

Religious Nonconformity and Cultural Dynamics: The Case of the Dutch Collegiants



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Introduction

There is ample reason to engage in research around the Collegiants, a minority religious movement in the Netherlands of the 17th century. An exploration of this topic can be interesting not only for a contribution to the history of Religion but also to understand the development of some central concept in the early modernity. Prominent, in this research, is the question that initially stirred my personal interest in the Collegiantism; i.e. to define and understand the religious and cultural background that represents the practical field of confrontation of Baruch Spinoza's philosophy. This historiographical question had the purpose of highlighting the relationship between Spinoza and the religious movements of his time in order to fully understand the public to whom he addressed his texts. Collegiants, however, constitute an interesting field of research not only for the study of Spinoza, but widely to understand the cultural and social dynamic of the Dutch Golden Age, a backdrop against which emerged a new idea of religion. This dissertation is not exploring a curiosity or an inconsistent exception in the history of the 17th century, but rather the centrality of a group that was influenced by and largely influenced its Dutch social, political and religious context.

One of the major problems in capturing the significance of the Collegiants arises from the difficulty in defining this movement, which chose never to formulate a confession of faith and consciously refused to be classified within a specific Church, sect, or congregation. The name, Collegiants, was not the consequence of an active choice but a label that arose, together with that of Rijnsburgers, in the polemic pamphlets of the epoch. The difficulties to define such elusive religious group make, however, the Collegiants a fascinating field of research. In this dissertation the Collegiants are termed a “movement” in order to emphasize their explicit lacks of norms or model and to highlight the continual change and redefinition of their religious identity. This process can be properly defined using Deleuze's concept of becoming minorities:

Les minorités et les majorités ne se distinguent pas par le nombre. Une minorité peut être plus nombreuse qu'une majorité. Ce qui définit la majorité, c'est un modèle auquel il faut être conforme [...] Tandis qu'une minorité n'a pas de modèle, c'est un devenir, un processus [...] Quand une minorité se crée des modèles, c'est parce qu'elle veut devenir majoritaire, et c'est sans doute inévitable pour sa survie

ou son salut.¹

This definition can help us to see both the positive and the productive side of the Collegiant movement, even though it defined itself negatively in order to protest against the institutional Church and normative religion. The Collegiants were involved in this process of “devenir minoritaire” in a highly conscious way. They decided willfully to avoid strict affiliation to Churches or congregations and criticized explicitly the necessity of an identitarian definition. It can hardly be denied, indeed, that the religious reflection of the Collegiants was characterized by the conscientious refusal to construct a model or a norm to which they could refer. In this dissertation the term “minority” will therefore be used, always in reference to this concept, without drawing too much stress to the effective number of the Collegiants' members. This question appears, indeed, misleading because it does not take into account the position that Collegiants' members occupied in the economic, political and intellectual life of the United Provinces. It is the case of a group which, indeed, demonstrated in several occasions its deep influence in the Dutch religious life. Collegiants' continuous efforts towards de-institutionalization and their aspiration to an egalitarian and democratic religious life have to be conceived as an invitation to their coeval confessions, to undertake the way of evolving minorities renouncing whichever exclusivity and authority.

The articulation of the Collegiants' proposal can be appreciated by studying the different lines of thought that emerged clearly from their texts. Most of Collegiants' publications were polemical or written to answer specific accusations. Within the enormous number of sources that can be included in Collegiants' works emerge a limited number of arguments. The question of religious organization, tolerance, freedom of speech and the epistemological approach in reading the Scriptures; these arguments can be taken as guidelines to understanding and defining the nature of the movement. These sources present arguments and concepts that we can take to be the Collegiants' stance on religious life and belief. Some arguments, however, emerged with particularly force because of the sanction of the Church orthodoxy. Tolerance, free-prophecy and egalitarian and anti-authoritarian tendencies were sensitive points to which the Church or Congregations reacted with particularly vehemence, sensing a threat to their institutional power.

