; where do we go from here?

Prof Dr Johan Temmerman

Abstract

In this contribution, I draw up a balance of 500 years of Reformation. From this, I distil a number of valuable elements that have proved very fruitful for the development of Western culture. At the same time, I do not remain blind to the flaws and especially the destructive and implausible facets of the religious upheavals during the 16th century. These reflections allow me to probe the relevance of the Reformation for the future. Finally, I argue for the relativisation of confessions in favour of respect for human rights. The credibility of Church and traditions, whether Protestant or otherwise, depends on the extent to which human rights are accepted as a condition of belief.

Introduction

To survey the harvest of 500 years of Reformation, I would like to begin this contribution with a quotation from Martin Luther (1483-1546). In his famous *Tischreden,* Luther ventured into a parable in order to counter the rising tensions within the Reformation movements:

> Two goats bump into each other on a narrow plank on the water. They cannot go back and the plank is too narrow to pass each other. If they start bumping and pushing, chances are they will both fall into the water and drown. What do they do? Nature has instructed them that one goat lies down so that the other

> can walk over her. Thus they both remain unharmed. We humans too should let people walk over us more often instead of arguing, rebelling and going to war.[1]

Luther wants peace and in this parable he appeals to the 'instruction' of nature, on the one hand, and to human reasonableness, on the other. If human beings were less honour-seeking and self-centred, we would all be better off, because then peace would be possible.

In this contribution, I ask what the religious upheavals of 500 years ago have to tell us about the future. Can we do anything at all with the Reformation legacy? Or would we do well to cover up this revolutionary period in the history of Christianity? And if we do remember the Reformation, how can we do so credibly?

I partly follow the line set out by Brad Gregory in his study *Unintended Reformation* (2012), especially where he cites British sociologist Zymunt Baumann, who says:

> for the past two or three centuries since the great leap to human autonomy and self-management variously called 'Enlightenment' or 'the advent of the modern era' history has run in a direction no one planned, no one anticipated, and no one wishes to take.[2]

The enlightenment and the modern secular philosophy of life do indeed have deep roots in the Renaissance and the Reformation, but I do not share the view that faith in reason took control of culture only at the outset of the 17th century; this is because there was an earlier intertwining of reason and faith. My analysis does not start from what Brad Gregory calls 'a directionless world' but from secular society in which the need for cohesion and meaning is growing. To borrow from this need, the legacy of 500 years of the Reformation offers opportunities and challenges.

I sum up the heritage of the Reformation with a view on the future and discuss four topics: freedom, history, personal faith and the serenity – some say 'the death' – of God.

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1 M Luther. (2014). *Gesprekken aan tafel* (introduction & comp Herman Westerink, trans Mirjam Nieboer). Sjibbolet Origine, p 177.

2 Brad S Gregory. (2012). *The unintended Reformation. How a religious revolution secularised society.* The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, p 383.

Using these four elements, I place the lessons taught by the Reformation under the heading of a 'reasonable spirituality'. The theology and history of the Reformation teaches me that, in order to believe, I do not have to turn off my mind. On the contrary: only when I understand the biblical proclamation I can deeply believe and integrate Christian ethics into my life. With a plea for 'reasonable spirituality', I raise a dam wall against postmodern forms of idolatry, fake news and conspiracy theories. Western culture has made great progress in the past 500 years, but I believe we have also lost some along the way. A single-minded focus on material prosperity has produced a two-speed world history, with an affluent section dominating the vast majority of poor populations. Even if the globalised free market will eventually balance everything out – something I do not believe will happen – African or Brazilian street children today do not have much use for it. Because I am spiritually moved by inequality (it is downright perverse that world leaders bathe in opulence while children die of hunger) and I refuse to use my mind to justify this injustice (but, on the contrary, I want to use reason to do something about it), I unearth some spiritual methods that we have lost along the way. I am convinced that, if we know the past and learn from it, we can feel the future.

Freedom

There is still some debate among cultural philosophers about whether the Reformation promoted or delayed the awakening of science. According to Nietzsche in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* (1886), the Reformation had everything going for it to fuse ancient and modern minds, but the German Reformation, with its attachment to the Middle Ages, prevented this.[3] Others blamed Luther for several hundred years of misery, because he fanatically opposed the Peasants' Revolt in 1525. This stance earned him the label of 'prince's servant', while his opponent during the Reformation, Thomas Müntzer, was branded a 'Marxist avant la letter'.[4] Historians who are less ideologically biased see the developments of human autonomy, which

3 F Nietzsche. (2014). *Menselijk, al te menselijk. Een boek voor vrije geesten* (trans Thomas Graftdijk, revised, annotated and foreword Hans Driessen). De Arbeiderspers, pp 156-157.

4 MA van den Berg. (1990). *Niet het zwaard meer het woord. Luther en Müntzer in de Boerenoorlog van 1525.* De Groot Goudriaan Uitgevers, p 10.

came to the cultural surface during the Renaissance and which the Christian humanism of Erasmus and Thomas More propagated, as the basis of the establishment of an independent scholarship.[5] As we know, Luther was at odds with Erasmus. The vision of free will stood between them. Luther saw in Erasmus a second Pelagius, the monk who argued in the pre-5th century that man's free will had remained intact even after the Fall, which brought him the wrath of Augustine. The original sin about which Augustine argued strongly Pelagius waved off. But Luther struck an ethical chord with his opposition to Erasmus's absolute free will, which he felt compelled to clarify to his contemporaries. For man is never completely free, Luther argued, except when he connects with God. And the connection with God arises through belief. He who believes is made free by God, but, the passionate reformer said, God immediately binds the freed man to his neighbour. Hence the pithy opening sentences of Luther's pamphlet '*Von der Freiheit eines Christenmenschen*', which he addressed to Pope Leo X in 1520:

> The Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none.
> A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.[6]

The image of man that Luther used to support these theses was that of a larva. From birth, man is 'spun in' to himself (*incurvatus in se*). Faith makes the inward and introspective man aware of his true stature, being a butterfly. The body is like a cocoon, and at the end of time, Luther echoes Augustine, it will turn out that the believer ascends to heaven with butterfly wings. Hence a Christian's freedom is always a bound freedom, bound to God and neighbour. With this imagery, Luther made it clear to his contemporaries that man comes to his true destiny by living in communion.

Kant used this Reformation view of man to connect human autonomy, that is, the ability to legislate oneself, with the transcendental quality of reaching out towards the good. It is religion, Kant said, that provides us with representations of the good. In *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793) he explains that reason and faith need not

5 Brad S Gregory. (2015). *The unintended Reformation: How a religious revolution secularized society*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press., pp 298-364.

6 The English translation of *The Freedom of a Christian* can be accessed online: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53b59f96e4b089bf6ae90076/t/5f4eab6686e9682f7116adb3/1598991206147/TGC+Volume+III+-+Martin+Luther+The+Freedom+of+a+Christian.pdf (accessed 26 April 2023).

be mutually exclusive, since reason teaches us to base our behaviour on a generally applicable natural law, the so-called ‘categorical imperative’. The representation of the good, which Kant also calls the ‘holiest of reason’, is humanity in its perfection. It is our theological duty to look for meaning in Scripture that is in harmony with pure reason.[7] Kant uses the category of ‘humanity’ as Luther uses ‘the neighbour’. They both connect freedom with the horizontal notion of the other. The vertical connectedness is the orientation on God or the absolute good. To act and live with this horizontal and vertical connectedness is at the same time the will of God and our duty imposed by reason.

We have lost the notion that human autonomy depends on this twofold connectedness.

The heritage of Reformation is the notion of freedom in connectedness. Today we live in a world that wants to grasp our attention every second of the day. We are bombarded with opinions and asked our opinion on everything. To understand that freedom is realised when we voluntarily connect with the reasonable good of God we can detach ourselves easily, or even refrain, from the temptation of modern slavery to be obliged to have an opinion on everything. Luther stated that we are obliged only to God or our neighbour. I think it is necessary to expand this obligation: we will be free if we live with a true and deep connection with nature and the planet. Ecological consciousness can draw on the Reformation concept of ‘freedom in connection’ as a life-giving source.

History

A second element that reappeared on the surface of Western culture during the early Reformation was the unmediated contact with the absolute. The inherent human quality of faith, according to reformers, was the instrument par excellence that made direct contact with God possible. The Reformation opened the doors of the closed monastic world and allowed God to intervene in every facet of human life. Puritan ethics introduced a worldly asceticism that eventually, according to Max Weber in *Die protestantische ethik* (1920),

7 I Kant. (2004). *Religie binnen de grenzen van de rede* (introduction, trans and annotated Geert Van Eekert, Walter Van Herck and Willem Lemmens). Boom, pp 137-139.

