LLEWELLYN BOGAERS

*Utrecht at a Crossroads: Religious affiliations in a sixteenth century Netherlandish city**

The quest for Christianity

In this paper I should like to show, by taking Utrecht as an example, that the development of denominations was a gradual process in the sixteenth century Netherlands, with distinctions only slowly emerging. It is only towards the end of the century that we can begin to talk of clear-cut denominations. Until then the demarcation lines between the various affiliations are rather transparent and fluid, not rigid or dogmatic.[1] In the town of Utrecht this shaping of denominations took place with very little excessive fanaticism, although of course at the critical moments pressure groups were at hand, as was the case with the iconoclasms, in Utrecht in 1566, 1579 and 1580, and with the ensuing alteration in 1580, when the reformed church was being favoured and public catholic worship forbidden. In

ABBREVIATIONS

AGN *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*
BHG *Berigten van het Historisch Genootschap te Utrecht*
BMHG *Bijdragen en Mededе(e)lingen van het Historisch Genootschap*
TvG *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis*
UED *Utrechters entre-deux*
WHG *Werken van het Historisch Genootschap*

* I would like to thank Marten Jan Bok, Prof. Dr W.Th.M. Frijhoff, Prof. Dr M.E.H.N. Mout, Dr B. Roest, Dr L. van Tongerloo and Prof. Dr J.J. Woltjer for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Rev. T.F. Taylor corrected the first English version. The investigations for this paper were supported by the Foundation for Historical Research, which is subsidized by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO). This article can be seen as a preview of my forthcoming dissertation.

1 See *AGN*, vol. 6 (Haarlem, 1979), A.F. Mellink, 'Prereformatie en vroege reformatie 1517–1568'; J. Decavele, 'Reformatie en begin katholieke restauratie 1555–1568'; W. Nijenhuis, 'De publieke kerk veelkleurig en verdeeld, bevoorrecht en onvrij 1579–1621'. Alastair Duke, *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries* (London/Ronceverte, 1990), gives a wealth of information and a penetrating analysis of the interaction of revolt and reformation. In *De Dageraad van de Reformatie in Vlaanderen (1520–1565)* (Brussels, 1975), Johan Decavele subtly sketches the reformist movement in Flanders.

fact, it will be shown that in Utrecht throughout the sixteenth century there existed a strong, steady undercurrent of belief in which the dominant motive was how to live according to the example that Christ himself had set. In analyzing reasons why people dissociated themselves from the catholic church and joined another religious group, from 1530 onwards anabaptism or one of its more radical offsprings, or later in the century the spiritually inclined parish around Hubert Duifhuis or the more dogmatic reformed church, various motives can be detected, political, economic, personal and religious.[2] For this paper I should like to focus on the religious impulse, but when necessary I will dwell on other causes as well.

Marking out some international differences

To give some framework to those of you who may not be acquainted with the position of church and state in the sixteenth century Netherlands I will briefly mention in what aspects the Low Countries differ from what I have gathered is the situation in Britain.

On a political level

In the sixteenth century the grip of the Habsburg government on the newly acquired territories in the Northern Netherlands was not as firm as the central authorities might have wished. Guelders had only come under Habsburg rule in 1543. Local powers everywhere were still quite strong, representing a force the central government had to reckon with. This is, by the way, an outstanding feature of the Netherlands: they have always been governed on the basis of *consensus*. Never did a central authority succeed in gaining absolute control. This was very much the case in the sixteenth century, and especially so in the *Nedersticht*, the territory of which the city of Utrecht was the capital, which had only become part of the Habsburg Netherlands in 1528. Until then the reigning bishop was head of the diocese of Utrecht. In this function he had, until 1528, also exercised temporal power over the *Nedersticht*. This did not mean, though, that he actually had much influence in either the ecclesiastical or the political realm. From the 1450s onward the bishops had been rather dependent on Burgundian, later Habsburg, support to exercise some form of effective government. And due to the balance of power in the *Nedersticht* itself the bishops from the fourteenth century onward gradually had to recognize the influence of the Estates of Utrecht that assembled in the city. In this political body that dealt with the more important issues of the country, like war and peace and the collection of taxes, Utrecht's five chapters represented the first Estate, the nobility and gentry the second, and the five towns of the *Nedersticht* the third. Among the towns Utrecht's vote was often decisive. There were strong personal ties between the members of the three Estates, and therefore

2 For an excellent analysis of how religion and politics interacted, see J.J. Woltjer, *Friesland in Hervormingstijd* (Leiden, 1962).

common interests, chief among them fighting off any influence the sovereign prince, until 1528 the residing bishop, and after 1528 the Habsburg princes Charles V and Philip II, might wish to exert. The princes could not make unilateral decisions in any of the matters mentioned above. For the collection of taxes, for instance, they needed the approval of the Estates each time.[3]

One does not need much imagination to envisage that this *privilege* or prerogative gave the Estates an excellent bargaining counter. In the course of the sixteenth century this issue would cause ever growing friction between the Estates and Brussels, the administrative centre of the Habsburg government that was in constant need of money.

Ecclesiastical affairs

In religious matters as well the bishop was not the dominant leader that one would expect, having lost all his spiritual tasks to other dignitaries and institutions within the church. The chapters, for instance, had certain areas in which they were entitled to nominate priests. For the city of Utrecht this right was *de facto* obtained by the Domchapter.

Religion could count on local interest. There are indications that local preferences were honoured in the appointment of priests, the most striking example being the nomination of Hubert Duifhuis as pastor of St. Jacob's church in 1575.[4] Also on other occasions consultation seemed to have taken place between canons of the Domchapter, clergymen and parishioners.[5] This need not surprise us at all: as all parties lived within the city of Utrecht they had plenty of opportunity to meet, in the street or at the inn, at mass, processions, and banquets, and in the frequent assemblies of the Estates of Utrecht.

