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INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 1566, some fifty Calvinist preachers made their way to the Netherlands from churches in England, Germany, France and Switzerland.[1] A clandestine Reformed[2] movement had existed there for many years, and when the government issued a decree which limited the activities of the Inquisition against heresy in April, many ministers in exile returned home expecting to witness the beginning of religious toleration. In the early summer they began preaching publicly to huge audiences in the countryside. Then, in August, small bands of Reformers broke into the churches and demolished the images of Catholic worship; within a few days the iconoclasts had destroyed the interiors of over four hundred churches in Flanders alone. Triumphant, the Calvinists moved into the 'purified' churches and began holding formal religious services, but within a few months they found themselves under siege by government troops. When the Duke of Alva arrived from Spain in 1567 to inflict the king's punishment on the heretics, the era of Reformed worship, and Reformed violence, was already over; contemporaries called it the Wonderyear.

Those ministers who did not escape were executed, and when the execution was by fire, the royal official sometimes fastened a small bag of gunpowder to the chest of the victim. When the gunpowder exploded the priests told the assembly that it was the noise made by the Devil escaping from the corpse of the heretic.

This drama of martyrdom is tragic in itself, but it is also significant as a historical problem, because the three figures of the drama – priest, martyr,

[1] By 'Netherlands' I mean the provinces of Brabant, Flanders, Hainaut, Liège, Artois. My reasons for limiting this study to the southern provinces are chiefly practical, but there is also some historical justification for this division. Antwerp was the center of the Reformed movement in the south, Emden in the north. The south was partly French-speaking and the Walloon ministers corresponded mainly with churches in France and Geneva, while the north was almost entirely Dutch-speaking, and had closer relations with churches in Germany and England.

[2] I have used the term 'Reformed' interchangeably with 'Calvinist,' as contemporaries did. In chapter 3 I have used the term 'Protestant' in connection with the early evangelical movement in the Netherlands, to distinguish these reformers from those who were explicitly allied with Calvin after 1544.

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audience – personify all of the discrete elements of the Reformation on which historians have focused their attention. Observing the drama from a distance, the three figures seem to be irreconcilably opposed and isolated from one another; the priest manipulates the ignorant populace by magical tricks which he himself does not believe; the martyr remains detached and spiritual, certain of his membership in God's Elect; and the passive audience simply watches, acted upon by forces which it does not comprehend. This is the way many historians, observing the Reformed movement from a distance, have chosen to analyze the disparate elements of that movement. They describe the corrupt bureaucracy of the Church and the properties of ecclesiastical magic as opposed to the fanaticism and spirituality of the Calvinist leaders, whom they designate as members of the 'magisterial' Reformation. They have also perceived a dichotomy between the magisterial Reformation, which they describe as organized, intellectual, and political, and the radical Reformation – those movements of social upheaval involving the lower classes of society, which they describe with phrases like 'inchoate,' 'inarticulate,' 'violent,' 'anarchistic.'

I began this study of the Troubles with the intention of describing one group of figures in the drama, the Calvinist ministers who were active in 1566. My assumption was that the ministers who preached in the years before the Dutch Revolt were similar in importance to the Huguenot pastors who fomented the civil wars in France, or to the radical Puritans in England. I was hoping to verify what many historians of the Netherlands had already assumed; that Calvinist ideology and organization created a radical, underground movement in the years before the Troubles, and that this clandestine movement, combined with the factors of economic unrest and political upheaval, led to a popular explosion of hostility against both Church and government in 1566, and ultimately to the Dutch Revolt. But as I became more familiar with the background and character of these ministers, I realized that they simply did not conform to the image which I had provided for them. Far from being a disciplined corps of Calvinist fanatics, the men who preached in the Netherlands were not even certain what it was to be a minister; three years before the Troubles they sent a mission to the church at Emden to inquire whether ordination was necessary to preach the Word of God.[3] The ministers also wondered about the political implications of Cal-

[3] Since the standards for distinguishing pastors from lay preachers were so vague during this early period of the Reformation, I have defined as a minister every preacher in 1566 who was involved in the activities of the orthodox Reformed movement in the years before the Troubles – either as a minister or as a member of an established church. Those who had no apparent connections with the movement and who preached during the Troubles are analyzed as lay preachers in chapter 6.

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vinist ideology. Several were political radicals, an equal number were conservative, and almost all were obsessed by the importance of defending themselves as members of a legitimate movement in support of the Catholic government.

