Reformation in the Low Countries, 1500–1620

This accessible general history of the Reformation in the Netherlands traces the key developments in the process of reformation – both Protestant and Catholic – across the whole of the Low Countries during the sixteenth century. Synthesizing fifty years’ worth of scholarly literature, Christine Kooi focuses particularly on the political context of the era: how religious change took place against the integration and disintegration of the Habsburg composite state in the Netherlands. Special attention is given to the Reformation’s role in both fomenting and fuelling the Revolt against the Habsburg regime in the later sixteenth century, as well as how it contributed to the formation of the region’s two successor states, the Dutch Republic and the Southern Netherlands. Reformation in the Low Countries, 1500–1620 is essential reading for scholars and students of early modern European history, bringing together specialized, contemporary research on the Low Countries in one volume.

Christine Kooi is the Lewis, Katheryn and Benjamin Price Professor of History at Louisiana State University. She writes on the religious history of the early modern Low Countries and is the author of Liberty and Religion: Church and State in Leiden’s Reformation (2000) and Calvinists and Catholics during Holland’s Golden Age: Heretics and Idolaters (Cambridge University Press, 2012), as well as numerous essays and articles.
Reformation in the Low Countries, 1500–1620

Christine Kooi

Louisiana State University
In fond memory of my grandparents,
Reformed Netherlands all
Contents

List of Illustrations .......................... viii
List of Maps .................................... ix
Acknowledgments ............................... x
A Note on Nomenclature ....................... xii
List of Abbreviations ........................... xiii

Introduction .................................... 1

1 The Netherlands in the Early Sixteenth Century 15
““The Lands Over Here” 15
The Habsburg Composite State 20
The Church 27

2 Inchoate Reformation ......................... 46
Evangelicals 47
Anabaptists 57
Reaction 63

3 The Confessional Turn ........................ 74
From Anabaptist to Mennonite 77
Reformed Protestantism 83
Catholic Reform 95

4 War ........................................ 105
The Wonderyear 110
Repression and Exile 117
Revolutionary Reformation 122
Reconquest and Consolidation 134

5 Schism ...................................... 141
The Southern Netherlands: Catholic Reformation 143
The Dutch Republic: Protestantism and Pluralism 161

Conclusion .................................. 182
The Wider Context .......................... 189

Bibliography ................................ 197
Index ..................................... 217

vii
Illustrations

1.1 Tower of the Church of Saint Rumbold, Mechelen. City of Mechelen page 28
1.2 Anonymous, *Lamentation with the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin*, 1507. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam 33
2.1 (Copy of?) Barend Dircksz, *Terechtstelling van twee wederdopers*, 1525–1545. Amsterdam Museum 72
3.1 Title page of Biestkens Bible, 1560. University Library, Free University of Amsterdam 84
4.1 Frans Hogenberg, *Presentation of the Petition by the Compromise of the Nobility*, 1566–1570. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam 109
5.1 Anton Günter Gheringh, *Jesuit Church in Antwerp*, 1662–1668. National Trust, United Kingdom 151
5.2 Illustration from Richard Verstegan, *Théâtre des cruautez des hérétiques de nostre temps*, 1587. Bibliothèque nationale de France 160
5.3 Anonymous, *The Synod of Dordrecht*, 1618. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam 168
5.4 Adriaen Pietersz van de Venne, *Fishing for Souls*, 1614. Rijksmuseum Amsterdam 180
Maps

1.1 The Low Countries in 1566  
1.2 Diocesan boundaries in the Low Countries before 1559  
3.1 Diocesan boundaries in the Low Countries after 1559  
5.1 The Low Countries in 1609
Acknowledgments

I think that I have always wanted to write this book. I have wanted to write it at least since the days I roamed the stacks of Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University as a graduate student, fingering dusty volumes on the history of the Reformation in the Low Countries. A work of synthesis, however, is best done later in one’s career, and so after thirty or so years of seasoning I offer this volume as an attempt to fill a lacuna in the historiography. It has been a labor of love in all the senses of those words.