in its American form and as articulated by Benjamin Franklin, 'let the spirit of capitalism' out of the bottle. Time is money and money is productive and fruitful. Diligence and frugality, alongside punctuality and honesty, help man progress both closer to God and higher up in the world.[8] Reason intertwined with religious ethics in Puritanism. But reason also introduced methodical doubt and historical criticism. Biblical texts and the teachings of the Church were tested by reason. This enabled Enlightenment philosophers such as Kant and Hegel to consider natural dynamics or developments occurring within creation teleologically. God had made the world and deposited his will in it. He will also complete his creation. Sir Isaac Newton sought fixed laws, Kant described the limits of reason and in so doing gave way to faith, while Hegel referred to the dynamics of reality, both of man and history, as 'becoming'. Everything is becoming reality. What is coming is already present, just as the blooming of a flower is already present in the bud. This dynamic – Hegel received his training at the Lutheran seminary in Tübingen – proceeds dialectically, a movement from matter to its opposite and culminating in absolute knowing. This absolute knowing is a category of consciousness, a '*Geist*', which Hegel used to refer to the goal of history as 'spiritualisation'.

So here we see the ripe fruit of the intertwining of faith and reason appear, namely, faith in progress. This faith still animates liberal democracies and is the result of the biblical thinking that was revitalised during the Reformation and which consolidated Enlightenment philosophy. I believe this legacy will be important in the future, given that we are increasingly struggling socially with purposelessness and depression. The legacy of reasonable spirituality clarifies the destiny of existence by pointing to its spiritual content. We should not orient our lives towards an upper world or a benevolent afterlife, nor should we disappear into an airless nihilism – both views are the same *stricto sensu* – but build a better world in communion. Some cultural phenomena that emerged in the 17th and 18th centuries on a reformational basis, such as the Brothers of the Rosicrucian Order and the Fraternity of Freemasons, worked out a method by which the individual could work on himself for betterment in order to increase cohesion and unity within humanity.[9]

8 M Weber. (2012). *De protestantse ethiek en de geest van het kapitalisme* (trans Mark Wildschut). Boom, pp 37-38.

9 I elaborate on these developments in my analysis of the Reformation heritage in J Temmerman. (2016). *Martin Luther. 500 jaar reformatie.* Academic and Scientific Publishers, pp 61-102. For a historical exposé on the Rosicrucian Brotherhood, I refer to F Yates. (1972). *The Rosicrucian*

Personal faith

A third important element that the Reformation honoured, following the medieval monastic tradition, is the value of detachment. We have just seen that the intertwining of reason and faith called into life a Puritan ethic. It is God's will and at the same time reasonable to understand that we should curb our passions (*affectiones*). The reformers denounced the wealth of the Church, which in Puritan tradition culminated in the practice of austerity. Austerity and detachment became signs of genuine faith. Weber noted that the Reformation meant not so much the elimination of the dominant influence of the Church on everyday life as its replacement by another form. The dominance of religion in Puritan ethics was an extraordinarily rigid and seriously intended regulation of the whole way of life.[10] Religion was the impetus for sober living: Puritans did not enter the monastery from the world, but turned the world into a monastery. In this reversal, the Holy Spirit, which guaranteed the medieval friars progress (*proficio*) in their seclusion, was transformed into a human striving (*conatus*), specifically the striving for self-preservation.[11] This most fundamental striving of man is the affirmation of a natural force. God and Nature are the same thing in Spinoza's philosophy. This means that man is part of God and human power is part of God's infinite power or Nature.[12] We can examine ourselves through our mind and therefore know God. This enabled Kant, who was steeped in his pietistic upbringing, to call the Christian religion the most reasonable and even 'learned' religion produced by mankind.[13]

So it is clear from the above that the Reformation, rather than bringing about an innovative renewal of religion, had provided the freedom to interpret the age-old Christian message in a different way, a way that was

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Enlightenment. Routledge and Kegan Ltd. A socio-historical and philosophical study of freemasonry was made by L Apostel. (1986). *Freemasonry. A philosophical essay.* VUB Press.

10 M Weber. *De protestantse ethiek en de geest van het kapitalisme,* p 28.

11 B Spinoza. (1979). *Ethica* (trans from Latin with explanatory annotations Nico van Suchtelen). Wereldbibliotheek, pp 136-137 (Dl II, St 9).

12 Tinneke Beekman writes: 'Everything (every "mode") may be finite and limited, but it can only exist and be compelled into action by other finite things and so to infinity. So, for Spinoza, God's will did not create the world. God is not separate from its creation, but is an active, producing force ("natura naturatans") as well as the expression of that force ("natura naturata") (E, I, proposition 29). God or Nature is immanent, a constantly working force and not a static, transcendent form of Being.' https://tinnekebeeckman.com/2012/12/26/spinoza-overvloed-tegenover-tekort/

13 E Kant. *Religie binnen de grenzen van de rede,* pp 234-240.

more closely aligned with the changing view of man and the world. The Reformation sold the same product in a different package, a package that allowed for less corruption but allowed for more waste, as we shall see in a moment. Luther criticised the Church of the time for being overly focused on externals, on pomp and circumstance. The institution had become an end in itself. Luther advocated repentance and personal faith. Initially, the letters to Pope Leo X, through which he delivered his pamphlets to the Holy Father, were very gentle in tone. Luther at first remained loyal to the Church and believed he could change it for the better. This turned around very quickly, with his criticism of the Church's externals and methods met with no understanding; but, theologically, Luther kept to the classical themes. We have mentioned the Fall and original sin. Methodically, Luther preserved confession as a third Sacrament. In *De captivitate Babilonica ecclesiae* (1521), Luther denounced the sacramental practice of the Church. By analogy with his theses against indulgences, he questioned the practice of using the 'holy goods' to perpetuate and increase the power and enrichment of the institution. Without repentance ('doing penance') and personal faith, there can be no question of God's forgiveness. This is why Luther advocated personal or private confession:

> As to the current practice of private confession, I am heartily in favour of it, even though it cannot be proved from the Scriptures. It is useful, even necessary, and I would not have it abolished. Indeed, I rejoice that it exists in the Church of Christ, for it is a cure without equal for distressed consciences. For when we have laid bare our conscience to our brother and privately made known to him the evil that lurked within, we receive from our brother's lips the word of comfort spoken by God himself.[14]

Confession, like the Sacraments of Holy Communion and baptism, consists of the word of promise and the personal faith in it. Because God's promise of forgiveness after penance had turned into a 'violent tyranny' and the 'establishment of a worldly rule', Luther saw it as his task to bring the Church back on track, that is, to act in accordance with the spirit of the gospel. After all, Jesus had given Peter the power to impute and forgive sins (Matthew 18:18-20). One can be another to 'Peter':

14 M Luther. (1521). *The Babylonian captivity of the Church* (trans ATW Steinhäuser, revd Frederick C Ahrens & Abdel Ross Wentz). http://www.onthewing.org/user/Luther%20-%20Babylonian%20Captivity.pdf, p 48 (accessed 28 April 2023).

> Now, the brother who lays his secret sins before his brother and craves pardon, certainly agrees with his brother on earth, in the truth which is Christ. Of this Christ says even more clearly, confirming his preceding words: 'For truly, I say to you, where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.'[15]

In theological terms, Luther reduces faith to its fundamental foundations. In doing so, he emphasises the value of repentance and personal faith. It is this mentality, which preserves what is good and reforms what should be different, that will be important as a legacy of the Reformation in the future. The reformers detached man from an institution or system that was too preoccupied with itself and too little with what really matters, being a liberated life *coram Deo*.

We live today under increasing pressure from externalities. Countless people become addicted to recognition and digital attention. This creates the threat of a negative human image, because one cannot satisfy everything. From this also arises a deep sense of falling short, not being capable of our work, being too weak or socially empathetic. If these feelings keep recurring to the rhythm of a carousel, people lose all resilience and strength. The mantra that you have to do it yourself can then come across as very mendacious, just like the advertising slogans that promote optimism and 'gusto' as a moral duty. The reformers encouraged the practice of stillness, repentance, confession and personal faith. One then taps into an inner space where one may simply be, without conditions, simply as one is, truly at home. In this 'inner room', worries and all kinds of weighty matters can be expressed and laid to rest. The practice of confession was originally a very meaningful refurbishment. If you can express your fears and limitations in full confidence, including why you regret this or that act, it not only relieves you, it also makes you alert to repetitions. It makes you a better person, first and foremost for those around you and for yourself. It bestows a new slate. We have sloughed off the practice of confession and prayer like old rubbish. At the same time, many do not know what to do with their internal tension, so the waiting lists for psychological and psychiatric counselling are growing longer and longer. Undergoing a 'mental overhaul' regularly is a legacy of the Reformation that we can take to heart.

15 M Luther. (1521). *The Babylonian captivity of the Church*, p 49. Online publication.

Serenity of God

Finally, we can also learn lessons from the mistakes of the Reformation. From the early years until today, fragmentation has characterised Protestant Churches: put two Protestants together and you have three Churches. There are always brothers and sisters who are straighter in doctrine than the others, who have a better faith and who consequently separate themselves from others who have become too lukewarm. According to the Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), there are about 200 official Protestant denominations in the United States alone, and on a global scale they run into the thousands. Add to this a growing number of house churches and this brings the number of independent Protestant Churches to around 35 500, according to ARDA.[16] We may wonder if this is what was intended. And ask: How could this be different?

What we have just called a positive element of the Reformation revolutions – repentance and personal faith – also turns out to have a downside. By removing the Church as a mediating institution between God and man, the revolutions simultaneously shattered the Magisterium. One's own opinion and experience was considered more important than community and cohesion. Self-will is a characteristic of Protestant culture, comparable to submission in the Catholic experience. We should immediately note that neither wilfulness nor submission could curb the mutual hatred and violence that resulted in the horrific century of religious wars in Europe. Diarmaid MacCulloch, in his magisterial history of the Reformation, makes the fine observation that Western Christianity's tolerance of dissenting Christian views was unimpressive. Eastern Orthodox Christianity fared better because it was confronted fairly early on with advancing Islamist forces, so the cohesion between them offered better protection. Medieval Latin Christianity could not imagine tolerance and stuck to theoretical reflections without distilling practical method from it.[17] Consequently, the first concrete cases of tolerance arose during the Reformation. The concessions were made by princes who

16 https://www.ncregister.com/blog/just-how-many-protestant-denominations-are-there (accessed 28 April 2023)

17 D MacCulloch. (2003). *Reformation – Europe's house divided 1490-1700.* Allen Lane/Penguin Books, pp 478-479.

lacked sufficient power and had unwillingly to allow a situation that would otherwise be forbidden.[18]

From this a reasonable spirituality learns the lesson that we should be sufficiently serene or cautious when talking about God. Theologically, we can say that God himself also considers earthly reality very serenely. He does not interfere in denominational discussions and anyone who thinks somewhat thoroughly and more deeply about tradition and faith soon finds that these discussions remove man from the essence. The lesson of the Reformation teaches us that confessions are side issues and can consequently be ignored if one has not yet got to the heart of the matter. The core of the Christian message is salvation through compassion and forgiveness. The plea for increased serenity regarding God is even louder in extremely secular times, where one cannot get beyond the externals of interdenominational and interreligious conversations without aspiring to decisive theological rapprochement. On top of this, today there exists a tension between religions and liberal – read secular – democracies in particular. Freedoms that have become a fundamental part of religious identity, from circumcision and unanaesthetised slaughter to headscarves and public holidays, are under threat. Intolerance is once again rising headlong ...

Traditionally, Western culture has offered two answers to this: either it strives for a universal religion based on morality, to which everyone must profess (Cusanus, Rousseau, Voltaire and Hans Küng), or the state imposes a standard of tolerance, according to which everyone must tolerate the faith of the other (Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, Civil Religion). The creation of a moral unitary religion collides with the walls of plurality, as one must abandon one's own views in favour of unification. The duty of tolerance encounters dissent and discrimination. The human rights approach tries a third (new) path: 'a full embrace of diversity.'[19]

The approach to the issue between religion and State organisation that led to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is grounded in three basic principles:

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18 MacCulloch points out that for this reason French Catholics could accept the Edict of Nantes, the Reformed Dutch could tolerate the proliferation of Churches and Charles II could tolerate Calvinists and Catholics among the landed gentry in England: MacCulloch. *Reformation*, p 679.

19 H Bielefeldt, N Ghanea, & M Wiener. (2016). *Freedom of religion or belief. An international law commentary.* Oxford University Press, pp 9-10.

1. Acceptance of the fact that all people hold irreconcilably different views on the ultimate meaning of life, regarding both religious beliefs and happiness. The basic principle is this: philosophical plurality is a fact.
2. Philosophical plurality is seen as wealth, because wanting to bring all people under one philosophical denominator is not only utopian but also dangerous.
3. One emphasises an 'overarching commonality' that is valid in both secular and religious contexts; that is, without sharing the view, one still respects any founded belief. One encourages respect for human dignity rather than seeking to change or destroy views. In this context, one uses the term 'empowerment'.

The method for establishing human rights presents an additional difficulty with regard to religious freedom, because it is not the religion whose freedom is guaranteed but the believing person. In short, freedom of faith protects the believer rather than the faith. There is indeed an intertwining of the two, but the focus of human rights is on the individual. This means that freedom of assembly, organisation, ceremonies, etc is granted 'indirectly', given that these freedoms arise only at the request of the believer. For this reason, the endorsement of religious plurality precedes the demand for religious freedom.

And what about theology? Why was God silent when the two young boys were burned at the stake in Brussels? Why was God silent during World War II? Was God really dead? Theologically speaking, we can argue that God was not dead nor was he asleep; but he was silent because he has faith in human beings. He knows that humankind will show resilience and will stand up again after the disaster that humans created. He trusts human beings for their resilience and progress. This trust is the basis of God's serenity. It is therefore necessary that Christianity at large and the Churches in particular work together on a theology of resilience as an answer to God's serenity. An important element of this theology, in my view, should be the nuance of the importance of creeds. Different creeds are like walls that divide human beings into good and bad camps. Creeds are the product of religious populism. In this regard, we must learn our lessons and know that plurality precedes unity and not the other way around. A plural humanity must be able to have a perception of God as the One that unites. It is God and his serenity that gives us the resilience to overcome the growing nihilism in the world.

Conclusion

The debate on the meaning of the Reformation is far from over. Consideration of the religious upheavals of the 16th century is not served by unsubtle framing. Certain elements have proved very valuable, others much less fruitful or even destructive. In this contribution, I first outlined the biblical insight that man is free only when he manages to live in harmony with his environment and the larger context. Luther asked the believer to commit himself unconditionally to God through faith. The consequence of this commitment, Luther said, is a servant's connection with their neighbour. This fitted in with the cultural shifts spreading through Europe from the Renaissance onwards, based on the rediscovered dignity of humankind. But this new humanism clashed with the Reformation in the context of free will. The Reformation stressed the importance of personal faith, but placed the ultimate decision on whether man was called to it or not with God and his general counsel. God had already predetermined our fate, preservation and loss. In my view, this explicit 'predestination' (*predestinatio*) frames the acute apocalyptic expectations that were high both in the New Testament period and during the Reformation. This decisiveness strengthens the recruiting momentum of a religious movement, but also weakens it through its initial eschatological absoluteness. 'It is so and not otherwise' is a slogan of the Church Fathers that was eagerly shared by the Reformers. The result was atrocious religious wars against other denominations, on the one hand, and endless fragmentation within their own ranks, on the other.

The apocalyptic high voltage with which the Reformation was pregnant was interpreted on reasonable grounds in an ethic of austerity and repentance. Pietism produced the most beautiful irenic fruit and, with its thinking about progress, installed a central concept of Western culture. The end of time is always near because it is a mental or spiritual condition. It gave a philosopher like Hegel the opportunity to refer to the purposefulness of reality as 'mind-realisation'. But the unending fragmentation, revealing an ever-present Reformation tendency towards rigid literalism and denominational idolatry, erodes the credibility of the message (captured in its essence as 'salvation for man and the world'). I therefore argue for the relativisation of any confession in favour of the individual right to freedom of faith and expression. I see the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 as a sign of God's serenity and trust in humankind. It is up to Churches, of

both Protestant persuasion and other denominations, to understand this as a necessary condition of faith.

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Contributors

FLTR Dr Dick Wursten, Prof Dr Guido Vanheeswijck, Prof Dr Johan Temmerman, Drs Harry Sinnaghel, Drs Jan Christian Pinsch, Dr Guy Liagre and Prof Dr Pieter Vos

Dr Guy Liagre, past General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches, is the former President of the United Protestant Church in Belgium and a former pastor at the Église Evangélique Réformée du Canton de Vaud (Switzerland). He currently serves as pastor at the Eglise Réformée Evangélique du Valais.

Drs Jan Christian Pinsch is a PhD student at the Theological Faculty of Paderborn.

Drs Harry Sinnaghel is emeritus pastor in the United Protestant Church in Belgium and a PhD student at the Faculty of Protestant Theology and Religious Studies in Brussels.

Prof Dr Johan Temmerman is the Dean of the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in Brussels. He specialises in the Philosophy of Religion and the dialogue between science and religion.

Prof Dr Guido Vanheeswijck is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Antwerpen.

Prof Dr Pieter Vos is Professor of Military Chaplaincy Studies and Associate Professor of Ethics at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam and Groningen.

Dr Dick Wursten is a theologian and a historian. After a career as pastor in the United Protestant Church in Belgium, he is now an inspector of religious education.