

## The Convent of Wesel

The Convent of Wesel was long believed to be a clandestine assembly of Protestant leaders in 1568 that helped establish foundations for Reformed churches in the Dutch Republic and northwest Germany. However, Jesse Spohnholz shows that this event did not happen but was an idea created and perpetuated by historians and record keepers since the 1600s. Appropriately, this book offers not just a fascinating snapshot of Reformation history but a reflection on the nature of historical inquiry itself. *The Convent of Wesel* begins with a detailed microhistory that unravels the mystery and then traces knowledge about the document at the center of the mystery over four and a half centuries, through historical writing, archiving, and centenary commemorations. Spohnholz reveals how historians can inadvertently align themselves with protagonists in the debates they study and thus replicate errors that conceal the dynamic complexity of the past.

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# The Convent of Wesel

*The Event that Never was and  
the Invention of Tradition*

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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-316-64354-9 — The Convent of Wesel  
Jesse Spohnholz  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India  
79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781316643549](http://www.cambridge.org/9781316643549)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108140492

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First published 2017

First paperback edition 2020

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

ISBN 978-1-107-19311-6 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-316-64354-9 Paperback

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## Acknowledgments

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In writing this book, I reflected on the intellectual, social, and cultural contexts of the production of knowledge, including of my own ideas. Some of my inheritances I have tried to keep at a critical distance; others, I warmly embrace. The ideas developed here have been shaped by conversations and intellectual exchanges with a wide variety of people. I would thank a few by name. At Washington State University, I shared ideas for this book and learned from warm and gracious colleagues, including Todd Butler, Steve Kale, Michael Myers, Matt Sutton, Jeff Sanders, Emily Anderson, Clif Stratton, and Lawrence Hatter. Others in North America to whom I am deeply thankful include Carina Johnson, David M. Luebke, Beth Plummer, Merry Wiesner-Hanks, Susan Karant-Nunn, Christine Kooi, Jared Poley, Ben Marschke, Howard Louthan, David Harris Sacks, Bruce Gordon, and Don Sinnema. I also thank colleagues in Europe, including Johannes Müller, Judith Pollmann, Geert Janssen, Erika Kuijpers, Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke, Ben Kaplan, Alexandra Walsham, Liesbeth Corens, and Eric Ketelaar. I also owe a particular debt to the faculty and staff of the Theology Faculty at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, where much of the final writing of this book was completed. In my time at the VU, I benefited from conversations and advice from Piet Visser, Anna Voolstra, Fred van Lieburg, Jan Krans, Jan van Booma, Jasper Vree, Leon van den Broeke, and Aza Goudriaan. Thanks also to the staff at Cambridge University Press, especially Lew Bateman for picking up this project and Liz Friend-Smith for taking over the reigns, as well as the peer reviewers and editors for their enthusiasm and suggestions. The people above, each in their own way, offered critical insights, recommendations, or corrections. Any errors, however, are my own.

I owe a special debt to the archivists and librarians who helped me. I must make special mention of Walter Stempel. Given our mutual interest in the Convent of Wesel and his generosity to me, I am saddened that he passed away before I was able to share this book with him. Other

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archivists who made a special effort to help include Bart Schuurman, Adriaan Plak, Ralf Schumacher, Kaj van Vliet, and most especially Martin Roelen at the Stadtarchiv Wesel. Thanks to all those working to catalog and protect inheritances from the past at the Evangelisches Kirchenarchiv Wesel, Stadtarchiv Wesel, Het Utrechts Archief, Het Zeeuws Archief, Stadsarchief Amsterdam, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Het Nationaal Archief, Theologische Universiteit Kampen, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Protestantische Theologische Universiteit, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Universiteit van Leiden, Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen (both in Düsseldorf and Detmold), Washington State University, and, yes, even at the Google Corporation.

I also owe a debt to all of my present and former students; many of the arguments articulated here germinated and developed in classes on early modern Europe, the Reformation, and historiography. While it might seem like it was I educating you, in fact, the process has always gone both ways. I would particularly thank Jennifer Binczewski, Chris Schlect, Alex Gannon, Jacob Wells, Emily Fradkin, Julia Stabler, Caryssa Murphy, Kristen Coan, and Jeff Turner for conversations that relate directly to this book.

Other conversations and discussions on the nature of historical inquiry and the Reformation that I draw on here were fostered and supported by the German Historical Institute, the German Studies Association, the British Academy, the Institute of Historical Research, the Sixteenth Century Society and Conference, the University of Cambridge, the University of Leiden, and the Association of Washington Historians. Funding and institutional support also came from the Faculty of Theology at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and the History Department and College of Arts and Sciences at Washington State University.

Finally, I owe the greatest debt to three people. First, Mirjam van Veen at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam provided financial, institutional, intellectual, and personal support. Her tenacity in helping me navigate the challenges of life abroad and her unceasing generosity can never be fully repaid. Her willingness to challenge my assumptions and learn with me in a cooperative spirit has also enriched my thinking. I cherish our friendship, both intellectual and velocopedic. Second, Ann Spohnholz fostered in me an independence of thought, habits of self-discipline, a willingness to challenge authority, and a desire to engage seriously with people who see the world differently. I owe much of who I am today to you. Finally, Sheri Six has provided tremendous personal, editorial, and intellectual support over the last

## Acknowledgments

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fifteen years that has helped me understand what I am doing as a historian, and how that connects to what I am doing in this world. I thank her for her willingness to uproot to Europe during this project, for joining me in exploring history across the centuries in museums, for reading and correcting drafts of my work, and for proving a sounding board for both my (personal and professional) fancies and frustrations. Thank you.