Thus the ministers who directed the Netherlands Reformed movement did not perceive the doctrines of Calvin as intrinsically revolutionary, and they certainly did not perceive themselves as members of a united revolutionary vanguard. On the contrary, the ministers saw the figures in the drama not as fixed entities, but as alternatives among which a choice had to be made. In exile, they had to decide whether or not they would compromise their religious principles in order to protect their congregations; at home, they had to decide whether or not they should give up the luxury of being 'fanatic Calvinists' in order to ally with the local Catholic nobility; in 1566, they had to decide to what extent they would encourage popular violence for the sake of the Reformed movement. In short, their interest as a historical subject lies in this: that we can observe, in concrete terms, how individuals tried to span the gap between an elitist Reformed movement and a spontaneous popular upheaval, between formalized religion – involving organized consistories, standards of behavior and inflexible doctrine – and a mass movement involving public demonstrations, the leadership of untrained lay preachers, and violence.

But once having questioned the popular conception of the Calvinist clergy as a corps of disciplined fanatics, and of Calvinism itself as a doctrine whose implications were fundamentally radical, we must also consider the broader question of the nature of charismatic leadership. For if the ministers who preached during the Troubles were not as united and purposeful as the Huguenot or Puritan pastors, how can we explain their popularity during the summer of 1566? Certainly the Reformed movement in the Netherlands cannot be viewed as a drama between the ignorant masses and the enlightened few, and we cannot explain the public preaching or the iconoclasm simply by discovering who planned these events; we must ask instead what needs the preaching and iconoclasm fulfilled in both the minister and his audience. My argument is that the ministers were accepted as popular leaders not because of their superior dedication and methods of organization; still less was their success a product of their commitment to a unique and radical ideology. On the contrary, it was the ministers' concern to appear as leaders of a legitimate, politically conservative Reformed movement that attracted their audience to them during the summer of the hedgepreaching. The ministers were regarded by their adherents not as prophets of freedom from the dictates of the Catholic government, but as reformers who were also defenders of the traditional social and political hierarchy.

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The sources for this study fall into two main categories: the writings of the ministers themselves, and the information collected by the Catholic government which persecuted them. A good deal of the ministers' correspondence has been published, along with the consistory records of the refugee churches in London. The ministers' published works – religious tracts, public letters to the magistrates, Confessions and poems – were consulted in manuscript form or in the sixteenth century editions which have survived; the writings of a very few pastors, such as Guy de Brès, have been re-edited by modern scholars. Information about the ministers' activities was also available in the diaries or 'daybooks' of contemporaries who witnessed the Troubles, and in the reports of the Council of Troubles, an agency set up by the Spanish government to seek out and punish heretics. All of these sources are biased to some degree. The official reports were based largely on hearsay, or on information extracted under torture, and almost every account was written either by a partisan of the movement or by the Reformers' enemies. But these diaries, letters and trial records are useful not merely as sources of information about the ministers' personal background; they make it possible to distinguish between the ministers' own perception of their goals and capabilities and their actual impact upon outsiders, and in this context the subjective nature of the literary evidence is a positive advantage to the historian.

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I
THE TROUBLES

> I cannot write you in ten sheets of paper the strange sight I saw there – organs and all, destroyed! [...] Yet they that thus did, never looked towards any spoil, but break all in pieces, and let it lie underfoot...[and] as I do not understand they neither said nor did anything to the nuns: but when all was broken, left it there, and so departed.
>
> Richard Clough, describing the iconoclasm at Antwerp in 1566.

> A Protestant crowd corners a baker guarding the holy-wafer box in Saint-Médard's church in Paris in 1561. 'Messieurs,' he pleads, 'do not touch it for the honor of Him who dwells here.' 'Does your god of paste protect you now from the pains of death?' was the Protestant answer before they killed him.
>
> Natalie Davis, describing the iconoclasm at Paris in 1561.

HEDGEPREACHING

To many contemporary observers, both Reformed and Catholic, the beginning of the public preaching in the spring of 1566 seemed abrupt and somehow awesome. A Catholic burgher wrote in his diary that the preaching 'spread rapidly like the fire which a stormy wind quickly stirs up here and there in the straw...'[1] Everyone had been expecting some kind of apocalyptic change: the Protestants looked forward to an imminent restoration of the true faith, while the Catholic clergy worried about the possibility of religious toleration. And there had recently been signs that the change would occur very soon. At Ghent the annual *ommegang* or religious procession was cancelled because of certain portents: the altar of the Virgin which was being prepared for display had burned down, while another fire had destroyed the great bridge at Mainz. This, wrote a chronicler, signified the dismemberment of France and Germany.[2]

[1] M. van Vaernewijck, *Troubles religieux en Flandre et dans les Pays-Bas au XVIe siècle*, trans. H. van Duyse, I (Ghent, 1905), p. 26.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 64–5.

