

# THE FIRST LUTHERAN CONGREGATION: 1566–1585 AND BEYOND

by Gijsbertus van Hattem

ON SEPTEMBER 2, 1566, almost fifty years after the start of the Reformation on 31 October 1517, the first Lutheran church was officially organized in Antwerp. The European Lutheran Conference (ELC) was held in Antwerp in honor of this 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The scope of this paper cannot cover every detail of the 450-year history, but only some important points. After an historical introduction of the sixteenth century, the focus will be mainly on the Wonderyear, 1566–67, the years until 1585, the aftermath, and conclude with the Lutheran church in our times.

## Lutherans in Antwerp

This doesn't mean that there weren't Protestants or, more specifically, Lutherans, in the city of Antwerp during these fifty years.

Antwerp was a thriving city and in that time, after Paris, it was the largest European metropolis north of the Alps. By the middle of the sixteenth century, the population was around 100,000 inhabitants. Antwerp was an important trade center and through its port, merchandise from all over the world was distributed, like it is nowadays as well. Belonging to the *Hanze*, or Hanseatic League, a trade organization of cities in north and northwest Europe, it provided a residence for traders of many nationalities.<sup>1</sup>

Already right after the publication of Martin Luther's 95 Theses on and against indulgences, his ideas came to Antwerp to his order brothers at the Augustinian

monastery in the neighborhood of the church of St. Andrew. This monastery was founded in 1513 and had strong ties with Wittenberg. Jacob Praepositius, the prior, had been a student of Luther and came back to Antwerp in 1521. Other well-known names are those of Hendrik van Zutphen, who also studied at Wittenberg; Hendrik Voes;

Jan van Essen as well as several others. They openly announced the Reformation ideas and spoke against many wrong doctrines in the Roman Catholic Church. Many citizens accepted the new ideas. And then of course there were the German merchants who owned a big share of the trade in Antwerp and therefore also had a large influence in bringing the Reformation to the Low Countries. This all contributed to

a fairly large community of Lutherans in the beginning of the 1520s, although there are no numbers to prove it.<sup>2</sup>

## Persecution and First Martyrs of the Reformation

The reaction of the government came without delay. The so-called Low Countries, or the Netherlands, were

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<sup>1</sup> Lodovico Guicciardini, *Beschijvinghe van alle de Nederlanden; anderssins ghenoeemt Nederder-Duytschlandt* (Amsterdam, 1612), 49–104. Guido Marnef, *Antwerpen in de tijd van de Reformatie. Ondergronds protestantisme in een handelsmetropool 1550–1577* (Antwerpen, 1996), 21–90.

<sup>2</sup> Nicolaas Christiaan Kist, "De Pauselijke Aflaat-handel, ook in deszelfs invloed op de Kerk-Hervorming in Nederland," *Archief voor Kerkelijke Geschiedenis* 1 (Leyden 1829): 204. Nicolaas Christiaan Kist, "Nederlanders, in de XVIIde Eeuw, aan de Hoogeschool te Wittenberg, in de Theologie gegradueerd," *Archief voor Kerkelijke Geschiedenis* 5(16) (Leyden 1845): 346. "Jacobus Proost of Iperenses/Sprenger," *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlands protestantisme* (Deel 1978): 263–264. Paul Estié, *Het vluchtige bestaan van de eerste Nederlandse Lutherse gemeente. Antwerpen 1566–1567*, (Amsterdam, 1986), 7–9. Johannes Wilhelm Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme in de Nederlanden tot 1618*, (Haarlem, 1911), 23–24. Martin Jhering, *Wandlungen und Aufbrüche. Der Weg der Niederländische Gemeinde von Antwerpen nach Frankfurt am Main* (Frankfurt/M, 2014), 208. Johannes Cristoffel Schultz Jacobi, *Oud en nieuw uit de geschiedenis der Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 5 dln. (Rotterdam, 1862), 20–77.

The beginnings of any Lutheran church matter explains the Rev. Gijsbertus van Hattem in a paper delivered at the 24<sup>th</sup> European Lutheran Conference, Antwerp, Belgium.

part of the Holy Roman Empire of Charles V, who was born in Ghent (Flandres) in 1500. Antwerp was part of Brabant, as Brussels was. Charles V, as we all know, was not a friend of the new ideas. In April 1521, at the Diet in Worms, Luther was made an outlaw, and in Charles's whole empire actions against the Reformation were undertaken. He issued some laws against the heretics, the so-called *ketterplakkaten*, and fostered the Inquisition.

It did not take much time before the consequences were felt in Antwerp. In 1522, Prior Praepositius was imprisoned and recanted, but changed his mind again, and managed to get out of the city to become a pastor in Bremen until his death in 1562. The same happened to Van Zutphen, the new prior and he was also able to escape. Not so with Hendrik Voes and Jan van Essen. They were imprisoned, refused to recant, and on July 1, 1523, were executed at the Grote Markt in Brussels, burned at the stake for their adherence to the Reformation doctrine. They are considered the first two Lutheran martyrs, making this a date to certainly remember in seven years from now. The monastery of the Augustinians was already demolished in October 1522. When Luther heard about the execution, he wrote a comforting letter to the Christians in the Low Countries and composed a hymn, "Ein neues Lied wir heben an."<sup>3</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the secretary and archivist of Antwerp at the time started the endeavor of publishing the official documents of the city. The first volume was published in 1864 from a first series that would have thirty volumes, twenty of which were by him, and that are now known as the *Antwerps Archievenblad* (AA, Antwerp Archives Bulletin). The series starts with and covers mainly the sixteenth century and much important information can be found about the Reformation and the reaction against it. In connection to the above described we read for example about the prohibition to read and to sell writings of Luther:

**Boeken gemaekt door eenen geheeten broeder Lutherus niet te lesen, verkoopen of daarmede om te**

<sup>3</sup> Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 34. WA 12, 73–80, "A New Song Here Shall Be Begun," AE 53, 212–216. Jos E. Vercruysee, "De Antwerpse Augustijnen en de lutherse Reformatie, 1513–1523," *Trajecta* 16 (2007): 203.

**gaen, vermits deselve de ketterye smaeken, op de confiscatie ende verbeurte van hunne goederen en de nog personelyk te worden gestraft; geene famose libellen oft rondeelen en balladen te schryven, uyt te geven en voor kerkdoren en poorten te slaen en plekken tegens degene die geene Luthersadherenten syn ...**<sup>4</sup>

The *Antwerps Archievenblad* also contains lists of all the persons that because of their "heretic" faith were persecuted, imprisoned, and/or executed. This is a valuable and indispensable source for sixteenth century Antwerp history.

These volumes show that the repression of the so-called "heretics" was taken seriously. This also marked the atmosphere for the coming years and decades when many were persecuted and executed. People met secretly. Lutherans had questions about these hidden meetings and asked Luther for advice. Luther disapproved such meetings and suggested creating a house church for the household or to emigrate to a place where it was allowed to publicly profess the Lutheran doctrine. This inspired many to do so.<sup>5</sup>

### **Other Protestants**

By 1540, another reformation movement inspired by Jean Calvin (b. 1509, France) had gained strength in the Low Countries and

was by far more militant than the Lutheran Reformation. Luther himself actually did not engage with Calvinists as much as many think. He had more to do with the followers of Ulrich Zwingli (b. 1484), the Swiss reformer. And then there was a third, much smaller group, the Anabaptists, who were followers of Menno Simons (b. 1496, Friesland). They actually played a minor role in the events of the years to come, but were severely persecuted.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Antwerps Archievenblad*, I (22 Feb 1522), 172. Casper Christiaan Gerrit Visser, *Luther's Geschriften in de Nederlanden tot 1546* (Assen, 1969).

<sup>5</sup> Victoria Christman, *Pragmatic Toleration: The Politics of Religious Heterodoxy in Early Reformation Antwerp, 1515–1555* (Rochester, 2015), 36ff. Ferdinand Jacob Domela Nieuwenhuis, "Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis der 'Huijskercken,'" *Godgeleerde Bijdragen* 30 (Amsterdam 1855): 404–405. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 14–15. E.M. Braekman, "Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen," *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis* 70 (1987): 24–25.

<sup>6</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 36, note 61. Robert Van Roosbroeck, *Het Wonderjaar te Antwerpen 1566–1567. Inleiding tot de studie der*

The Antwerp Calvinists organized themselves and had established an unofficial congregation by 1550. By then the Antwerp city government had developed a more condescending behavior against the Protestants. Trade was more important, but not everything that the Protestants desired would be possible. But it allowed a certain freedom for the Protestants, as long they kept a low profile, and so they did, holding their meetings still in secret.<sup>7</sup>

Another important aspect that needs to be mentioned is that Antwerp developed itself in an important printing center. Another lecture today will focus especially on this subject. Where there is trade and money, there is also space for other segments of a civilization to flourish. The political situation was therefore largely influenced by the economic situation of the city.<sup>8</sup>

But changes were on their way. Charles V's health began to fail in his mid-forties. He had been considering abdication long before it became clear in the 1550s that Protestantism in Germany would have to be tolerated. He handed the Holy Roman Empire over to his brother, Ferdinand, in 1554, and in October 1555, in Brussels, he resigned the sovereignty of the Low Countries to his son, Philip of Spain (1527–1598). The following January 1556, he resigned Spain and Spanish America to Philip as well. In August he formally abdicated as Holy Roman Emperor and died in 1558. His son, Philip II, also inherited the Low Countries and had the strong purpose to have only one church in his kingdom, the Roman Catholic Church, and not tolerate Protestantism. In 1559 he left the government of the Low Countries to his older half-sister, Margaret, Duchess of Parma (b. 1522, the illegitimate daughter of Charles and Maria van der Gheynst). She governed there from 1559–1567 and from 1578–1582.

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godsdienstnlusten te Antwerpen van 1566 tot 15 (Antwerpen, 1930), 151.

<sup>7</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 15–17. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 45. Van Roosbroeck, *Emigranten. Nederlandse vluchtelingen in Duitsland (1550–1600)* (Leuven, 1968), 19. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 152, note 1.

<sup>8</sup> Francine de Nave, “Antwerpen, dissident drukkerscentrum in de 16de eeuw: algemene synthese,” *Antwerpen, dissident drukkerscentrum. De rol van de Antwerpse drukkers in de godsdienststrijd in Engeland (16de eeuw)* (Antwerpen 1994): 13–22.