First I would like to offer some institutional thanks: I am grateful to the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Louisiana State University (LSU) for providing me with both grants and leave time to research and write this book. My particular thanks go to the Inter-library Loan Office of LSU Library for its heroic work in securing for me books on obscure topics from faraway libraries, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other side of the Atlantic I spent many happy hours working on this project in the Royal Library in The Hague, a congenial venue for scholarship of all varieties. Since 2013 I have presented portions of this work at an array of conferences and meetings in such far-flung places as San Juan, Leuven, Wittenberg, Bologna, Ghent, Dordrecht, Kampen and Grand Rapids. I warmly thank my hosts at each of these occasions for their invitations to talk about this project.

At the Free University of Amsterdam’s Centre for the History and Heritage of Protestantism I finished a preliminary draft of the manuscript. My appreciation goes to my hosts, Mirjam van Veen and August den Hollander, for providing time and space for the project and for doing it so collegially. Likewise the H. H. Meeter Center for Calvin Studies at Calvin University offered me a month to complete the last touches on the manuscript before submission to Cambridge University Press. I thank Karin Maag, Paul Fields and Deborah Snider for their help during my visit. And, as ever, my heartfelt gratitude goes to René Vanhaelen for continually providing me with a home during my stays in the Netherlands.
Acknowledgments

This manuscript found a home with Cambridge University Press, a storied publishing house with which I am proud to be affiliated. My thanks go to Liz Friend-Smith of the Press for her interest in the manuscript and for her work in bringing it to fruition.

My LSU colleague Leslie Tuttle and Mirjam van Veen of the Free University of Amsterdam kindly read, from very different perspectives, an early iteration of the manuscript. Bits and pieces of it have also been read by Lee Wandel, Jesse Spohnholz and the members of the online workgroup affectionately known as “Paapse Stoutigheden.” All of their comments have improved the manuscript substantially, and I appreciate their taking the time to read my work. My thanks also to the Winter Writing Group of Ray Ball, Kathleen Comerford and Liz Lehfeldt for the occasional and much-needed cheerleading as I slogged through the writing process.

This book rests on the work of many fine scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, some of whom I have known personally. My special thanks go to Alastair Duke for encouraging me in this endeavor from the beginning; he appreciates better than most how complicated an undertaking this has been. The time I have spent working on this book was punctuated by the presidency of the Sixteenth Century Studies Conference in 2017; it was a privilege to shepherd, briefly, such a vital and convivial community of scholars of all things early modern.

Over the course of thirty years working in the field of Netherlandish history, I have had many colleagues in early modern European history ask me to recommend a good overview on the Reformation in the Low Countries. It took some time, but I hope this work will provide them with at least some of the insight they sought.
A Note on Nomenclature

This book is about a place that has historically been difficult to name. It uses the terms “Low Countries,” “Netherlands” and “Netherlandish” interchangeably to describe the collection of territories that in sixteenth-century Europe was tucked in between the western border of the Holy Roman Empire and the northern border of the kingdom of France. This region corresponds roughly to the present-day Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg, as well as to northern parts of the French Republic. Today these are of course all sovereign states, but back then they were mostly gathered under the composite monarchy of the Habsburg dynasty and so here they are referred to as the “Habsburg Netherlands.” The adjective “Dutch” is limited to those parts and peoples of the region that were either Dutch-speaking or that came under the control of insurgents starting in the 1570s, provinces that formed the nucleus of the eventual Dutch Republic. Those parts of the region that remained under or were restored to Habsburg control in the later 1500s are referred to as the “Southern” or “archducal” Netherlands. “Reformation” is used as a shorthand, nonsectarian term for the many momentous and enduring religious changes that took place during this period: the rebellion against the established church and the concomitant emergence of new types of Christianity, as well as the reinvigoration of Catholicism.
Abbreviations

AGKKN Archief voor de Geschiedenis van de Katholieke Kerk in Nederland
AGN Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden
AHN Acta Historiae Neerlandica
ARG Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte
BMGN Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden
BRN Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica
NAGN Nieuwe Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden
NAKG Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis
SCJ Sixteenth Century Journal
TvG Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis