

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 inquisitionis 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 000²) 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

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 vi 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 sententiaris*): 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 Stadtreform* [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 remèdes!*

deutschen Augustiner-Eremiten, DI 5: Die sächsisch-thüringische Provinz und die sächsische 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/Provost; 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 doctoer 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' (colophon 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 yet¹⁹. 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 Wittenberg²⁵ 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 Reformationgeschichte nützlicher Urkunden*. 4 vols (Leipzig), vol 2, pp 484-493: 'XXII: Heinrich von Zutphen Sätze wider die Privat-Messe, aus dem von Spalatinus 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 Melancthon celebrated Holy Supper together with his students, sharing bread and wine. One of Hendrik’s promoters, 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.

Bibliography

[Original sources quoted in the text/footnotes]

[Secondary sources quoted in the footnotes]

General studies on the Early Reformation and the Augustinians:

Bubenheimer, Ulrich. (2023). *Wittenberg 1517-1522. Diskussions-, Aktionsgemeinschaft und Stadtreformation* (Thomas Kaufmann & Alejandro Zorzin, Eds). Mohr-Siebeck.

Christman, Robert. (2020). *The dynamics of the Early Reformation in their Reformed Augustinian context*. Amsterdam University Press.

Christman, Victoria. (2015). *Pragmatic toleration. The politics of religious heterodoxy in Early Reformation Antwerp, 1515-1555*. Boydell & Brewer.

General studies on women and the Reformation (often not dealing with the beginnings):

Bainton, Roland. (1971). *Women of the Reformation in Germany and Italy*. Augsburg Publishing House (reprint 2001, Academic Renewal Press).

Stjerna, Kirsi. (2009). *Women and the Reformation*. Wiley Blackwell (for biographical introductions, theological interpretation, and methodological discussion).

Wyntjes, Sherrin Marshall. (1984). Women and religious choices in the sixteenth century Netherlands. *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 13, 276vv. Gütersloher.

Wyntjes, Sherrin Marshall. (1987). *The Dutch gentry, 1500-1650: Family, faith, and fortune*. Greenwood Press.