On a personal level as well a lively communication was going on between priests and parishioners: in the Netherlands priests could write their own sermons and thus express a personal point of view from the pulpit. In this way they could attract a wide audience. In Utrecht we know this for a fact of the parish priest Dirck van Abcoude who preached in the church of St Geert's (1536/37–1542), of the *vice-cureit* of St Jacob's, Herman van Remundt (1541), and of Hubert Duifhuis, (vice-)pastor of St Jacob's from 1573 until his death in 1581.[6] In the

3 Cf. Rob van Drie, 'De Staten van Utrecht en Philips II', unpublished doctoral thesis (1983), available at the Bibliotheek der Letteren, Rijksuniversiteit of Utrecht, and at the Rijksarchief of Utrecht; Bram van den Hoven van Genderen, *Het Kapittel-Generaal en de Staten van het Nedersticht in de 15e eeuw*, Stichtse Historische Reeks, 13 (Zutphen, 1987), pp. 26–30 and 39–41.

4 See the articles of L. van Tongerloo and R.H. Pegel, in *Utrechters entre-deux* (Delft, 1992), pp. 84, 101 and pp. 130–132.

5 See the above-mentioned article by L. van Tongerloo in *UED*, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–84.

6 For Dirck van Abcoude and Herman van Remundt see 'Gedenkschriften van jhr. Herberen van Mijnden', in S. Muller Fz. (ed.), *BMHG*, 11 (1888), pp. 55–58. For Hubert Duifhuis, see J. Wiarda, *Huibert Duifhuis, de prediker van St. Jacob* (Amsterdam, 1858); B.J. Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines. The Reformation in Utrecht, 1578–1618*, Thesis

administration of the sacraments a personal communication between priest and parishioner could take place.

To summarize, in the city of Utrecht religion was not totally institutionalized from above. On quite a few levels room was left for personal involvement. This decentralized aspect seems to me one of the most characteristic features of the sixteenth century catholic church in the Netherlands. It may explain why so many people chose to stay within the catholic church, even after catholicism had been abolished in Utrecht in 1580 as a result of the war with catholic Spain. The reformed governments initially had not enough grip to force catholics to become reformed. Only when the Synod of Dordt (1618–19) had established a victory of the counterremonstrants upon the remonstrants, could the staunch protestants start exercising more pressure upon society.[7] Even then the balance of power was not reversed. All through the seventeenth century the catholics remained a power the reformed government had to reckon with.

Utrecht's impact

To return to Utrecht, I will first give you a rough idea of Utrecht's status in the middle ages. Being the bishop's see Utrecht was at that time the ecclesiastical heart of the Netherlands. The towery skyline of the city reflected its importance. As bishop's see it saw the establishment of five capitular churches, and also the erection of the impressive Domtower, three abbeys and numerous convents. As the town grew, four parishes were established. In the early sixteenth century around 20,000 people probably lived in the city.

Establishing the framework of this article

Concerning religious affiliations, historians from 1847 onwards until recently agreed that in the sixteenth century Utrecht was not prone to reformatory movements, let alone heretical adherence. The catholic church was so omnipresent, they say, that allegiance to the reformation could not have developed here.[8] They may

Harvard University 1989, facsimile Ann Arbor, 1990; B.J. Kaplan, 'Hubert Duifhuis and the nature of Dutch libertinism', *TvG*, 105 (1992); R.H. Pegel, in *UED*, *op. cit.*, pp. 132–134.

7 Cf. A. Duke, *Reformation and revolt*, *op. cit.*, p. xiv.

8 See H.J. Royaards, *Geschiedenis der Hervorming in de stad Utrecht* (Leiden, 1847), pp. 3–4. Here he states that being a bishop's see and having a strong clergy, Utrecht was not prone to reformist influence. An argument still being put forward: Stuart E.C. Moore writes in 'The Cathedral Chapter of St. Maarten at Utrecht before the Revolt', unpublished thesis (Southampton, 1988), 'Not that the area around Utrecht itself was especially prone to heresy, although as was to be clear in 1566, there was a determined minority of religious dissidents within the city itself, whose presence was to be significant in later decades.' In a note (n. 116) he then remarks that further study into the religious affiliations in Utrecht is necessary, because although 'Utrecht was a city Catholic at heart' this catholicism is not to be understood as univocal: too many layers within society can be discerned and they need to be further studied. In his chapter 'Building Heaven in Hell's Despite', *Reformation and*

have been influenced in this opinion by a statement of the Utrecht city magistracy in 1567, when in answer to a Spanish questionnaire with regard to the iconoclasm of 1566, it was said that before the hedgepreachings of that year only a few burgers were known to be adherents of the so-called new religion.[9] Did historians have sound evidence for this opinion?

Utrecht as a cultural centre

As was observed above, Utrecht was an important administrative centre, which required many trained clerks, especially in the field of both canonical and roman law. They were to be found among clergy and lay people alike, many of them with a university background, having studied mainly at Louvain, Cologne and Orléans. Would not these people take an interest in the intellectual debate of their time, a debate that examined the sources of Christianity, i.e. the bible and its translations and the various institutions and dogma which the church had built on behalf of them in the light of humanistic principles? Besides being a bishop's see, with all the wealth and political power that entailed, Utrecht was a rich city, providing opportunities not only for people working in the administrative field, but also in the trades and arts. Utrecht was known for its gold- and silversmiths, for its sculptors and painters.[10] The composer Jacob Obrecht had directed the Domchoir, in which Erasmus may have sung. Many of these highly qualified artisans were able to read and write, and among them were people who had travelled abroad. One would expect this complex body of clergy, gentry, politicians and artisans that was so highly involved in ecclesiastical and religious matters to be interested in the all-consuming debate that was launched by Luther's action in 1517.

Some methodological observations

To find an answer to these questions and hypotheses is not easy. This has to do with the intricacy of religion and politics in those days. For soon after Luther had proclaimed his theses, his teachings were condemned on all official levels: by the universities of Cologne and Louvain in 1519, the pope in 1520 and 1521, and the emperor Charles V in 1521. Thus, religion had become a political issue. Drawn into the heresy debate fairly soon, people felt no great need publicly to demonstrate

Revolt, *op. cit.*, p. 98, Alastair Duke states that Utrecht 'was only lightly affected' (by the Reformation). In his thesis *Calvinists and Libertines*, *op. cit.*, Benjamin J. Kaplan ignores the local roots of the Utrecht reformation. Recent archival research presents a more nuanced picture. Of this new approach the above-mentioned articles by L. van Tongerloo and R.H. Pegel are good examples.

9 J.J. Dodt van Flensburg, *Archief voor kerkelijke en wereldsche geschiedenissen inzonderheid van Utrecht*, vol. V (Utrecht, 1846), p. 338, art. 9.