The Chapter 5 of this dissertation are dedicated to the enumeration of these arguments. Each chapter presents a specific theoretical core and question. However the chapters are not self-conclusive because the various problematics encountered in the study of Collegiants overlap each other in continuous cross-reference and this gives rise to a kaleidoscopic effect. The concepts debated in this dissertation can be fully understood only in relation to each other, as they emerge to construct a semantic constellation useful to their contextualization. Each chapter, furthermore, comes to focus on one or more texts that are considered exemplary or representative of a particular tendency in the Collegiants' history. This methodology wants to underline how the constant redefinition of the Collegiants' identity is always a matter of personal as well as collective choice, of internal debate and external polemic.

An emphasis on the intentionality of Collegiants' behaviour is particularly important in understanding which specific choice they made to contrast the authoritarian and

¹DELEUZE G., *Le devenir révolutionnaire et les créations politiques*, Entretien réalisé par Toni Negri <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Le-devenir-revolutionnaire-et-les> .

exclusive vision of the religious life. These choices are well reflected in the use of a specific vocabulary and in the emergence of specific concepts that can be considered as key guideline to identifying some stable points in the shifting nature of the Collegiants.

The first chapter of this dissertation delineates an initial general history of the movement together with the ground on which the Collegiants built their vision of belief: the question about Church organization. The chapter refers directly to the practical organization of the Collegiant movement, an egalitarian and anti-charismatic religious life which involved considerations of power and identity. This specific position, with its high level of nonexclusivity and anticharismatic consciousness, makes Collegiants movement an exception in the pluralist world of 17th century Holland and marked their difference to the constellation of Dutch reformation. Although some Collegiants' demeanor mirrored the progressive individualization of cults and beliefs, they accorded central importance to the community, the context in which their religious ideal of confrontation and discussion was realized.

The first attempt to write an exhaustive history of the rise and development of the Rijnsburgers was made by a Remonstrant preacher, Paschier de Fijne. He was the first opponent of the Collegiants; his book, *Kort, waerachtigh, en getrouw Varhael van het eerste Begin en Opkomen van de Nieuwe Sekte der Propheten ofte Rynsburgers in het dorp Warmont anno 1619 en 1620* (Brief, truthful, and faithful history of the beginning and origin of the new sect of the Prophet of Rijnsburg in the village of Warmont), published anonymously in 1671 by his son, expresses his critical position vis à vis the Rijnsburgers. Besides representing the first opposition to the Collegiants, this work constitutes an important source because the author attended the first Collegiant' assembly (the Rijnsburgers' *vergadering*). In particular it describes the way in which this first meeting took place. For the first complete history of the Collegiant movement, however, we have to wait until 1775 when the *Histoire der Rijnburgsche Vergadering* (History of Rijnsburg's assembly), written by the Collegiant Elias van Nijmegen, appeared in Rotterdam. Both these sources are key instruments for reconstructing and understanding how Collegiants organized their assemblies, and how they achieved an acharismatic meeting, through debate and free-exegesis. These testimonies, which embrace a whole century, have, however, the demerit of representing the Collegiant' *vergadering* (assembly) as an eccentric but defined ritual. What emerges, on the other hand, from Collegiants internal debate is that the conduct of the meeting supper, the organization of religious life, the definition of free-exegesis and the limitation of free speech were all subject to constant argument and discussion inside the movement. These concerns emerge in a fragmentary way in the manifold sources that discuss the nature of free-prophecy, tolerance and ecclesiology. In the polemic with Bredenburg, the *Bredenburgse twisten*, the debate about tolerance involved the discussion of women's role in the *vergadering* and the reflections on free-prophecy indirectly interrogate the charismatic nature of the organization.

Another important characteristic of the Collegiant' movement, delineate in the first chapter, is the autonomous and independent development of the single *collegia*. City autonomy and the different religious and social contexts in which the Rijnsburger *vergadering* took root led to large-scale differentiation. The capacity of Collegiants to survive for more than a century with their refusal of normativity and authoritarian organization was substantially due to the penetration of the Collegiants' arguments into

the different confessions. This deep influence, in particular in the Mennonite and Remonstrant communities, defined the nature of the Collegiants, especially in some cities, as a stream inside institutionalized Churches. Because the *collegia* were open to all Christians, without limitation, even including Socinians and Catholics, most of the participants were also members of structured Churches, congregations or sects. In Amsterdam this phenomenon was particularly evident and the penetration of Collegiants' argument in the Flemish community through Galenus Abrahamsz led to one of the most important schisms in the Mennonite history in the United Provinces. In other cities such as Leiden or Haarlem, the existence of cultural circles and other forms of nonreligious association constituted the basis for the spread of Collegiantism. It was only in Rijnsburg, the village in which the movement first emerged, that a common house was built, after 1640, to host the twice yearly Collegiant national *vergadering*.

The practical organization of the Collegiants, as has been stated, represents the foundation on which noncharismatic ecclesiology and anticonfessional ideals were constructed. With the historical background of the first chapter it is then possible to discuss the main religious and political tendencies inside the movement.

The second chapter of this dissertation, following the issue of religious organization discussed in the first chapter, deals with the principles of free-prophecy, Biblical exegesis, and Collegiants ecclesiology. The central concept examined in this chapter is nonconformity analysed in its historical development of England and the Netherlands. This chapter suggests that nonconformity as religious phenomenon was an elaboration and transformation of the anti-confessional and anti-clerical thought that emerged in the 16th century with the radical Reformation. The inception of nonconformity in the Netherlands is indicated by the transformation of the debate about Nicodemism, following Coornhert's defense of religious dissimulation and indifferentism. Nicodemism was indeed considered, in the early 16th century, as necessary behavior to avoid pointless martyrdom and persecution, utilized especially by the crypto-reformed in Catholic countries such as Italy and Spain. The diffusion of this conduct among Catholics in reformed countries but, principally, the diffusion and justification of Nicodemism in the United Provinces, where inquisitorial control and confessional repression presented a relative risk after the revolt against Spain, testify of the new meaning that this behaviour took on in the late 16th century. Nicodemism, as Coornhert's position shows, became the justification of anticonfessionalism as conscious behaviour, with the possibility of openly criticizing rituals and ceremonies as for achieving salvation.

In this chapter particular attention is paid to the consciousness and the open dimension of this behavior. The neglect of dissimulation and the necessity of making public personal religious sentiments, is one of the basic elements in the change between Nicodemism and nonconformity. The nonconformists acquired the anticonfessional and anticlerical content of Nicodemism, but added a principal characteristic: the veridiction. The veridiction represents the necessity of telling the truth about personal belief and religious conscience, but also institutes the core of reality in the conformity between internal belief and external behavior. These elements were present in both English and Dutch nonconformity, which developed, however, into different and sometimes opposite ecclesiology. In the English case, external nonconformity to the dominant Church and the necessity of openly showing belief led

to a demand for exclusivity and a process of individualization rooted in the juridical meaning of nonconformity. Despite the turning of the debate around the necessity of free-conscience, the understanding of nonconformity as a refusal of secular world and the attempt of Baxter to disconnect the debate around nonconformity to a juridical question, the English debate never developed into a criticism of the Church's organization or in the necessity of a democratization of the religious life, which was, on the contrary, dominant among the Collegiants.

The central text in the history of Collegiantism and in the Dutch definition of nonconformity is Galenus Abrahamsz and David Spruyt's *XIX Artikelen*. This text was conceived, from the very beginning, as a collective discussion about the nature and the sense of a religious community in the absence of Holy Gifts. Collegiants give to the term nonconformity a specific meaning which designates the absence of conformity to the first apostolic Church and the end of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. This radical statement caused a reaction among the orthodox members of the Mennonites and Quakers, which see in the absence of Holy inspiration a complete secularization of the religious community. Nonconformity assumed therefore for the Collegiants a double meaning: on one side it was an elaboration of anticonfessional criticism through the statement of the absence of holy influence on the religious life, on another side it represented a deep criticism of priestly authority conceived as a secularized power acting as constraint of consciences. The absence of Holy Gifts was, for the Collegiants, the demonstration that no Church or Congregation could pretend to be the true or original one. The reaction of Dutch orthodoxy appears, indeed, completely justified, because Collegiants' religious nonconformity presents itself not only as conscious antiauthoritarian criticism but also as a statement of the full secularization of the Church. Nonconformity was, for Abrahamsz and Spruyt, not only an unavoidable state, but also a necessary behavior to unmask the inauthentic religious life. This position represented the core of Collegiants' practice, the reason for their continuous redefinition and, on the same level, for their refusal of any type of identification. The recognition of the secularized status of common religious life arose among the Collegiants accompanied by an ample debate about free-prophecy and Bible exegesis, stressing the possibility of an individual form of salvation.

A central role, in this direction, was played by reflection on the veridiction as a form of conformity between the inward conscience and the external behavior. Although there emerged from the sources a controversial statement about how to approach and read the Scriptures, through the free-prophecy the Collegiants organized a form of collective exegesis that had its principal aim to avoid charismatic and authoritarian leadership but also to realize a form of community close to the first apostolic Church. The communitarian discussion also involved a debate on salvation, which had no more to be tied to the simple membership in a confession but developed as an articulated discussion on the significance of the ethical and religious life. A good Christian had to reinterpret and bring alive the first teaching of the Gospel, which can be summarized as love for others and in the propagation of tolerance as ethical and interpersonal behavior.

Collegiants' reflections on religious life, organization of communities, and their continuous effort to maintain equal relations in the absence of charismatic gifts in the Church institution, never turn to consideration of society or political forms. This absence was even more significant in a cultural and social context in which theological

questions involved directly or indirectly political questions. In the same period, furthermore, Hobbes' reflections on jusnaturalism challenge for the first time the divine legitimacy of political power, establishing the basis of a new vision of the political community. Collegiants understood religious community as deprived from any form of divine inspiration and conceived it as a human association, nevertheless they never outline a political parallelism to this situation. The most evident reason of this absence is probably the lack of a strong monarchy in the 17th century United Provinces. However the relationship between secular and religious ideology did not fail and was well summarized by the situation after the Synod of Dordrecht, which created a rupture in Dutch society with the consequent convergence of the religious position with the political one. The intervention of Grotius in favor of the Arminian party testified to a clear identification between theological opposition to predestination (which meant a challenge to Calvinist orthodoxy) and antimonarchical opinion. This fracture remained invisible in Collegiants sources that debated the secularization of Churches and consider religious congregations as human institutions, but never tried to define the legitimacy of political institutions. It is possible, however, to find in the history of the Collegiants one significant exception: Cornelius Plockhoy's attempt to promote a religious-social project in the Dutch colonies of Delaware².

Plockhoy's work illuminates the relationship and the fruitful parallels that it is possible to make between the United Provinces and England, especially during the time of the Cromwellian Commonwealth. Plockhoy's most significant works were written, indeed, in England, some years before the fall of Cromwell, and testify to a particular social and political engagement in the construction and definition of a community with a religious basis. It is interesting to note that only after the English experience did Plockhoy returned to Holland, following the end of the Commonwealth, to propose a similar project to the city of Amsterdam. This chapter suggests an analysis of his English and Dutch sources, stressing the differences and the modifications to his proposal. The importance of this author lies in the possibility of deducing from his position a possible Collegiant' thinking on politics and social organization. This contribution is certainly not descriptive of Collegiantism as a whole but represents the only explicit trace of the modification of Rijnsburger's religious reflections on the secular field.

The description of Plockhoy's community in many respects echoes a certain irenicism sourced from the reading of Rosicrucian text; however it reflects and refers principally to his Collegiant experience³. Although Plockhoy's account of the community project is never exclusively religious, the confessional element appears as prominently in both his Dutch and English projects. His religious and political project emerge clearly from his letters to Cromwell: it is essentially devoted to resolving the problem of religious conflict and the disturbance of social peace. It is, indeed, clear that Plockhoy's aim was not that of describing an ideal society or forming a separate community in order to conserve a purist religious ideal, but to propose a paradigmatic alternative to the religious turmoil and the social injustices of his time. The relation between political

²See: O'CALLAGHAN E.B., *New Netherland or, New York under the Dutch. Vol. II (1646-1652)*, D. Appleton & Company, New York, 1848, p. 469; and PLANTENGA B., *The Mystery of the Plockhoy Settlement in the Valley of Swans*, <http://www.mcusa-archives.org/MHB/Plantenga-Plockhoy.htm>

³See: POSTMUS BOUWE, *Plockhoy's A Way Propounded: Mennonite Utopia or Millennium?*, in BAKER-SMITH D., BARFOOT C.C., *Between Dream and Nature: Essays on Utopia and Dystopia*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1987.

and religious arguments in Plockhoy's solution to religious turmoil highlights the interconnection between religious tolerance and colonial criticism, social injustice and authoritarianism. Plockhoy's meticulous pedagogic description of his project, his underlining of the necessity of economic independence for women and the possibility of them participating in collective work are expressions of an outlook that includes an aware judgment of his contemporary society. The last part of this chapter is dedicated to criticize two approaches dominant in the literature about Plockhoy: one is the description of his project as a classical form of Utopia the other one is the reading of the Delaware religious community interpreted as a triumph of the work ethic.

The third chapter of this dissertation deals with the tolerance, a fundamental and central concept to understand the nature of the Collegiants. It is our intention to show how during the 17th century there emerged in the Netherlands, in the religious context, a new concept of tolerance inspired by Castellio's works. The publication and translation, in the first half of the 17th century, of some of Castellio's work testify to the major interest that the French author had in the United Provinces, especially for the oppositors to the intolerant and orthodox Calvinist tradition. For the Collegiants, Castellio represented a predecessor in the struggle for religious peace. His work against the persecution of the heretics, supported by Biblical argumentation, represented a constant source of inspiration for the partisan of religious toleration. As suggested by Voogt⁴, Castellio's deconstruction of the concept of heresy, as it was used by the Calvinist orthodoxy, in order to redefined it to signify a person who acts and believes differently from the mainstream, represented Collegiants' basis to rethink the concepts of rationality and truth.

The peculiarity of the Dutch concept of *vedraagzaamheid* (tolerance), in opposition to how tolerance was defined and discussed in the European mainstream debate, was certainly due to the elements of reciprocity and mutuality that this particular form of tolerance included. In the 17th century, tolerance (especially religious tolerance) was used to label negative behavior, to identify indifferentism or libertinism, intolerance was, on the contrary, a sign of unity, integrity, and orthodoxy. Furthermore, arguments for religious intolerance were justified by the biblical example of the Mosaic theocracy, while religious tolerance represented the interests of the emerging mercantile elite, which supported the Republican experiment and advocated cities' autonomy. Tolerance became, in the 17th century, a concept contested because of its pejorative meaning; the progressive introduction of the pro-tolerance position, in order to contrast with this negative predominant vision, supported the idea that tolerance was not a menace to the integrity and peace of the Dutch Republic but the principal reason for its prosperity. The concept of tolerance became, afterwards, the battle-field on which the best juridical, economical and political form of the United Provinces was decided.

The penetration of this debate about tolerance and intolerance in the Collegiants movement was adapted into an anticonfessional and irenic orientation focusing on religious and social peace. The defense of an unlimited and mutual tolerance represented, for the Collegiants, a proposal of pacification in the pluralistic dimension of the Dutch religious life, which was perceived, by their coeval, as a source of

⁴VOOGT G., "Anyone who can Read may be a Preacher": Sixteenth-Century Roots of the Collegiants, In: *Dutch Review of Church History / Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, Vol. 85 Issue 1, 2005.

division and instability. The practice of nonexclusive tolerance and the extensive reception of different confessions inside the movement was a pragmatic attempt to find a solution to the problematic turbulence inside the *Doopsgezinden* and more generally to the religious disputations in the United Provinces. The central figure investigating the conduct and the limits of this debate inside the Collegiants was Jan Bredenburg. This chapter will, indeed, analyze the trouble arising from Bredenburg's position on tolerance and his extensive use of Spinozist concepts and language. This debate about the extension and the limits of tolerance involved, indirectly and directly, a discussion regarding religious organization, freedom of speech, and charismatic authority.

In his works, Bredenburg, with his continuous redefinition of the discussion about tolerance, shows all the ambiguity and ambivalence of this term. Unlimited and mutual tolerance finds its limits in the continuous exigence of a normative delimitation of it, in the distinction of necessary and unnecessary dogma, but also, in a trivial way, in the impossibility of tolerating the intolerant. In the case of the Collegiants the adversaries of the unlimited and mutual tolerance undermined Collegiants' nonexclusivism with their proposals to identify with a confession of faith. Pressures in the direction of identification and exclusivism were, however, only a part of the tolerance problem. With the "Bredenburgse Twisten" (Bredenburg controversy) the limits and the ambiguities of the concept of tolerance and the limits of the penetration of Spinoza's philosophy in Collegiant' movement become clear. These limits concerned especially the necessity and priority of contrasting skeptical and atheist tendencies in the field of belief.

The final chapter of this dissertation is dedicated to a question that underlines the problems of anticonfessionalism, tolerance, and secularization. The question asked in this conclusive part regards the possibility to trace the emergence of rational argument in Collegiants understanding of the divinity. To answer this question it was necessary to make some preliminary remarks about the diffusion and vernacularization of Descartes' and Spinoza's philosophies in the 17th century Netherlands. Short descriptions of the two most influential systems of thought of the epoch are two methodological steps useful in understanding not only the degree of penetration of these philosophies into Collegiants but also the nature and meaning of the concept of rationality at that time.

The definition of the relationship with the divinity, after the *XIX Arikelen's* statement of the unholy Church, is represented, in the history of the Collegiant movement, by a precise moment: the discussion and dispute between the Rijnsburgers and the Quaker missionaries in the United Provinces. The debate with the Quakers assumes a specific meaning not only because it shows the proximity and similarity between the two religious movements but also because it testifies to the emergence of a central concept: the light. Central text to determine the nature of this relationship and to define the meaning that for the Collegiants had the concept of light, is Balling's *Het licht op den Kandelaar* (The Light on the Candlestick). Balling's answer to Quakers represents a penetration of Spinozist language into the definition of religion as knowledge of God but also a singular affinity and fascination for the Quakers' concept of light. The question of contact with the divinity appears in the text as an individual experience, not mediated by any human instrument via language or the empirical experience. The approach to God is certainly described as an epistemological progression but the

perfect comprehension of God is defined with the vocabulary of the affections rather than as full rational understanding. This text is certainly highly controversial and the continuous shift between philosophical and Quakers' language make its interpretation problematic. *Het licht op den Kandelaar* reflects Collegiants' position as a sum of philosophical argumentation, mysticism, and the irreconcilable reference to God as an infinite and unknowable creature. What emerges with force in the analysis of this source is the impossibility of understanding Balling's description of the relationship with God as purely rational. Balling, however, stresses the possibility of the constant perfectionism of human knowledge and self-emancipation and, furthermore, proposes new terms for religious thought. What he calls the "true religion" is described as ethical behavior constructed with the combination of tolerance, equal participation in the religious life, and the refusal to countenance formal conformism to Church institutions. Collegiants' acceptance of a Church without God does not necessary involve a pure absence of divine work, on the contrary, the proximity to God is progressively researched in an interior sphere which involve a process of knowledge. The legitimacy of the "Truth" is, then, given no more by the transcendental gift of the divinity but in the accordance of personal conviction and ethical behavior, the religion is, indeed, redefined according to these terms. True religion is, for Balling, a continuous inquiry into the natural and internal principle that each individual possesses in order to achieve full comprehension of God's word. This statement testify not only of a new conception of the Religion but also reaffirm the minoritaire core of Collegiants' nature; religion, in their understanding, is not more matter of concord, unity, orthodoxy but source of knowledge, problematization and continuous questioning about its own identity.

Nonconformity and cultural dynamics: some preliminary remarks

Before starting the presentation of the Collegiants' argument about tolerance, Church organization, and rationalism, to fully understand some choices and the approach of this dissertation, and to comprehend how Collegiants sources have been read, some methodological remarks are necessary about the emergence and development of the historical phenomenon called nonconformity and how was it received and transformed in 17th century Holland. Nonconformity is, as will be shown, one of the central concepts developed by the Collegiants to justify their antiauthoritarianism and anticonfessionalism. The concept appears more interesting if we look at the number of meanings and social phenomena that it includes. It first developed in England in the juridical context and was named in the later 17th century as a defined religious movement that opposed the Act of Uniformity. In the English sources it is possible to retrace the history of this concept, demonstrating how the significance and arguments regarding nonconformity changed in one hundred years. Not far from England, in the United Provinces, the evolution of the concept of nonconformity follows another route, giving rise to radically different signification. Proposing a comparative study, between England and the United Provinces, of the development and semantic elaboration of the concept of nonconformity, is useful not only to understand the different expression of religious dissidence but also to detect cultural and social change in the approach to religion. Beyond the obvious differences between the two Countries, the different political, social and cultural history it is still possible and

fruitful to compare how the concept of nonconformity developed in England and Netherlands because of the numerous contact between the Collegiants and the English religious dissident groups and because of the particular redefinition that the concept of nonconformity assumed in the United Provinces. The differentiation of English nonconformity (which dominates the European semantic field with direct and specific connotations of particular events with particular actors) from Dutch nonconformity, explains how historical agents using or interpreting a concept in a particular way can change its semantic connotation. The category of nonconformity, because of its shift from a juridical field to a social-religious one, indicates a semantic enrichment and a conceptual dynamic that can prove a sensible point to investigate structural changes.

These case studies possess the necessary characteristics to be approached with the methodology developed by Koselleck and the Cambridge History of Ideas, because “society and language insofar belong among the meta-historical givens without which no narrative and no history are thinkable. For this reason, social historical and conceptual historical theories, hypotheses and methods are related to all merely possible regions of the science of history”⁵. It is our intention to pay particular attention to the analysis of the sources and to their contextualization with the aim of constructing a map of nonconformity's semantic change via its arguments in pamphlets and polemical texts of the 17th century. It is our intention to investigate, through the study of the emergence of this concept, the tendencies of secularization, the development of arguments regarding religious indifferentism, and the renunciation of a religious life normalized by concrete institutions, rituals, and ceremonies.

A semantic study of how the concept of nonconformity emerges, how it is filled with new meaning, and which new and old concepts intervene to define the religious and political field, is essential to explain and understand the Collegiants' mentality in 17th century Holland, to determine how they think, and in which ways they influence the cultural and social dynamic in a specific context. The production of new meaning and the continuous nomination of a cognitive world influence, in their turn, the production and development of new instruments of thinking. To understand the shift, the dynamics, and the changes in the cultural field, a rhetorical and semantic analysis is necessary. The arena of investigation is, however, limited to the religious sphere and the sources analyzed are, in a large majority, polemical pamphlets, which means that the question about the correlation between the emergence of a new concept and change in the mentality refers principally to the change in the perception of religion as a dogmatic and doctrinaire system.

The concept of nonconformity is surrounded by many other concepts, which partly explain its nature and constitute its semantic field. In this dissertation we focus on different concepts (tolerance, anticonfessionalism, Utopia, mysticism, and millenarianism) because nonconformity emerges, from the analysis of different pamphlets and sources, as correlated with them. Dutch nonconformity involves, for example, a necessary reflection on Church form, the organization of religious life, exclusivism vs. non-exclusivism and a certain vision of the future that actualizes itself as Utopia or millenarian impulse. This constellation of concepts, which characterizes itself for semantic differentiation but also for their strict interrelation, is also useful in explaining the nature of a radical and dissident movement like the Collegiants and in

⁵KOSSELLECK R., *Social History and Conceptual History*, in *Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol.2 No.3, 1989. p. 310.

understanding how the religion, understood as belief experience, was fulfilled by new themes, concepts, and meanings. Furthermore, to investigate this conceptual connection and contextualize the emergence and use of determined religious vocabulary, it is useful to understand the nature and presence, in the Dutch religious field, of the phenomenon of secularization especially in its particularly form which goes under the name of “rationalization of the world”.

The central question asked in this dissertation is, finally, not how it is possible to construct a category of nonconformity as an analytical concept that helps in understanding religious phenomena, but what is nonconformity and which kind of religious phenomenon it describes, how it has been used and with which consequences. The question regards how it is possible to detect structural change in the mentality while investigating conceptual change or emergence of a new concept. The cultural dynamic is, in this dissertation, understood as a semantic and cognitive phenomenon of mutual influence between emergence or nomination of new concepts and events historically determined.