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In retrospect, we can see that contemporaries were wrong to be shocked about the hedgepreaching, for members of the Protestant movement had been continuously active in the Netherlands for nearly half a century. The Lutherans, or 'Martinists,' had circulated forbidden literature since the 1520s; they and the Anabaptists were already holding secret conventicles when the first Calvinist pastor from Geneva arrived at Tournai in 1544. The Calvinists proceeded to form consistories and synods, and had even begun to organize public religious services in Tournai, Valenciennes and West Flanders when the Catholic government forced them underground in 1563. The Calvinists had also established contacts with members of the German and Netherlands nobility. In December, 1565, when a group of Protestant nobles met at Brussels to form a League in support of religious toleration (the famous Compromise), it was a Calvinist pastor, Franciscus Junius, who delivered the opening prayers.[3] Junius also collaborated with the noble Marnix of Thoulouse on a series of pamphlets which, along with ballads, cartoons and songs, inundated the country in the spring of 1566. Propaganda of another sort emanated from the churches themselves, in the sermons of Catholic priests who had become Reformed sympathizers. One priest, Cornelis Huberti, was arrested and tried as a Lutheran in 1565. 'There are many wolves,' Huberti preached, 'who want to divert us from Christianity to idolatry...there are now many who wear the spiritual habit and are hypocrites...Had the whore of Babylon and Antichrist not dominated so long, the lambs should not suffer what they suffer...'[4] Another apostate priest called Kackhoes (Shithouse) by his enemies, became notorious in the neighborhood of Maastricht for his heretical sermons, delivered in the spring of 1566 to an audience of burghers and notables. After reading a biblical text Kackhoes began to fulminate against the Host, calling it 'the baked God' and denying 'that our Lord should enter into bread.'[5]

Finally, in April 1566, a group of nobles called the 'Confederates' presented a public request to the Regent, Margaret of Parma; they demanded that the Inquisition be abolished along with the King's edicts against heresy, and that religious policy be decided at a meeting of the Estates General. Margaret hedged by offering a 'Moderation' which effectively suspended the edicts. Immediately, hundreds of Reformers who had fled the Netherlands in order to escape prosecution by the Inquisition returned home, and the Walloon minister Jean Taffin wrote to Beza that at last the time had come when the true religion might be practiced in freedom, and that Beza himself

[3] M. L. van Deventer, *Het jaar 1566* (The Hague, 1856), pp. 16–17.
[4] Fl. Prims, *Het wonderjaar (1566–1567)*, 2nd ed. (Antwerp, 1941), p. 93.
[5] W. Bax, *Het protestantisme in het bisdom Luik en vooral te Maastricht 1557–1612* (The Hague, 1941), p. 128.

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should visit the Netherlands and assist in the triumph of the Reformed cult.[6]

Thus the apocalyptic mood which pervaded the country in the spring of 1566 was largely the creation of the Reformers themselves as well as of factors, like the rise in unemployment and the agitations of the Confederates, which had little to do with religion. But the Calvinist consistories did not initiate the hedgepreaching; in this sense the nocturnal, clandestine services which took place in the countryside of Flanders *were* spontaneous, even awesome. On the night of May 28, a young monk named Carolus Daneel fled his cloister in Ypres and began preaching in the area, attracting a large personal following. The prior of the cloister wrote to Daneel, pleading with him, as a respected member of the Augustinian order, to return, but he received no reply.[7] In June, the magistrates of Ypres informed the Regent that 'lately' meetings of more than one thousand had been held in the open fields by another apostate monk named Antonius Algoet, who had only recently left the cloister.[8] These early hedgepreachers were certainly Reformers in spirit, but they were not formal Calvinists; in fact, the first public meeting outside Antwerp in May was conducted by a former priest whose religious affiliation was described as Lutheran.[9] The Calvinist consistory at Antwerp sanctioned, and attempted to canalize these popular demonstrations only after the fact. At a series of consistory meetings in May and June, it was decided 'to do what the Flemings had been doing for some time, to assemble our community in public and hold our *prêches* openly.'[10] Pastors in exile were summoned home, and the minister Ambroise Wille transmitted the order, which stated that the Confederate nobles had authorized the preaching, to the consistories of Tournai and Valenciennes.

The hedgepreaching started in the industrial districts of Flanders, where large numbers of workers had already responded to Calvinist propaganda. At Ghent the early congregations consisted of 'a group of unsavory-looking people...foreign workers who had come to our city as apprentices...'[11] The

[6] Boer, *Hofpredikers van prins Willem van Oranje. Jean Taffin en Pierre Loyseleur de Villiers*, v (The Hague, 1952), p. 23.

[7] H.-Q. Janssen, *De kerkhervorming in Vlaanderen* (Arnhem, 1868), pp. 276–7. This may not have been the first outdoor service. One chronicler reported a meeting in Ghent as early as April (P. de Jonghe, *Gendsche geschiedenissen*, I (Ghent, 1746), pp. 5–6).

[8] I. L. A. Diegerick, ed., *Documents du XVIe siècle, archives d'Ypres*, I (Bruges, 1874), pp. 152–3.

[9] Prims, *Het wonderjaar*, p. 99. The Calvinists' first formal service at Antwerp was on June 24.

[10] F. Junius, *Francisci Junii theologileidensis vita*, ed. Daniel Gerdes, *Scrinium antiquarium*, I (Groningen, 1749), pp. 46–50.

[11] Van Vaernewijck, *Troubles*, I, p. 21.

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ritual of these early meetings was primitive. The preacher at Ghent 'had taken for a pulpit the ladder of a mill. The congregation. . .invited passers-by to join them to hear the "Word of God", as they called it.' The minister, who spoke the dialect of a town in Flanders, was bareheaded and dressed in grey; he held a book from which he occasionally read a text and then delivered a sermon, admonishing sinners and praying for the enlightenment of king and pope. The congregation sat in rows, divided into three groups of about thirty each, and each held a booklet of psalms which sold for a *denier*. Van Vaernewijck had this from his laundress, who found the *prêche* edifying, 'like many people of little sense.'[12]

But van Vaernewijck, whose first response to the *prêches* was indifferent and condescending, soon observed with astonishment that the hedgepreaching had become a mass movement. Estimates of attendance ranged from seven to fourteen thousand auditors; some went as high as twenty-five thousand. Contemporaries were even more astonished by the increasing participation of respectable citizens. Among the men on horseback who were guarding the pastor at Ghent on July 3, commoners noticed the Count of Batembourg: 'Nobody could explain the attitude of these gentlemen,' wrote van Vaernewijck, 'for, among the thousands of people who streamed to the *prêches*, one saw only those of low extraction, those who had nothing to lose.'[13] But by July even people with a great deal to lose had joined the congregations: women with golden necklaces, city notables, even members of the Council of Flanders. At Tournai the magistrates reported that at one meeting there were over a hundred men on horseback, 'as many gentlemen, bourgeois and merchants as peasants.'[14] What seemed to have been a popular movement emanating from the lower classes, appealing as much to a desire for charity as the desire for prayer, soon encompassed all elements of society. Originally the magistrates hesitated to interrupt the meetings because of the enthusiasm of the Calvinists, but by mid-summer many of these same magistrates had joined the Reformed congregations – and all of them carried weapons.

Although armed preaching was everywhere carried on since July, there had been few actual incidents of violence; people marched to and from the *prêche* in battle formation, but quietly. Certain ministers, however, became notorious for actions which the Catholics regarded as provocative. At Ypres, two preachers (Antoine Algoet and Jacques de Buzère) entered the city from opposite sides, Algoet accompanied by fifty men, Buzère by two thousand. The two groups marched through the city singing psalms, and then left with-

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 21.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 26.
[14] A. Hocquet, *Tournai et le Tournaisis au XVIe siècle au point de vue politique et social* (Brussels, 1906), p. 318.

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out incident.[15] At Tournai, Ambroise Wille boasted in a sermon that if he were killed, fifty thousand men were ready to avenge his death; he also announced that in two weeks he hoped to have the power and means to preach inside the city.[16] At Ghent, Herman Moded held a secret meeting at which he was said to have recruited troops.[17] Still another incident was reported by Richard Clough, an Englishman living at Antwerp.[18]

> As on Saturday last, was a proclamation. . .that no man should go to the sermons upon pain of hanging; whereupon on Sunday. . .went out of the town. . .above sixteen thousand persons, all with their weapons in battle array; and so, after the sermon [they] returned to the town, and went to the high bailiff's house (who had taken one preacher prisoner two or three days before) and commanded him to deliver the prisoner; which he refused. Whereupon they went to the prison and brake it, and delivered the preacher; and so, everyone departed.