Margaret seemed to be approachable and the lower nobility seized the opportunity. They made a covenant, and on April 6, 1566, they offered a petition to Margaret. They demanded that the Inquisition cease and that the *ketterplakkaten* be nullified. She did not give in right away, but desired a softer approach in combating the heretics. In reality, it was a victory for the *Geuzen*, as one of Margaret's advisors named them after they presented their petition and he tried to minimize it for her, saying: “Ce sont que des gueux” (French for “They are just beggars”). This nickname of *Geuzen* (the Beggars) was adopted by the nobility as an honorary title and it was very symbolic, since they promised fidelity to the king even to requiring the beggar's bag.<sup>9</sup>

The Lutherans eventually became closer to the Catholics than to the Calvinists. And then the church had also to deal with theological controversies from within, like if the bread should be broken at the consecration or not.

### Hedge-Preaching/the Wonderyear

The halfhearted answer of the regent was enough for the Calvinists to increase the pressure. Instead of secret meetings outside the city walls, as has been recorded in 1565, they now openly met, still outside the city, challenging the city government. Up until this time, the city government tried to minimize the meetings to the leaders in Brussels by saying that most of the atten-

dants were foreigners. But now everyone could hear the Psalms and the preaching. The first of one of these so called *hagepreek* (Dutch for “hedge-preaching”) was on June 13, 1566, hence almost 450 years ago. On June 24, 1566, it was decided to stop meeting in secret. To attend a hedge-preaching was not without risk. Some meetings were guarded by armed guards of their own people to protect the community and the preacher, and to warn against a possible intervention by the government.<sup>10</sup>

This brings us to the picture that illustrates the program of this conference. Frans Hogenberg (1535–1590) made dozens of pictures illustrating the events that happened in those turbulent years. One of those pictures illustrates the

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<sup>9</sup> Jozef-Ernest van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen 17 augustus 1585 – voor en na* (Antwerpen, 1985), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 18. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 18. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs gezogte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...)* omstandig zyn beschreven (Leiden, 1743), 75–77. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 66. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 7 note 2.

hedge-preaching south of the city. His picture at the same time gives an idea of the distribution of the Protestants, a detail that the occasional observer passes by. At the top by the banks of the river Schelde is a first group of people that, in front of a church, listen to a preacher. This group is marked as *Confessi*, which means those who follow the Augsburg Confession, the Lutherans. Two more groups are pictured. The group on the left under the trees is marked as the *Walsche*, the French-speaking Calvinists. Antwerp had a large contingent of French speakers from the south of the Low Countries and from France, not least because of the economic relations with cities in those areas. One of Antwerp's most well-known printers came from France, Christoffel Plantin. His printing house exists still today as a museum. Antwerp was and is an attractive city. On the other side of the trench, the last group on the right listening to a Dutch preacher is marked *Calvinsche*. The language was already in those days a dividing issue. Interesting detail: There are no armed guards around the more peaceful Lutherans. The strength of the different groups is more or less the same, that means one Lutheran for each two Calvinists, or one-third of the Protestants were Lutheran and two-thirds Calvinists. This proportionality remains the same in the following years.<sup>11</sup>

The time period between Easter 1566 and Easter 1567 has been called the *Wonderjaar* (Wonderyear). Protestants used this word in a positive sense because of their advance. The Catholics used it in a negative sense because of the terrible changes in the Christian faith. Others rather preferred to call it a *Hongerjaar* (Hungryyear) due to the economic consequences for a large part of the population.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> F. Hoogenbergh, *De 80-jarige Oorlog in Beelden* (Den Haag, 1977), 3. Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 19. Jozef-Ernest Van Roey, *Antwerpen, het avontuur lijkt bestaan van een stad* (Antwerpen/Rotterdam, 1995), 49. *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht over de troebelen van 1565 tot 1574 te Antwerpen en elders*, 2 dln. Volume 1, ed. Robert Van Roosbroeck (Antwerpen, 1928–33), 63–91. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs gezogte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven* (Leiden, 1743), 78. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 69. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 18–19. J. Andriessen, “Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat,” *Antwerpen in de XVIde eeuw, Genootschap voor Antwerpse Geschiedenis* (Antwerpen 1975): 215–216. Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 65. Van Roey, *Antwerpen, het avontuur lijkt bestaan van een stad*, 90, 102. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 37, note 62. Guido Marnef, “Protestanten in ‘Noord en Zuid’: Kerkhistorische beschouwingen n.a.v. een recente studie,” *Bijdragen tot de Geschiedenis* 70 (1987): 139–145.

<sup>12</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 16. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs gezogte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven*, 69. Erich Kuttner, *Het Hongerjaar* (Amsterdam, 1949), 31.

More hedge-preaching followed, not only in Antwerp, but all over Flanders, Brabant, and Holland. These drew a large number of attendees. The one on August 10, 1566, for example, had 24,000 people. Surely not all were Protestants; likely many came because of the novelty.<sup>13</sup> Margaret got worried, and questioned the issued regulations and laws. Antwerp reacted, reminding her of the important position of the merchant and the trade. Nobody was waiting for persecution. It was decided to send one of the twelve noblemen of the *Raad van State* (a council instituted in 1531 by the emperor to assist the government in the Low Countries) to Antwerp to sort things out. The one sent was William of Nassau (b. 1533), Prince of Orange, and also *Landgraaf* (viscount) of Antwerp, among other titles. He arrived July 13, 1566, in Antwerp and faced a major challenge in solving the religious tensions.<sup>14</sup>

William of Orange had an important role in the Low Countries. Born in Dillenburg, Germany, and baptized Roman Catholic, he was raised Lutheran. During his further education at the court of Charles V in Brussels, he became Roman Catholic, but kept sympathy for the Lutherans. In 1559, Philip II appointed him as *Stadhouder* of Holland, Zeeland, and Utrecht. His wife, Anna, was from Saxony and Lutheran. His brother, Louis (Lodewijk) of Nassau, was a professed Lutheran.<sup>15</sup>

### Iconoclasm

Despite all his diplomacy, William of Orange was not very successful. On the contrary, iconoclasm erupted and reached Antwerp on August 20, just when William had left the city for consultations in Brussels the day before. The iconoclasts destroyed the interior of many churches, among them the cathedral where the Calvinists managed to preach. Lutherans and Calvinists differed in many aspects concerning doctrine — Holy Communion, for example. Lutherans also tried to keep obedience to the authorities and had no problems with the images and altars in the churches. Iconoclasm was neither induced nor supported by Lutherans. In the meantime, one priest, Matthijs, became noteworthy because, despite the fact that he was Roman Catholic, he preached in a Protestant, Lutheran way, and attracted many people. The city

<sup>13</sup> *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 63. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 20, 24. Andriessen, “Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat,” 215. Marnef, “Protestanten in ‘Noord en Zuid,’” 140.

<sup>14</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 20.

<sup>15</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 38.

government called him to the church of St. George in the hopes of getting control of the situation.<sup>16</sup>

### Agreement and the First Lutheran Church: 1566–1567

When William returned to Antwerp on August 26, he managed to reestablish order. Some iconoclasts were executed, others banned or punished. The Calvinists requested freedom of religion, and the Lutherans did the same on the 28th. The latter were struggling to know how to act in this situation *sui generis* wherein the authorities did not take the initiative to establish the Protestant religion, as happened in Germany or Scandinavia. The requests resulted, after some negotiation, in William on August 31, 1566, announcing that in the Low Countries, with the approval of the king and the regent, the Inquisition and the *ketterplakkaten* against the heretics for the time being was suspended.<sup>17</sup> The first Lutheran church in a non-Lutheran country established with the approval of the authorities was a fact.

The Lutherans, contrary to their practice, already had called some pastors without the approval of the authorities and now asked for their approval. They also asked to make some churches available for the Lutheran services. Again they did not wait for an answer, but rented a barn close to St. Michael's abbey (this abbey was demolished under Napoleon rule).<sup>18</sup>

On September 2, 1566, William of Orange and the Lutherans made an agreement, which included provisions<sup>19</sup> to, among other things, not disturb the other religions, and allowed the Lutherans to use, besides the barn they already were renting, a place named *Reyger*, close to the *Paardenmarkt*,<sup>20</sup> and a place named *Lijmhof*,

close to the *Oudaenstraat*. And if we consider Matthijs a Lutheran, then also St. George's church should be included, but only until September 25. They were also allowed to call two pastors for each of the three places.<sup>21</sup> This agreement did not differ much from the one made with the Calvinists. The agreement was signed by the different parties, for which the Lutherans seemed to choose ad hoc some representatives, since they had not really organized themselves yet. For their organization the Lutherans were surely influenced by the Calvinists.<sup>22</sup>

### Life of the Church

**Membership** — What about the membership of the church in 1566? Calculations differ, but as has been pointed out before, it would be acceptable to estimate one-sixth of the population being Lutheran, one-third Calvinist, and one-half Roman Catholic. In a population of 100,000 this means roughly 16,000 Lutherans.<sup>23</sup> This is an optimistic estimate since we will never know the real membership. In January 1567, William reported that 12,000 people had signed the Augsburg Confession. Margaret estimated only 4,000. Lutherans were also called “Martinists,” followers of Martin Luther, or “Confessionists,” those of the Confession, a reference to the Augsburg Confession of 1530.<sup>24</sup>

Most of the members were Germans, but also inhabitants of Antwerp, among them many wealthy ones, are found in the member lists, such as the city's secretary, Alexander Grapheus, and the alderman, Nicolaas Rockox, Jacob van Wesenbeke, a good friend of William, and Godevaert van Haecht, to name some of them. The latter two both wrote about the events in those years, especially

<sup>16</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 22. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 22–26. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 50, 59. Andriessen, “Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat,” 216. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 98–103. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefsich gezogte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven*, 95. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 72–73.

<sup>17</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 29. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 105. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 52. Gustaaf Asaert, *De val van Antwerpen en de uittocht van Vlamingen en Brabanders*, (Tiel, 2004), X, 149.

<sup>18</sup> Asaert, *Vlamingen en Brabanders*, XI, 22–23. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 66.

<sup>19</sup> Asaert, *Vlamingen en Brabanders*, XI, 56–58. Johannes Wilhelm Pont, “De belijdenis van de luthersche gemeente te Antwerpen over de erfzonde, 1579,” *Nieuwe Bijdragen tot kennis van de geschiedenis en het wezen van het lutheranisme in de Nederlanden* 1 (Schiedam 1907): 124.

<sup>20</sup> A. Thijs, *Historiek der straten en openbare plaatsen van Antwerpen* (Antwerpen, 1973), 191.

<sup>21</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 30–32.

<sup>22</sup> Asaert, *Vlamingen en Brabanders*, XI, 56–58. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 35–36, note 60. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 17–18. Johannes Cristoffel Schultz Jacobi, “De toestand van Antwerpen na de invoering van de Hervorming,” *Nederlandsch Archief voor Kerkelijke Geschiedenis* 15 (Leiden 1844): 115–175. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 64. Andriessen, “Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat,” 215. Johannes Lehnemann, *Historische Nachricht von der ... im sechzehenden Jahrhundert ... evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche in Antorff und der daraus entstandenen niederländischen Gemeinde Augburgischer Confession in Frankfurt am Mayn, aus beglaubten Urkunden mitgeteilt* (Frankfurt/M, 1725), 56.

<sup>23</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 57–70. Braekman, “Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen,” 29. J. Briels, *Zuid-Nederlanders in de Republiek 1572-1630. Een demografische en cultuurhistorische studie* (Sint-Niklaas, 1985), 76.

<sup>24</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 37. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 114. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 19. Guillaume Groen van Prinsteren, *Archives ou Correspondence Inédité de la Maison d'Orange-Nassau*, Serie, dl. 3 (Leiden, 1835), 5.

van Haecht.<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, almost all the *suikerbakkers* (confectioners) of the city were Lutherans.<sup>26</sup> Probably Rubens's parents were also members of the church, since in 1582, his mother-in-law, Clara Colyns alias de Touion, in her will left a bequest to those of the Augsburg Confession.<sup>27</sup> She would have been delighted to know that almost 450 years later a conference is being held at the back of or on the grounds that her grandson bought in 1606 to build what today is known as the Rubens House, as we are today, in experiencing this fitting setting for a conference like this. Thanks to the Rubenianum for its hospitality.

**Church Buildings** — Immediately after the signing of the agreement, the Lutherans (and the Calvinists) started to build their churches. Both Lutheran church buildings at Reyger and Lijmhof were finished before the end of the year, though the places were used for open air services as long weather permitted. The barn at St. Michael's in the meantime had been improved with galleries and an altar. The Calvinists did the same and built two churches, one at the *Wapper* for the French-speaking, and one a little bit further at *Hopland* for the Dutch-speaking. They also improved another location, but of course, no altars at their churches.<sup>28</sup>

**Pastors** — The six called pastors were Franciscus Alardus (b. 1530, Brussels), Balthasar Houwaert (b. ca. 1525, Brussels), Johannes Ligarius (b. 1529, East-Friesland), Johannes Saliger (b.?, Lübeck), Dittmar Tymannus (b. ?) and Christian Warnerus (b. ?), and all had arrived by mid-October 1566.<sup>29</sup> Also Matthijs (van Statvelt ?), after

the closing of St. George and until the arrival of the called pastors, had preached a while at the *Lijmhof*.<sup>30</sup> Besides the six pastors, the church also called six theological advisors to help with counseling. Among them was the well-known Matthias Flacius. The others were Herman Hamelmann, Johan Vorstius, and three from Mansfeld, Cyriacus Spangenberg,<sup>31</sup> Martin Wolff, and Joachim Hartmann (and some sources mention a seventh person, a certain Dr. Ulsperger). They were all known as die-hard, anti-Calvinist Lutherans.<sup>32</sup> Flacius had an important role.<sup>33</sup>

**Services** — The agreement allowed for the Protestants to hold services on Sunday and during the week on a saint's day. If no such day was on the calendar, then on Wednesday. The Calvinists only used Sunday and Wednesday for worship. The first service with Holy Communion was celebrated on September 15 in the barn. After the first communion service, it was celebrated every Sunday. The congregation most likely used a translation of the German "Bonner Hymnal" from 1544, which contained psalms and all Luther's hymns, except one.<sup>34</sup> Apart from the instruction in the church, plans were made to have their own schools for the education of the children in a Lutheran way.<sup>35</sup> Also an agenda was written by the advisors with the order of services. "Agenda. Christian Liturgy of God's congregation in Antwerp, holding to the genuine, pure and unaltered Augsburg Confession." It contained an order for a communion service, one without communion, one for a baptismal service, and one for a wedding service.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Asaert, *Vlamingen en Brabanders*, IX 423–427. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 37–38. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 42. Schultz Jacobi, "Hervorming," 168–169. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 77. Van Roosbroeck, *Emigranten*, 183. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, XVII–XVIII.

<sup>26</sup> Andriessen, "Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat," 1X, 426. Schultz Jacobi, "Hervorming," 170, note 5. Oliver K. Olson, "The Rise and Fall of the Antwerp Martinists," *Lutheran Quarterly* 1 (1987): 98–119, 98. Frans Hendrik Mertens and Karel Lodwijk Torfs, *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen*, 8 dln. (Antwerpen, 1845–53), 616.

<sup>27</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 25, 67, 104.

<sup>28</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 40–42, note 71. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 108, 117. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs gezogte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven*, 98. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 98, 139. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 76, note 4. J.C. Diericxsens, *Antuerpia christo nascens et crescens seu acta ecclesiam Antuerpiensem ejusque Apostolos ac Viros pietate conspicuos concernentia utque ad seculum XVII*, 7 dln (Antwerpen, 1773), Volume IV, 345.

<sup>29</sup> Estié, 42–44. Schultz Jacobi, "Hervorming," 141. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 79–81. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 137–138.

<sup>30</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 47, note 92. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 31. Floris Prims, *Geschiedenis van de Sint-Jorisparochie en -kerk te Antwerpen (1304–1923)* (Antwerpen, 1923), 154–155.

<sup>31</sup> Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 69–80. Johannes Wilhelm Pont, *De Luthersche kerken in Nederland. Haar belijdenisschriften, kerkeordeningen en liederenschat historisch toegelicht en ingeleid* (Amsterdam, 1929), 74–96.

<sup>32</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 44–47. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 28–34. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 184.

<sup>33</sup> Schultz Jacobi, "Hervorming," 156. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 137. Pont, "De belijdenis van de luthersche gemeente 1579," 121–164. Braekman, "Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen," 23–38. On pages 26–27, Braekman misses the point about the advisors.

<sup>34</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 47–51. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 108. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 79. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 183. Casper Christiaan Gerrit Visser, *De Lutheranen in Nederland tussen katholicisme en calvinisme 1566 tot heden* (Dieren, 1983), 72.

<sup>35</sup> *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 2, 19, 45.

<sup>36</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 56. Johannes Wilhelm Pont, *De luthersche kerk in Nederland* (Baarn, 1908).

**Antwerp Confession** — Lutheran literature had been circulating for years already in Antwerp, for instance, Luther's Small Catechism, but more was needed. Several publications appeared of which one is significant, the "Antwerp Confession."<sup>37</sup> It brings in 23, often long, articles of the Lutheran doctrine professed by the Antwerp Church. It was signed by the six called pastors. On one side it confirmed the Lutheran doctrine (*affirmativa*); on the other side it condemned the Roman Catholic, the Anabaptist, and the Calvinist doctrines (*negativa*). The way the others interpreted Holy Communion takes a long part of the confession in articles XVI and XVII.

**Church Seal** — The Church also had a seal that 400 years later was reintroduced in the third Lutheran church in 1962. It depicts the Lamb that is worthy to open the Book with the seven seals (REV 5). The broken seals hang on the open book, which reads EVANGELIUM IESU CHRISTI. Heavenly light beams from above. The inscription around the seal reads SIG. ECCL. EVANG. CONF. AUGU. VRB. ANTUE (Seal of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in the City of Antwerp).<sup>38</sup>

William had tried all those months to get the Lutherans and Calvinists on the same page, asking the Calvinists to accept the Augsburg Confession, so that the Provisions of the 1555 Peace of Augsburg could maybe also be applied to the Low Countries, since Charles chose to use the peace treaty for only some regions of his empire. William's efforts were in vain. That Lutherans and Calvinists were not able to work more together pleased the government.<sup>39</sup> How the old adage "divide and rule (conquer)" fit the situation. The relationship with the Catholics was not much better. When theological advisor Spangenberg left Antwerp, he declared, "In Antwerpen Christ hangs between criminals, the papists and the Calvinists."<sup>40</sup> But in the months to come, the Lutherans eventually became closer to the Catholics than to the Calvinists. And then the church had also to deal with theological controversies from within, like if the bread should be broken at the consecration or not.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 56. Johannes Wilhelm Pont, *De luthersche kerk in Nederland* (Baarn, 1908).

<sup>38</sup> J.K. Schendelaar, *Lutherse Kerkzegels in Nederland* (Utrecht, 2000), 24.

<sup>39</sup> Olson, "Antwerp Martinists," 98–119. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 57–64.

<sup>40</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 65. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 5 dln (1864), 22–24.

<sup>41</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 68–69. De kroniek van Godevaert, Volume 1, 129–130. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 82. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 285–286.

## Reaction and the End

One may think that everything was settled and peace had returned to the city. To some extent this is true. The Catholics were reorganizing, despite the divisions, and people tried to pick up normal life. But Margaret hadn't been inactive all those months. Although she had sent William to mediate, she did not agree with his solution. She had sent secret agents to keep her informed about the plans of the Lutherans and Calvinists and to support the Roman Catholics,<sup>42</sup> so she was well-informed about what was going on. She also had ordered a couple of times to end the non-Catholic services in Antwerp, but Lutherans and Calvinists each time referred to the agreement of September 2. When she in January 1567 demanded it again, the Lutherans got worried. The theological advisors were leaving and returning to where they came from, Flacius being the last one to leave by the end of February.<sup>43</sup>

Margaret continued the pressure, and on February 20, she ordered again the end of all heretic services and ordered the pastors to leave the city. William, who had managed to protect the Protestants so far, now with his keen insight into the political and military situation, realized that the cause of the Reformation in Antwerp, and elsewhere in the south of the Low Countries, for the moment was lost. On March 13, Margaret sent in the army, which stayed for the moment out of the city. The Calvinists tried with an armed opposition to gain control over the situation, but it failed, partly because the Lutherans did not join them. Rather the Lutherans joined the city government, faithful to their principles to obey the authorities. By March 15, it was all over. Margaret ordered the closing of all non-Catholic churches, although William and the city government pleaded to let the Lutherans keep their churches, but it did not help.<sup>44</sup>

From March 20 on, the Protestants started to leave the city. On April 10, the city government ordered the Protestant pastors to leave the city in 24 hours. Along with the pastors, about 4,000 Protestants left the city. The

<sup>42</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 65.

<sup>43</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 70. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 174. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 289, 317–334.

<sup>44</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 24. Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 70–72. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs geschegte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven*, 121. Schultz Jacobi, *Nederlandsch-Luthersche Kerk*, 39–41. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 87–88. Pont, *De Luthersche kerken in Nederland*, (Amsterdam, 1929), 85–86. Van Roosbroeck, *Wonderjaar*, 362–383. Andriessen, "Het geestelijke en godsdienstige klimaat," 217–218. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, 208–209.

next day, twenty more ships with refugees left. Lutherans mostly emigrated to the north part of the Low Countries (the Netherlands today) and to Germany, mainly Frankfurt, where a flourishing congregation was founded. It should be noted, however, that most of the Lutherans did not leave.<sup>45</sup> An estimated 10,000 people left the city in the following months and year, among them Jan Rubens, lawyer and alderman, with his wife, Maria Pypelincx. They went to Siegen, where their son Pieter Paul, the master painter of the contra reformation, was born in 1577 and baptized Protestant.<sup>46</sup> This means that, on the other hand, many Protestants stayed but conformed to the new rules and went back to secret meetings. The first Protestant adventure in Antwerp was over. For almost seven months Antwerp had known a certain freedom of religion. Now a time of repression would start.

### Repression: 1567–1576

And it started right away. The Spanish Army entered the city on April 26 and came to stay for a couple of years. Once also the Duke of Alba as commander had arrived, another period of turbulent years started for Antwerp. The churches of the Protestants were demolished.<sup>47</sup> The *Raad van Beroerten* (Council of Troubles, or popularly called, “Blood Council”) was installed. The first heads to roll were those of the counts of Egmont and Hoorne. Many Lutherans and Calvinists who stayed in the city and were known as such were persecuted and many of them executed. A citadel was built for the army and as a warning to the city not to revolt. Difficult years of repression followed, culminating with the *Spaanse Furie* in 1576. Also William was condemned. In 1568, he chose openly in favor of the Reformation and started to resist the Spanish occupation. The so-called Eighty Years’ War began and only ended in 1648 with the peace of Westphalia. It would take until 1576 before the Protestants would again get the freedom to profess their faith publicly.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Van Roosbroeck, *Emigranten*, 33, 183. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 210–212. Schultz Jacobi, “Hervorming,” 172–175.

<sup>46</sup> Rik Torfs, *Rubens’ religieuze kunst – Wat vandaag?* (Lezing St. Paulus, Antwerpen, 2004), 2. Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 25.

<sup>47</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 76. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 1, 220–222, 237. *Antwerpsch Chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefs gezogte geschiedenissen, sedert den jaren 1500 tot het jaar 1574 (...) omstandig zyn beschreven*, 134, 137. Schultz Jacobi, “Hervorming,” 152, note 5.

<sup>48</sup> Estié, *Nederlandse Lutherse*, 77–79. *De kroniek van Godevaert*, Volume 2.

### The Second Church: 1578–1585

With the Pacification of Ghent on November 8, 1576, which gave freedom of religion, many of the refugees returned in the hopes of living in a free country. But actually only on July 22, 1578, did the governor, Archduke Matthias of Austria, make this possible with the “Religious Peace.” In every place where at least 100 people professed the same faith, there was also the freedom to do it openly. On September 18, 1577, the Prince had already arrived in Antwerp. Ten and a half years after, he left it in the *Wonderjaar*.<sup>49</sup>

On August 29, 1578, Lutherans were given the barn by St. Michael’s Abbey, the St. Anna Chapel at the *Keizerstraat* (Keizerskapel), and the attic of the Hessen House to assemble. On October 22, the St. George’s church nave, and later also the choir and the rest, and the church of the Carmelites on the Meir followed (as noted above, this was probably the church which Rubens’s grandmother attended). Also the church of the monastery at Falconplein (?) (*Falcontinnenklooster*), and in August 1581, the St. Walpurgis’s church (to replace the barn) were given to the Lutherans.<sup>50</sup>

In 1566 the church had services in Dutch and German; now there were also services in French. The salaries of the pastors were paid by the city from September 1581 on. The number of Lutherans grew fast, and they needed pastors. Adolf Fischer, Carel de Meijer, Stephanus Praetorius, and the well-known Cassiodorus de Reyna were some of the many pastors that served the Lutheran churches in those seven years until 1585.<sup>51</sup>

Many of the documents published twelve years earlier came in handy now. A new document was the “Confession on the Original Sin,” which settled the dispute that already disturbed the church in 1566. De Reyna wrote a catechism, Willem Van Haecht wrote a psalter in Dutch, and Charles de Navière wrote a songbook in French.<sup>52</sup>

From all the church locations only the attic and the Keizerskapel survived until our days. St. George’s church was demolished during Napoleon’s rule and another

<sup>49</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 35–36. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 397–400.

<sup>50</sup> Pont, “De belijdenis van de luthersche gemeente 1579,” 161. Edm. Geudens, *De Keizerskapel* (Antwerpen, 1920), 24. Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 67. Prims, *Geschiedenis*, 165, 168.

<sup>51</sup> Braekman, “Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen,” 29. Pont, *Geschiedenis van het Lutheranisme*, 402–410.

<sup>52</sup> Pont, “De belijdenis van de luthersche gemeente 1579,” 119–159. Braekman, “Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen,” 30.

church was built on the location in the nineteenth century. The building of what is now the Lutheran Church is from the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, built on the grounds that came available after demolishing the 1542 city wall in the midst of the nineteenth century.

### The Fall of Antwerp

The siege started in 1584 and the subsequent fall of Antwerp on August 17, 1585, to the Duke of Parma brought the city back to Spanish, and Roman Catholic, rule.<sup>53</sup> Unlike in 1567, the Protestants were given four years to decide what they wanted. They could recant and stay, or keep their faith and go. They also were allowed to take with them all of their goods. The population of Antwerp had decreased to 82,000 in 1579. By 1589, it would decrease by another 40,000 to 42,000.<sup>54</sup> Many went to the Protestant north and helped the Dutch to their Golden Age in the seventeenth century. Many went to Germany. Antwerp Lutherans were all over the place. An era of nineteen turbulent years ended in a defeat for the Reformation in the south of the Low Countries, but at least in the north, freedom of religion was achieved.<sup>55</sup>

### And Beyond

With half of the population gone away, and with the port closed because the Dutch had blocked access to it, Antwerp turned into a sleeping city. But in the almost two hundred years of the contra reformation it was very active in the fine arts. Many of those famous painters were Protestants (Jordaens), or influenced by them (Van Dyck), or from Protestant origin (Rubens).<sup>56</sup>

During these 200 years, as before in the time of repression, the (very) few remaining Lutherans kept a low profile and only had services for their own households.<sup>57</sup> They were occasionally served by pastors from Amsterdam. This small but brave congregation had an oval seal, which depicts a tree, probably a date palm. The inscription reads: A.C.A. QUO PRESSIOR EO VALENTIOR (Antwerp [Congregation] of the Augsburg Confession: stronger through persecution).<sup>58</sup>

The Calvinists had their small congregation, the

*Brabantse Olijfberg*, and survived. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Protestants were tolerated.<sup>59</sup> This all changed when Napoleon came in 1792. The port was reopened. In 1801, a law was passed that gave equal rights to Catholics, Calvinists, and Lutherans. After the independence of Belgium in 1930, the Calvinists organized themselves and founded the Protestant Church of Belgium in 1939. The first King of Belgium, by the way, was Lutheran, although not a really active one. Other Lutherans that came to Antwerp were the Norwegians, who in 1870 finished building and owned the church building at the *Tunnelplaats* until last year. This is the only remaining Lutheran church in Antwerp built as such. With the open port, the Germans came again, among them Lutherans, and they had a strong presence in the years before the First World War and had their services at the Protestant church in the *Lange Winkelstraat*, and in the church, demolished in 1975, in the *Bexstraat*.<sup>60</sup>

### The Third Church: 1939–Present

In 1934, a small evangelical Protestant congregation was formed at the initiative of Lambert Hellings. Through his contact with the Scandinavian Lutheran pastors, he turned to the Lutheran churches abroad and his congregation adopted the Lutheran Confessions in 1939. Difficult years were ahead with the eruption of World War II. The congregation was offered for a while the use of the Norwegian Church. After the war, a house in the *Geulinckxstraat* was used till the death of Pastor Hellings in 1956. Again, there were difficult years until the next pastor, Hendrik Zijlstra, arrived in 1958. Services were now held in the Swedish Church at the *Italiëlei*, but their own building was needed. This was found in 1962 in the *Tabakvest* and after some renovation work and fitting of church windows, the church was dedicated in May 1964. Pastor Zijlstra retired in 1985 and since April 1986, Gijsbertus van Hattem has been the pastor. In 2002, the Lutheran Church was recognized by the government. In 2014 it celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the dedication of the church and 75 years of this “third” Lutheran Church in Antwerp.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 71–80.

<sup>54</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 82.

<sup>55</sup> Asaert, *Vlamingen en Brabanders*. Braekman, “Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen,” 30–31.

<sup>56</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 103–104.

<sup>57</sup> Braekman, “Het Lutheranisme in Antwerpen,” 30.

<sup>58</sup> Schendelaar, *Lutherse Kerkzegels*, 24–25.

<sup>59</sup> Van Roey, *De Val van Antwerpen*, 101. Dick Wursten, “De ‘gemeente onder het kruis’, de Brabantse Olijfberg (1648–1798),” *De Band* (kerkblad VPKB): Antwerpen, 2015. Also see <http://www.protestantsekerkantwerpennoord.be/historie-protestantmomentopnamen.htm>

<sup>60</sup> “Christuskirche”

<sup>61</sup> Gijsbertus van Hattem, *Gedenkboek van de Evangelisch-Lutherse Kerk te Antwerpen. Weer 50 jaar lutherse kerk in Antwerpen en 25 jaar van de inwijding van het huidige kerkgebouw* (Antwerpen, 1989).



The Lutheran Church of Belgium has churches in Antwerp and Brussels and is a founding member of the Antwerp Council of Churches in 1972. On the international level, it is a member of the International Lutheran Council and of the European Lutheran Conference. It is hosting these days a conference in Antwerp and many Lutherans of different European countries and from the U.S. are in our midst today.

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