10 See *Kunst voor de Beeldenstorm, Noordnederlandse Kunst 1525–1580*, catalogue Rijksmuseum Amsterdam (The Hague, 1986), also available in English; Louise E. van den Bergh-Hoogterp, *Goud- en zilversmeden te Utrecht in de late middeleeuwen*, 2 vol. (The Hague, 1990).

their convictions or even to write about them. In Utrecht even the city magistrate and the Courts were reluctant to elaborate upon the theme.[11] So often historians find only indirect traces of what was going on in the field of religion, sources being judicial records, legislation, official and personal documents, the diaries of individual people, the books that were being written and published, and iconography. Scraping all these bits and pieces together produces a rather diversified picture.

The religious experience

First, religion never was a non-issue in the medieval Netherlands. From the days of Geert Groote (1340–1384) who was the founder of the *Devotia Moderna*, religion was a lively issue, less on an abstract theological level than because of its practical implications for daily life. How to follow Christ's example was a genuine question. Published for the first time in 1427, Thomas à Kempis' *Imitatio Christi* soon became a bestseller. In Utrecht this devotional attitude can be discerned in the reverence paid to sister Bertken, a nun who became a recluse in the Buurkerk, Utrecht's main parish church, in 1456/57, where she remained until her death in 1514. She left some beautiful poems and prayers, which all centre on the quest, later the experience, of how to attain to God. Within seven years after her death her writings were being published by *three* publishers in the Netherlands, including a publisher from Antwerp. Between 1516 and 1520 *eight* editions are known.[12] This concern with leading one's life style according to the Gospel was reinforced by the humanists' achievements. The retracing of the original sources of the bible and its translations opened the way to the examination of some of the institutions and dogma of the catholic church, notably the sacraments. Thus genuine involvement with religion and criticism of the church became entwined.

The reformist debate

In Utrecht the humanists' proceedings were being followed at the bishop's court, among the clergy, both secular and regular, and by the teachers of the Hieronymusschool, the Utrecht grammar school. Laypeople got information through books, sermons and travelling, to Antwerp for instance, and from hear-say. Although no overt allegiance to the reformist cause can be ascribed to bishop Philip of Burgundy (1517–1524), he did support a humanist, even renaissance, courtlife. The famous painter Jan Gossaert van Maubeuge belonged to his household. His secretary Gerard Geldenhouwer was personally acquainted with Erasmus with whom he corresponded. In 1517 Erasmus dedicated his book *Querimonia Pacis* to bishop Philip of Burgundy. Later Geldenhouwer would write about himself that as early as 1518 he had taken an interest in Luther's works. Having followed as early as 1521 the Habsburg example of banning and burning books considered heretical, bishop Philip was neither a man to pursue an active anti-heretical policy, nor to resist Habsburg in this matter.

Several teachers of the Latin or Hieronymusschool participated in the reformist debate of the day: as early as 1521 the rector of this school, Hinne Rode, a Brother of the Common Life, is said to have travelled to Luther to discuss the meaning of the eucharist with him, since this was a popular subject for discussion among theologians and lay-people.[13] Hinne Rode himself tended to a symbolic interpretation of the communion, conceiving of bread and wine as *images* of Christ's body and blood, rather than assuming, as was the belief within the catholic church, that through the act of consecration bread and wine literally transformed into Christ's body and blood. Accused of Lutheranism, Rode had to leave Utrecht in 1522, after which he visited reformers like Oecolampadius, Zwingli and Bucer.[14] Rode was a strong advocate of the reformist cause, which at first did not take the shape of a struggle *pro* or *contra* Rome, but was more concerned with the true meaning of doctrines such as those surrounding the holy communion. In this he followed Wessel Gansfort's and Cornelis Hoen's opinions. Through Rode Zwingli came to understand the eucharist as a symbolical act.[15]

It was not only Rode who left the Netherlands. Others who were involved in the reformist debate, and thus under suspicion of heresy, did so as well. Among them was Gerard Geldenhauwer. After such experiences people were less inclined to express their religious convictions openly, but teachers of the grammar school were

11 For instance when people leave prison on bail, often either their names or their alleged crimes are not mentioned. Often the historian has to combine several sources to get some basic understanding of the event.

12 Sister Bertken left some texts that were published as two booklets. The first book is called *Boecxken van die passie o.l. heeren*, see W. Nijhoff and M.E. Kronenberg, *Nederlandsche bibliographie van 1500 tot 1540*, 3 vols (The Hague, 1923–1971), numbers 308, 2408–2409, 4187–4188; for the second book, called *Boec tracterende van desen puncten*, see Nijhoff and Kronenberg, *op. cit.*, numbers 309, 2407 and 4186.

13 B.J. Spruyt in *UED*, *op. cit.*, p. 31. Although it is often questioned whether Rode truly was the rector of the Hieronymusschool, I tend to be in favour of this opinion. By a contemporary, Gulielmus Gnaphaeus, who knew him well, Rode is both called 'praeceptor' (teacher) and 'percelebri Hieronymiani collegii praefectus' (rector of the famous Hieronymusschool). Authors, (f.i. B.J. Spruyt, *op. cit.* p. 22) tend to interpret this statement as 'rector of the House of the Brethren of the Common Life', but in the argument itself they often leave out the – in my view crucial – word 'percelebri'. I cannot see any reason why a convent would be called 'perceleber', whereas this term makes sense when applied to a school. In his insistence that Rode was not the rector of the school, but of the Brotherhouse, R.R. Post does not refer to the description by Gnaphaeus, but to the description in a chronicle of the Doesburg Brotherhouse, namely 'rector domus clericorum', see *The Modern Devotion. Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought vol. III (Leiden, 1968), pp. 571, 575, notably note 2.

14 In the Netherlands of the first half of the sixteenth century 'lutheranism' was the common accusation for people suspected of heresy. The term itself, however, does not give any information on the actual content of the suspect's beliefs, which may in fact be lutheran or sacramentarial or anabaptist.

15 For literature on Hinne Rode, see C.C. de Bruin, in *Jaarboek Oud-Utrecht*, 1981, pp. 191–208; B.J. Spruyt, in *UED*, pp. 21–43.

never totally successful in hiding their enthusiasm for humanistic approaches, which often entailed a critical view of Rome and its institutions.[16]

The religious debate which was being encouraged by Luther's action in 1517 also reached secular priests who talked about it from the pulpit. Already in 1522 a priest had to renounce convictions which were much inspired by Luther.[17]

Even laypeople talked about religious issues in public. They questioned the validity of the eucharist and of saints, even the sanctity of the mother Mary. Sometimes they acted out their convictions, making a mockery of a procession or a ritual.[18]

Religion and politics

How did the government react to this? It has already been indicated that the Habsburg government did not tolerate any deviations from the catholic path. Hence its strong condemnation of Luther's opinions, which started off an anti-heretical campaign. Although not incorporated into the Habsburg empire until 1528, Utrecht had already before this date followed its policy, establishing in 1524 a board consisting of four magistrates to prevent the spreading of the so called Lutheran heresy. On this occasion the city council also forbade the reading and selling of Lutheran and other heretical scripts. When people were accused of heresy the magistrates did not follow Habsburg prescriptions. The people that had been arrested got off fairly lightly, seen at least from the perspective of the death penalties that were later executed: they 'only' had to publicly renounce their so-called heretical convictions and to repent and worship in front of the community, sanctions which in effect may have been experienced as a social

16 Lambertus Hortensius, rector at Utrecht c.1527–1534, was nicknamed 'the lutheran papist', see G.H.M. Delprat, *Verhandeling van de Broederschap van G. Groote* (Arnhem, 1856), p. 156. Did Hortensius write his treatise *Tumultuum anabaptisticarum* (Bazel, 1548), which is directed against the anabaptists, out of fear he might be accused of having sympathized with them? Hortensius was familiar with Henric Niclaes, the founding father of the Family of Love, and 'deeply enough involved to translate some of Hendrik Niclaes' writings into Latin in the late 1550s.' Quotation out of Alastair Hamilton, *Cronica*, Kerkhistorische Bijdragen 15, Documenta Anabaptistica Neerlandica VI (Leiden, 1988), p. x.

The humanistic approach of Macropedius, rector from 1537 until 1552, is widely acclaimed. Many of his pupils became leading scholars, often displaying an enlightened attitude towards religion. Outstanding examples are Johannes Saskerides, Willem Canter, Johannes Heurnius, Georgius Rataller and Cornelius Valerius, Delprat, *op. cit.*, pp. 157–58.

17 On 13 January 1522 the priest Herman Gerritsz. had to publicly renounce nine so-called heretical convictions, *Corpus Documentorum Inquisitionis Haereticí Pravitatis Neerlandicae*, ed. by Paul Frédéricq (Ghent/The Hague, 1900), vol. IV, n. 62, pp. 86–87.

18 Read the 13 testimonies, made in 1525, on the city's cooper Willem Dircsz., in Paul Frédéricq, *Corpus op. cit.*, vol. IV, n. 330, pp. 368–373, or the indictment by the Court of Utrecht against the Utrecht burger Dirck Weyman, *BHG*, 1851, pp. 124–25, on 25 April 1534.

humiliation.[19] This pattern of moderate government interference in religious affairs was characteristic of the *Nedersticht*, even after Habsburg had taken over power in 1528. In the jurisdiction of Utrecht at least, people were generally not condemned to death for their convictions. The authorities were well aware that too severe a punishment or a dismissal of a priest would also have a disturbing effect upon the community. This tolerant attitude only broke down when society was considered endangered, as was the case in 1533 when a priest refused to renounce the reformed and seditious opinions he had expressed from the pulpit,[20] and even more explicitly so during the Münster upheaval (1534–35) and after, when radical sects were found to have a stronghold in Utrecht, as was the case both in 1539 and in 1544/45. For transgression of heresy legislation a total of 38 people were condemned to death in Utrecht prior to the executions that followed the iconoclasm of 1566.[21] All but two, possibly three convicts were born outside the *Nedersticht*. One observes that the magistrates protected their own citizens against the encroachment and sanctions of Brussels. Native leaders and adherents of dissident opinions, often citizens or people of considerable *status*, were given the opportunity to flee, as was the case with Hinne Rode. By the late 1520s all the main leaders of the early reform movement had left Utrecht, leaving the city bereft of experienced spiritual teachers. This may be one reason why people opened themselves up to radical or anabaptist influence in the 1530s and 1540s.

Utrecht and Münster

In 1534–35 the anabaptist upheaval at Münster took place. Only a few Utrechters had actually gone there. Some were arrested *en route*. Among the latter was Dominicus Abelsz., a young goldsmith, the son of the then famous Utrecht goldsmith, Abel van de Vechte, who had made shrines and chalices for the Dom-chapter.[22] What turned Dominicus into a zealous anabaptist we will probably never know. But he had the gift of the tongue. An eye-witness of his execution on 30 March 1534 described him as one of the most important and certainly the

19 The above mentioned cooper Willem Dircsz., for instance, was sentenced to sit on a heightened chair in the Domchurch and listen to a sermon in which his convictions were condemned, Paul Frédéricq, *Corpus op. cit.*, vol. IV, nn. 362 and 363, pp. 395–97.

20 This death sentence befell Jan Winter, vice-pastor at Hoorn, *BHG*, 1851, pp. 117–19.

21 Of these 38 death penalties 33 were for adherents of radical groups. Three men had refused to abjure. And two men combined another crime, repeated theft and cheating, with heretical ideas or behaviour, f.i. the seduction of a nun. This figure is excluding those who were condemned to death for church robbery without an ideological connotation being linked to the crime.

22 Louise E. van den Bergh-Hoogterp, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 554–559, 576–585. In this thesis biographies are dedicated to both Abel van de Vechte and his son Dominicus (nn. 89 and 138). See for more detailed information on Dominicus Abelsz. my forthcoming articles in both the *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*, 1993, and *Jaarboek Oud-Utrecht*, 1993.

most learned of the baptizers. He had heard Dominicus' fellow-prisoners state that they could not believe St Paul had been more learned or a better preacher in his days.[23] In Utrecht he had inspired at least 18 men and women, the men all being craftsmen, among them well-respected and well-to-do burgers. Thirteen members of this group appealed for mercy after Dominicus' execution, and this they all obtained.[24]

What is amazing though is that only a handful of Utrechters felt an urge to go to Münster. Compared to the thousands out of Holland and Frisia it is a negligible figure.[25] For this I can detect three grounds, although at this stage of my research it is hard to evaluate them. First of all, I believe that the economic structure of Utrecht was totally different from that of Holland. Being dominated by commerce Holland was susceptible to fluctuations in the market. We all know that the grain trade through the Sont was at this time very difficult due to political tensions. The uncertainties of employment may have reverberated in the appeal that came from Münster with its announcement of the millenium. By contrast, as a city of trade and handicrafts Utrecht essentially was a corporate unit, the guilds representing a rather monolithic structure with its emphasis on traditions, rules and hierarchy. Besides, Utrecht produced for a local market and for a large hinterland, notably the German Rhinecountries. With trade relations relatively undisturbed Utrecht was less susceptible to the vibrations of the market, although of course it did experience the dearth in the supply of grain and the consequent rise in price. Compared with Holland though Utrecht's economy seems quite stable at this time.

Another reason why anabaptism did not get support in the *Nedersticht* may be that reformist ideas, including anabaptist ones, were not being stimulated by the local magistrates or by rural lords, whereas in numerous towns of Holland these ideas received, if not overt support, at least a moderate toleration. This was certainly the case in Amsterdam.[26] We have already seen, that the Utrecht courts did not punish so-called heretics severely. But they did follow a policy of discouragement. The unity of society could after all not be disturbed.

An important reason why anabaptism did not appeal to Utrechters may be the state of spiritual care in Utrecht. Contrary to the received view of the priests of those days as unlearned, adulterous and unconcerned,[27] from their sermons and/or

[23] *Documenta Anabaptistica Neerlandica V*, Amsterdam (1531–1536), ed. by A.F. Mellink (Leiden, 1985), p. 29.

[24] Rijksarchief Utrecht, inv. Hof van Utrecht, n. 99, Criminele Sententiën, vol. I, ff. 197–214v, all sentences given between 20 and 30 June 1534.

[25] Cf. A.F. Mellink, *De Wederdopers in de Noordelijke Nederlanden, 1531–1544* (Groningen, 1953); and J.J. Woltjer, *Friesland in Hervormingstijd*, *op. cit.*

[26] Cf. G. Grosheide, *Bijdrage tot de Geschiedenis der Anabaptisten in Amsterdam* (Hilversum, 1938), pp. 87–94; and Albert F. Mellink, *Amsterdam en de wederdopers in de zestiende eeuw* (Nijmegen, 1978).

[27] Cf. R.R. Post, *Kerkelijke verhoudingen in Nederland vóór de Reformatie* (Utrecht, 1954), pp. 48–64, 97–145.

their reading it can be gathered that most of Utrecht's parish priests were educated men who took their tasks seriously.[28] As has been observed, a highly involved dialogue was going on between priests and parishioners. The wide range of beliefs within the Utrecht clergy may have encouraged this. A few examples will suffice: before 1540 reformist sermons were being preached in the church of St Geert by the pastor Dirck van Abcoude and in St Jacob by the vice-pastor Herman van Remundt. They both attracted an ever growing audience, among them members of the well-to-do, and even the magistracy. These two priests got into a competition, so states one eye-witness, for the favour of the public. Ever bolder statements were being hurled from the pulpit. This did not go by unnoticed, as it also disturbed the unity of the community. As a result of a royal visit in 1540 these priests were questioned by inquisitors, imprisoned, and eventually given the choice to renounce their opinions or die. Both opted for the first of these choices. After being banned in 1542, Dirck van Abcoude settled himself in the nearby city of Vianen in the virtually independent territory of the Lord of Brederode. Until 1550 he continued to have a say in who was to represent him as a pastor of St Geert's.[29] As long as he lived – he died before 23 March 1576 – he got paid for the various vicariates he possessed in Utrecht, although there are no indications he ever visited the town again. This is by the way a striking example of how vested interests were respected. More examples of priests who proclaimed new ideas in the city of Utrecht can be given. Among them were Steven van Loon, pastor of St Geert's from 1556 until 1561, and Ricoud Jansz. van Rees, Nicolaas Rol and Johannes van Haller, all *vicecureit* at St Jacob's, respectively in 1550, in 1554 and from 1559 until 1572.[30] Although the reform orientated priests could express their opinions for some time, in the end they were all deprived of their pastoral cures. Some were even imprisoned as happened to curates of the Buur- and Jacobichurches in 1557.[31] Among them was Nicolaas Rol who had to renounce his beliefs and flee. This was the fate of other priests too. And yet at the same time it happened that the *vicecureit* of St James' Ricoud Jansz. van Rees, dismissed in 1550, not long afterwards obtained an official position at St John's chapter in Utrecht, first becoming a *presbyter animarum* in 1553 and later an honorary canon.

In Utrecht were also priests who adhered to the Tridentine view. The best known of these was Joachim van Oprode, pastor of the Buurkerk (1557–c.1571),

[28] Particularly illuminating in this respect is the above-mentioned article by L. van Tongerloo in *UED*, *op. cit.*, pp. 75–112. The little biographies give a wealth of detail.

[29] For information on Dirck van Abcoude and Herman van Remunt, see the 'Gedenkschriften van Herberen van Mynden', as mentioned under note 6. For biographical details on Dirck van Abcoude, see L. van Tongerloo in *UED*, *op. cit.*, pp. 79–81, 86–87 (n. 21), pp. 108–09, and on Herman van Remunt, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

[30] For the biographies of Steven van Loon, Ricoud Jansz. van Rees and Nicolaas Rol, see L. van Tongerloo in *UED*, *op. cit.*, pp. 81–82, 102 and 103.

[31] RAU, inv. Domkapittel, 1, acta on 17 February 1557 (information from Arie de Groot).

Utrecht's main parish church, who sympathized with the counter-reformation.[32] He also had a wide audience.[33]

To summarize, throughout these decades, there had always been priests – next to the many who took a more neutral or traditional view – who shared an interest in reforming the catholic church from within, some inclining to protestant reformed ideas, others to counter-reformational solutions. In the end most priests who tended to so-called heretical views were forced to resign or chose to do so, the striking exception being Hubert Duifhuis who nearly always enjoyed official support. The fact that these dissident priests eventually had to leave did not mean, though, that all doors were closed for them: after all the pastor Dirck van Abcoude, banned in 1542, officially remained in post until 1550, receiving his vicariate pensions until his death, and the dismissed Ricoud van Rees later became a canon in Utrecht. This mixture of a firm stand where society's integrity was considered endangered and yet a lenient, tolerant, almost Erasmian attitude towards dissident opinions is typical of the way in which religious affairs were handled in the city of Utrecht. A reason for this seemingly inconsistent policy may be found in the personal interest some members of the magistracy and chapters took in religion.

Another, and perhaps more important inference of this overview is that nearly all through the sixteenth century reform orientated priests held posts in Utrecht, expressing their ideas within the framework of the catholic church. Time and again Utrecht parish priests offered such a wide range of religious affiliations that a Utrechter could choose whatever kind of priest he or she wished to hear. Finding gratification of one's spiritual needs within the catholic church may have been a very important reason why so few Utrechters chose to break away from the motherchurch throughout the sixteenth century.

Growing awareness . . .

And yet, in spite of the anabaptist upheaval in Münster and the disturbances caused by the *Davidjoristen* and the *Batenburgers*, radical sects that operated in the Netherlands after the fall of Münster, the new ideas gained ground among all strata of society. The government's usual prudent administration of justice could not prevent this. An ever widening circle of people responded to the spirit that was mentioned before, being concerned not so much with a radical reshaping of society, as the leaders of the anabaptists or radical sects were, nor with institutions

32 During a visitation in 1569 he stated he had the Trent resolutions proclaimed as soon as this was asked of him ('Verslagen van Kerkvisitatiën in het Bisdom Utrecht in de 16de Eeuw', *WHG* (1911), p. 59). On request of King Philip II he revised the Dutch translation of the Catechism by the Jesuit Petrus Canisius and had it published for the third time in 1576, *Batavia Sacra* (Antwerp, 1716), vol. II, p. 656.

33 During a visitation in 1569 Joachim van Oprode estimated the number of communicants at 8000, see the 'Verslagen van Kerkvisitatiën', *op. cit.*, p. 57.

and dogma as the later reformed church was, as with an inner devotion to God. The quest for a vital christianity was very strong in this century. Metaphors used of Jesus express this longing for the living Christ: the Word Incarnate, the Life Giving Water, the Fountain of Life. This all-pervasive search finds expression in many spiritual treatises, covering all angles of sixteenth century christianity. In the Netherlands it is nearly impossible to classify these people as being within or without the catholic church until the iconoclasm in 1566, with the exception of course of the radical anabaptists and the mennonites. As I said before, boundaries were very thin at this time and virtually non-existent. In his Dutch rhymed version of the psalter of 1534 the Utrecht nobleman Willem van Zuylen van Nyevelt asks a fatherly God to try him so he can purify his ways.[34] And in his *Play of the Christian Church* (1540) the rhetorician Reynier Pouwelsz. emphasizes that neither good deeds nor outwardly displayed belief matter, but only the intentions of the heart, the inwardly felt convictions: this is what God observes. The Holy Scripture can in his view be a guide on this path.[35] All these authors can be seen as representatives of that quest that already for so long had such a strong appeal in the Netherlands: truly to live according to Christ's example of charity.

. . . leading to growing dissent

While awareness grew, society was not likely to remain unaffected. In the 1550s people were less inclined to have their children baptised. In a public announcement of 1551 the city council ordered the parents that had not had their children baptized, to do so immediately.[36] We know of mennonites preaching and baptising in the city.[37] In these decades prior to the iconoclasm at least eight conventicles had existed in the *Nedersticht* and its immediate surroundings.[38] In the end they were all dismantled. As mentioned before, the government did not allow any infringement of the structure of society, the unity of both citizenry and church having to remain intact. Most participants came off lightly though, as was mentioned before, having to do public penance only. Three men were put to death in the years immediately preceding the iconoclasm of 1566. One of them refused to abjure his dissident opinions. In this period we repeatedly find prison guards helping prisoners who were arrested for the sake of religion escape, sometimes even

34 W. van Zuylen van Nyevelt, *Souterliedekens*, s.l., 1540, the last verse of psalm 138. Another book by W. van Zuylen van Nyevelt is called *Die Fonteyne des Levens*, s.l., 1533. C.f S.J. Lenselink, *De Nederlandse Psalmberijmingen in de 16de eeuw* (Assen, 1959).

35 Reynier Pouwelsz., *'tSpel van de Cristenkercke*, c.1540, manuscript number 1336 at the university library of Utrecht. This view is strongly expressed in the prologue, cf. G.A. Brands, *Tspel van de Cristenkercke* (Utrecht, 1921).

36 Gemeentelijke Archiefdienst Utrecht, Stadsarchief I, n. 16, Buurspraakboek, f. 170, on 10 March 1551.

37 See the record of baptisms performed by Lenaert Bouwens, *BMHG*, vol. 36 (1915), pp. 39–71; *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*, 1903, pp. 11, 13, 14, 39, 41, 42.

38 They will all be presented in my forthcoming thesis on religious affiliations in the city of Utrecht in the 16th century.

fleeing with them. Should we map the dissidents we should find that the mennonites formed the greater party before 1566.

Iconoclasm and revolt

The reform-orientated priests and the books that were being read prepared the minds of those who wanted a reformed church. In 1566 150 men and women were actively involved in the hedgepreachings around Utrecht. Once the iconoclasm found a response in Antwerp, on 20 August 1566, it flared out all over the Netherlands. It also reached Utrecht. In three days, from 24 to 26 August, the interiors of the four parish churches and the churches of the hated dominican and franciscan friars were demolished. The social background of iconoclasts all over the Netherlands showed many similar features. They did not come from the rabble of the populace, as is still too often assumed. Most of them were well-to-do craftsmen, the leaders being of noble rank.[39]

The issues at stake were not only of a religious nature, although we should not underestimate the impact of religion as a motive. What bound the participants together was a variety of dissatisfactions which found unifying force in the religious issue: the abhorrence of the religious policy of the Habsburg government as expressed in the heresy legislation or *plakkaten*, the – in Utrecht not so real – threat of the Inquisition, the many death penalties, notably in Antwerp, and Philip's unwillingness to relent. What also found expression in the iconoclasm was the resentment against the centralist policy of the Habsburgs. The transference of the temporal power over the Nedersticht to Charles V in 1528 had been experienced as a loss of autonomy. From that time the Estates of Utrecht had resisted any Habsburg intrusion in the field of jurisdiction, taxation and *privileges*.[40]

Alva's punishment

After an initial hesitation the Habsburg government fought back, forcing the leaders of the movement to flee, among them William of Orange and Hendrik van Brederode who had both backed up the reform movement.[41] The latter had even

[39] For Utrecht read Sherrin Marshall Wyntjes 'The lesser nobility of Utrecht in the Revolt of the Netherlands', thesis (Tufts University, 1972), facsimile Ann Arbor, 1980. For Holland see H.F.K. van Nierop, *Van ridders tot regenten* (Amsterdam, 1990).

[40] See note 3. Cf. Ferdinand H.M. Grapperhaus, *Alva en de tiende penning* (Zutphen, 1982), pp. 115–17.

[41] It is often questioned whether Prince William of Orange was involved in the iconoclasm and early revolt. In Utrecht at least William took an active stand. In his capacity as *stadhouder* he stayed in Utrecht from 19 October until 15 December 1566 in order to restore peace in town. In this period he visited the well-known leader of the malcontented noblemen, Henrick van Brederode, Lord of Vianen, twice. Brederode in his turn visited William two or three times. In the same period William's brothers saw Brederode several times. On top of this William of Orange supported the Lord of Brederode with guns late in 1566. In Utrecht William lodged with a nobleman who had been a leader of the iconoclasm in Utrecht, Jan van Renesse, Lord of Wilp. While in Utrecht William was looking for a rapprochement with the Utrecht protestants. In *Utrecht in 1566 en 1567* (Groningen/Batavia, 1932), A. van Hulzen strongly advocates the view that Prince William of Orange was openly supporting the iconoclasm and ensuing revolt and knew all along of the movement and intentions of the malcontented nobles, see chapters II, III and IV.

attempted to initiate a revolt. With the arrival of the duke of Alva in 1567 severe punishment awaited the iconoclasts and the soldiers in Brederode's army. Many of them fled to England and Germany, Utrechters often finding refuge in the Rhine-countries. Those who had not fled were nearly all condemned to death or to serve in the galleys. The refugees were all banned for life. The goods of these people were confiscated. The aftermath of the iconoclasm can be seen as the starting point of the Dutch revolt.[42]

As war dragged on, less attention was paid to the issue of religion. Since 1569 the city of Utrecht had been heavily plagued by billeted soldiers who had to be lodged, fed and even paid. Religion was not on the magistrates' mind. In 1575 a priest was installed as pastor or *cureit* of the *Jacobikerk* by the name of Hubert Duifhuis, having already served as a *vicecureit* at the same parish in 1573. Yet this man was not without a reputation: in 1572 as pastor of St Lawrence's church in Rotterdam he was summoned for interrogation by the Inquisition. He fled rather than appear. Duifhuis was later said to have spiritually *libertine* opinions.[43] In Utrecht the responsible people must have known of his position, yet he was installed.

With the billeting continuing, life in Utrecht became very strained. There was the constant danger of looting and mutineering soldiers. The Utrecht people were being squeezed out to keep the soldiers contented.

Reaction

In this predicament Utrecht was ready for peace. Negotiations with the provinces in revolt, Holland and Zeeland, seemed the best way to provide this. However, their leader, William of Orange was looked upon with suspicion in Utrecht. His support in 1566/67 for the new religion and for the rebellious Lord of Brederode had not been forgotten. Yet he was the leader since 1572 of the successful revolt against the central government. In Utrecht also the anti-catholic policy pursued by the *Geuzen* was mistrusted. And yet, the loyal provinces had to come to terms with these forces in order to obtain peace. War on the side of the central government had brought too many risks and costs that people became less willing to bear.

[42] For those readers who require further insight into this Revolt I recommend *Texts concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands*, ed. E.H. Kossmann and A.F. Mellink (Cambridge, 1974).

[43] The consistorialists called Hubert Duifhuis a *libertine*. This is another way of saying he held undogmatic views. Hubert Duifhuis can be rightly called a *spiritualist*. See both Alastair Hamilton, *Cronica*, *op. cit.*, and Benjamin J. Kaplan, 'Hubert Duifhuis', *op. cit.* In both these works the relationship between Henric Niclaes, the founding father of the Family of Love, and Hubert Duifhuis is elaborately dealt with.

In the absence of a Spanish governor, the Estates General started peace negotiations with Holland and Zeeland in 1576. In Ghent it was agreed that war should come to an end. Since the question of religion was one of the obstacles, it was decided that Holland and Zeeland could remain reformed. Once this treaty had been implemented, and thus the ties between all the Netherlandish provinces formally restored, Utrecht had to ensure itself that it would be effectively out of the warzone, regardless of how Philip would react to the treaty. This meant getting rid of the billeted soldiers. Siege was laid to the castle Vredenburg, the stronghold of the Spaniards in Utrecht. After three months the Spaniards surrendered. After another successful battle, this time with German mercenaries who had been lodged in the city, Utrecht was free of foreign soldiers in 1577. The only military force that remained was the *burgerwacht*, the guard consisting of Utrecht citizens themselves, of which a hard core happened to be devoted to the reformist cause, be it spiritual or reformed. The *burgerwacht* forced the Estates to conclude negotiations with William of Orange and to accept him again as a *stadhouder*. This was effectuated on 31 October 1577.

Catholic worship forbidden

Although William of Orange and the Estates aimed at establishing peace between the various denominations, which were now rapidly taking distinct shapes, this goal was not to be reached. The main cause was the war situation which perverted all internal relationships. 'Catholic' was associated with 'Spanish' and therefore with inquisition and betrayal.[44] The majority of the catholics had no way of defending themselves against this charge, as they were not so much advocating the counter-reformist cause, but rather continued the traditional type of catholicism, which was quite undogmatic, leaving room for local and personal preferences. Utrecht catholics did not submit to being subjugated without resistance, though. In the negotiations for the Union of Utrecht (1579), Utrecht catholics tried to introduce political guarantees that would safeguard catholic worship, once the Union between the revolting provinces had been established. The spokesmen of this so-called Counter-Union were, however, arrested and put in jail. The mastermind behind the movement, the *scholaster* of the chapter of Oudmunster, Jacob Cuynretorff, even remained in prison until the treaty was signed.[45] No guarantees for catholic worship were included in the final version of the Union. Tension between the various denominations however grew, fed by the war with Spain. When catholicism was officially abolished, in Utrecht in 1580, catholics were formally excluded from public functions. Catholicism was driven into the private realm, as all churches were taken from the catholics and no public worship was to take place. Catholic education was forbidden. And yet, being the largest denomination

44 Cf. A. Duke, *Reformation and revolt*, *op. cit.*, pp. vii, xiii.

45 See 'Stukken over den tegenstand der Utrechtsche katholieken, onder leiding van den scholaster van Oudmunster Jacob Cuynretorff, tegen de Unie van Utrecht', as assembled by P.L. Mulder, in *BMHG*, 9 (1886), pp. 393–472.

and having very influential people among its members catholicism *de facto* survived in Utrecht, as it did in other places where it could not be subjugated, yet under a considerable financial strain and unfavourable conditions.[46]

Strife among the protestants

Among the protestants themselves relationships were very ambiguous. After the Satisfaction with William of Orange had been concluded in October 1577, the *spiritualist* Hubert Duifhuis started to worship in a moderately reformed fashion, but without introducing a consistory, or internal discipline. In this decision he was supported by some magistrates and captains and members of the *burgerwacht*. In 1578 the magistracy had not been willing to fulfil the urgent request of the reformed people for a church of their own, where they could worship after their own fashion. This group included the Utrecht refugees who had fled in 1567 but had now returned, many of them having become staunch calvinists in the exile communities abroad, as well as refugees from the Southern Netherlands. Of course these people could not tolerate being harassed once again. Some of the captains and members of the *burgerwacht* supported their appeal. When the magistracy was not willing to grant a church, in August 1578 the reformed took what was not being given to them, occupying the vacant church of the franciscan community who as staunch catholics had been forced to leave the city some weeks before. After the Treaty of Utrecht had been signed in January 1579, the reformed soon started to officially celebrate communion. They then began recording their members.[47] They also set up a consistory from which they took the title consistorialists. All along they felt a bitter resentment towards the parish of Hubert Duifhuis which had such strong support from the magistracy and did not wish to adopt ordained reformed institutions. Vehemently they fought its policy which they considered to be *libertine*. When Leicester was captain-general of the Netherlands he supported the reformed cause, in 1586 forcing the independent parish of St Jacob's to become part of the consistory. Now this faction felt frustrated. When Leicester had left the country and the magistracy that had been deposed was back in power, they, in 1589, in one stroke dismissed all reformed parsons, including the moderate ones. Thus the magistracy consolidated a breach within society that was already hard to mend.[48]

Conclusion

Unity could not be maintained in this multi-religious society, one of the reasons being that religion itself had become a political issue, and thus part of political propaganda. After 1577 religion was a source of internal strife. And this was the more so because none of the protestant denominations could assert themselves and

46 Compare A.Th. van Deursen, *Bavianen en Slijkgeuzen* (Assen, 1974), pp. 129–160.

47 Gemeentelijke Archiefdienst Utrecht, arch. Nederlands Hervormde Gemeente, 404, list of members 1579–1589.

48 See Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*, *op. cit.*

the catholics, although subjugated as a result of the war, were still the major economic force behind the political scene.

Since 1577 there had been repeated breaches in confidence between the city council and groups within society, which were not easily to be undone. To this should be added that the religious debate itself had hardened. Theological issues were being treated from the pulpit. Opponents, whether clergymen, magistrates or institutions could be personally attacked. In a way a schism had occurred within society. Initially the parsons whom the magistracy eventually appointed in 1590 did not receive the support of the reformed community. For years the situation remained strained, and this made it very difficult for the reformed church to consolidate its position. Due to internal and external debates, often made more difficult by an entanglement with theological issues, many reformed goals like the diaconate, education, and even internal discipline, did not get firmly rooted before 1620, all energy being devoted to arguing and surviving. It was only after stadtholder Maurice of Orange had in 1617 replaced the *libertine* inclined magistracy by a more orthodox council and after the Synod of Dordt had taken place in 1618–19, that the reformed church in Utrecht could begin to consolidate itself. Even then, in a society which was so divided between denominations, the catholics still being an important part of the populace, not only in number, but also in wealth, and the battle between reformed and remonstrants continuing, this was not an easy task.

Epilogue

Let us return to the question that was posed in the beginning: were historians justified in proclaiming that the reformation had triumphed totally in Utrecht? In my opinion, many of them looked upon the sixteenth century with the frame of mind that is characteristic of a nineteenth or twentieth century Dutchman, being acquainted with *verzuiling* or the compartmentalization of society into various religious denominations. They may have expected as clearcut a situation in Utrecht as in Holland and Frisia, where the anabaptists and also at a later stage the reformed had quite a strong following. As we have seen, this was not the case in Utrecht. Yet, this bias hindered a thorough investigation of the abundant, though dispersed, archival material. The record publications that ensued and the commentaries that were written upon them also betrayed this prejudice.[49] It hindered historians from seeing the specific nature of the early reformation in Utrecht,

[49] For instance in the *BHG* 1851, a collection of *data* on the early reformist movement in Utrecht has been published. This record was the basis of later historical research. Of the events in 1534 only the abjuration of 4 heretics was listed in the *BHG*, but not the subsequent amnesty for 13 men and women who had actually been rebaptized. Until now all historians failed to detect them. Next to this there are many mistakes in the interpretation of these recordings, due to the fact that the editors were not well enough informed on the situation in Utrecht. Later historians often repeated these mistakes, as they did not check the published data. Especially on the history of the early reformation in Utrecht there circulate many views which are simply not factual.

where a lively interest in humanist and evangelical ideas and ideals coincided with a tolerant and prudent government policy in religious affairs that consequently did not emphasize heretical events.[50] Only through new research in the archives could opinions be adjusted. This process led to a reevaluation of the actual functioning of the catholic church and to a new understanding of the impact of religion at a local level in an important sixteenth century Netherlandish city: more light was shed on the circulation of religious ideas and on the interaction between the authorities and the inhabitants of the city. In my opinion the advantage of this analysis is that it leads to a more nuanced appreciation of Dutch sixteenth century society. Put in relationship to present-day society, which is burdened by growing cultural and religious differences and conflicts, and above all by mutual misunderstanding, such a nuanced attitude is of great importance. It may help to get a more balanced view of the historical roots of internal relationships, and as a result put local events in a wider perspective.

[50] See note 11.