Elsewhere the Calvinists, who had been unsuccessfully requesting permission to preach inside the city walls, entered the cities by force. At Bois-le-Duc ('s-Hertogenbosch) Cornelis Walraeven preached outside the city until mid-August, when he led the congregation through a gate and took up lodgings in the town.[19] Even more ominous was a meeting of the ministers and the Confederates at St Trond (St Truiden) in July, when the Protestant nobles agreed to protect the Reformed church in return for funds donated by the consistories – money which would be used to raise German troops in case the April Request was rejected by Philip.[20]

Another incident which occurred on August 10 was less radical, but perhaps even more insolent. Four ministers who had traveled from Ghent to Bruges to hold services took advantage of a rainstorm to preach inside a church. The magistrates objected and the ministers withdrew and preached in the cemetery.[21] This 'invasion' of a church adumbrated the type of violence which was to occur during the following weeks. The next day Clough wrote, 'as far as I can learn, these matters will break out, and that out of hand. . . God be merciful unto them, and to us all. For and if they do once begin, it

[15] Diegerick, *Documents*, I, pp. 53–5.
[16] Hocquet, *Tournai*, p. 318. Taken from a report of the magistrates, who may have exaggerated Wille's boasts.
[17] C. Blenk, 'Hagepreek en beeldenstorm in 1566. Een historische analyse,' *Hagepreek en Beeldenstorm* (1966), p. 23.
[18] J. W. Burgon, *The Life and Times of Thomas Gresham*, II (London, 1839), p. 132. Letter to Gresham, July, 1566.
[19] BWK Prot., II, p. 485.
[20] C. Paillard, *Huit mois de la vie d'un peuple* (Brussels, 1877), pp. 165–73. The ministers were not admitted to the meetings; their requests were submitted in writing. They agreed to keep the peace and do nothing against the king or the local magistrates; in turn they were promised protection by the Confederates.
[21] H.-Q. Janssen, *De kerkhervorming te Brugge* (Rotterdam, 1856), p. 49.

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will be a bloodie time; for it is marvelous to see how the common people are bent against the papists.'[22]

ICONOCLASM

In the end it happened that some of the baser sort, meaning to show an inconsiderate zeal unto their religion...advanced and encouraged each other to beat down images and crosses set up in the highways. Then they went to chapels and so to churches and monasteries in the country, and in the end to towns...so as the insolencie of these base people, and of some women and children, exceeding all temper and modestie, broke down and beat down all images, crucifixes, altars, tables...and generally that which was displeasing unto their eyes.[23]

The image-breaking of 1566, like the hedgepreaching which preceeded it, was not the first such event in recent memory. Many Netherlands preachers had originally come from France, where iconoclasm had occurred in 1561. In the Netherlands itself, the placard of 1550 already mentioned those who broke images and statues, and in 1562 the Council wrote to Margaret complaining that some gentlemen passing through on their way to France had beaten down roadside crucifixes and icons with their swords. In May, 1566, during a Mass at Audenarde, a young bourgeois named Hans Tuscaens suddenly grabbed the Host from the priest, crying that it was merely bread and that the worship of men was idolatry.[24] In July, the bailiff of Furnes testified in a report to Margaret about the plundering of churches and cloisters in the area.[25] In fact, hostility to images was apparently endemic in the popular culture of the time. Van Vaernewijck described a procession at which a statue of St Anthony was carried through the streets; it became the custom to treat the statue as an object of mockery, tossing it back and forth until it was lost in the sand.[26]

The image-breaking of 1566 probably shocked contemporaries less because it was sacrilegious than because the movement was so explosive and so thorough. In less than two weeks, acts of iconoclasm were committed in

[22] Burgon, *The Life and Times*, p. 137. Letter of Clough to Gresham, August 11. At Tournai a priest, hearing a clapping sound outside the church, fell as though dead, thinking that the Confederates, who now called themselves the Beggars, were attacking him. It turned out to be a boy who was beating two bladders against the walls of the church to dry them out; he had been using them as water wings. (Pasquier de la Barre, *Mémoires*, ed. Alex. Pinchart, I (Brussels, 1859), pp. 108–9).

[23] J. F. Petit, *A General History of the Netherlands* (London, 1609), p. 400.

[24] J. Russe, 'Le procès et le martyre de Hans Tuscaens à Audenarde en 1566,' BSHPB (1953), pp. 90–122.

[25] Blenk, 'Hagepreek..., p. 28.

[26] Van Vaernewijck, *Troubles*, I, pp. 65–6.

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