## Notes on Usage

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### Terminology

**Calvinism:** Until the nineteenth century, this term usually had a pejorative connotation. It was used by opponents of Reformed orthodoxy to identify that faith's supposedly foreign nature. Starting in the late nineteenth century, some orthodox Reformed in the Netherlands (but generally not in Germany) embraced the term to describe themselves. In general, I use the term either to describe the views of opponents of Reformed orthodoxy or the self-identity of Dutch Neo-Calvinists. In only a few other instances and only to avoid confusion, I have used "Calvinist" to refer to the specific strand within the Reformed tradition that was oriented toward the teachings of John Calvin. Calvinism is never treated as a synonym for Reformed Protestantism in this book.

**Dutch:** In most cases, this adjective refers either to speakers of the Dutch language or to the lands where Dutch is the most common language. After 1572, the adjective can also refer to the often-shifting rebel-held lands, even though there were Dutch speakers in Habsburg-controlled lands. After 1815, the term usually refers to people from the Kingdom of the Netherlands (which after 1830 excluded Belgium).

**Dutch Reformed Church:** The "Dutch Reformed Church" refers to the public church in the republic starting in 1572. For the period before 1572, I have used "Netherlandish Reformed churches" instead, to reflect the early aspirations of Protestants that they might establish a new state church for the entire seventeen provinces of the Low Countries.

**German:** This adjective refers to the people or characteristics of the German-speaking lands, which made up the majority of the Holy Roman Empire. Some territories in the empire were not German speaking, while some German speakers lived outside the boundaries of the empire. Linguistically, Germans along the Dutch border spoke a Lower

German dialect similar to the Dutch dialect spoken on the eastern borders of the Low Countries.

**Low Countries:** The term for the geographical region roughly equivalent to present-day Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and most of the French Nord-Pas-de Calais.

**Netherlands:** Before 1572 “Netherlands” or the adjective “Netherlandish” refers to the Low Countries as a whole. For the period after 1815, however, I use the “Netherlands” and “Dutch” to refer to the Kingdom of the Netherlands specifically. For a brief time (1815–30), the kingdom included most of the Low Countries. For the period after 1830, I used the terms “Netherlands” and “Dutch” only to refer to the northern lands of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, while most of the southern lands became Belgium.

**Reformed:** The term refers to a general religious tradition, including Calvinism and Zwinglianism. I have used “Reformed” to refer to the general tradition because it was how Reformation-era figures in that tradition used it to self-identify. Reformed Protestants of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries did not refer to themselves as Calvinists, though modern historians often refer to them as such. When attempting to distinguish those committed to the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and, later, the Canons of the Synod of Dordt, I have preferred the term “orthodox Reformed” to distinguish them from their opponents within the Reformed church.

### Spelling

I have often used English spellings, especially for cases in which that usage will not cause confusion. In addition, where multiple spellings of people’s names are available, I have used only one, usually either the most common; the most similar to modern conventions; or the most familiar to those readers unfamiliar with Dutch, French, German, or Latin.

## Abbreviations

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|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| CWO         | “De correspondentie van Willem van Oranje,”<br>Instituut voor Nederlands Geschiedenis. < <a href="http://www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/WVO">www.inghist.nl/Onderzoek/Projecten/WVO</a> >              |
| EKA<br>W    | Evangelisches Kirchenarchiv Wesel  |
| JPVD        | Personal Archive of Jan Pieter van Dooren, held in<br>the Faculteit der Godgeleerdheid, Vrije Universiteit<br>Amsterdam  |
| KB          | Koninklijke Bibliotheek (The Hague)  |
| Keller      | Ludwig Keller, ed., <i>Die Gegenreformation in<br/>     Westfalen und am Niederrhein</i> , 3 vols. (Leipzig:<br>S. Hirzel, 1881–85)  |
| LAV NRW OWL | <i>Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen Abteilung<br/>     Ostwestfalen-Lippe</i>  |
| LAV NRW R   | <i>Landesarchiv Nordrhein-Westfalen, Abteilung<br/>     Rheinland</i>  |
| NA          | Nationaal Archief (The Hague)  |
| NNBW        | <i>Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek</i><br>(Leiden: A. W. Sijthoffs Uitgevers-Maatschappij,<br>1911–37) < <a href="http://www.inghist.nl/retroboeken/nnbw">www.inghist.nl/retroboeken/nnbw</a> > |
| OSA         | Oud Synodaal Archief, 1566–1816  |
| SAA         | Stadsarchief Amsterdam   |
| SAW         | Stadtarchiv Wesel  |
| UTSC        | Universal Short Title Catalogue < <a href="http://www.ustc.ac.uk">www.ustc.ac.uk</a> >   |
| UA          | Het Utrechts Archief   |
| ZA          | Het Zeeuws Archief (Middelburg)  |

Cambridge University Press  
 978-1-316-64354-9 — The Convent of Wesel  
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Map



Map 1.1. Map of relevant locations in the Low Countries, Germany, and England.