The History of Concepts approach privileges, as has been shown, the semantic field and text analysis for detecting changes in the mentality and in the social-cultural sphere. One more reason to find in this approach a fruitful method for understanding the Collegiants' universe is the particular interest that they reserved for the language. The Collegiants stressed the importance of the spread of vernacular Dutch with the compilation of grammars, dictionaries, and lexica⁶. In 1654 the Collegiant Luidewijk Meijer published the *Nederlandsche Woorden-Schat*, with a new edition in 1658. The *Woorden-Schat* was a Latin-Dutch and French-Dutch dictionary and a guide to principal terms in *Nederduitsche* (Low Dutch), with particular attention paid to the *basterdwoorden* (Bastard Words) and the *konstwoorden beghrijpt* (cultural and artistic concepts). Some Collegiants in Rotterdam, as well as in Amsterdam, were active participants in a cultural project that worked on the definition and elaboration of the Dutch language in poesy, theater, and literature. Rafael Camphuysen and Johachim Oudaan were appreciated poets and, in 1669, Luidewijk Meijer and Johannes Bouwmeester founded a cultural academy with the name *Nil Volentibus Arduum*⁷ (Nothing is arduous for the willing). Around the same time Adriaan Koerbagh published *Een Bloemhof* (A flower garden), a theological dictionary edited according to controversial philological criteria, with the explicit aim of explaining the origin of superstition and unmasking the authority of theologians' obscure and adulterated language⁸. In 1706 William Sewel, a Flemish converted to Quakerism, wrote the *Compendius Guide to the Low-Dutch Language*, a Dutch grammar for English speakers.

These sources and the presence in Collegiants' texts of a continuous debate about the language, testify to great awareness in their choice of terms and words. Collegiants often use italics to emphasize special concepts, or to introduce a neologism or Latin calque. In addition, they refer several times to their efforts to introduce a correct and

⁶To look at some Collegiant sources see: WAITE G.K., *The Holy Spirit Speaks Dutch: David Joris and the Promotion of the Dutch Language, 1538-1545*, in *Church History*, Vol.26, No.1, 1992.

⁷See: VAN SUCHTELEN G., *Nil volentibus arduum. Les amis de Spinoza au travail*, in *Studia Spinzana*, No.3, 1987; see also: BORDOLI R., *Etica, arte, scienza tra Descartes e Spinoza. Lodewijk Meyer (1629-1681) e l'associazione Nil Volentibus Arduum*, Franco Angeli, Milano, 2001.

⁸See: WIELEMA M., *Adriaan Koerbagh: Biblical Criticism and Enlightenment*, in VAN BUNGE W. (ed.), *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic, 1650-1750*, Brill, Leiden, 2003.

transparent use of the language. The Collegiants were surprisingly familiar with the crystallizing power in a certain employment of discourse and language; they explicitly challenged the predominance of scholastic and theologian's terms, which substitute the direct and immediate experience of the religion with an intricate and abstract speculation on transcendence and divinity. Dutch grammar and dictionaries, work with the vernacular language in poetic or literary texts, and philological research on the origin of words, testify to a Collegiant Dutch language undertaking, an engagé project anything but neutral to democratize the discussion about religious matters and to guarantee egalitarian participation by both cultivated and uncultivated people. This effort is well represented by an emblematic figure in the Collegiants' sources; the founder of this religious movement, Van de Kodde, is several times described as a cultivated peasant able to speak French, Latin, Greek, in the same way the *Philosoperenden Boer* (Philosophizing peasant), described by Stol in 1676, extols the superiority of a simple peasant' reasonable pragmatism in comparison to the Cartesian's method and the Quaker's rhetoric. This was the essence of the Collegiants' anticonfessionalism and antiauthoritarianism, a campaign with both Utopian and rational implications, aiming at a possible rethinking of religious experience outside normative structures.

Chapter 1.

The nature and spread of the Collegiant movement

- 1.1. Introduction
- 1.2. The Rijnsburg general assembly: a network of Collegiants
- 1.3. Spread of the *collegia prophetica* and their territorial characterization
 - 1.3.1. The case of Amsterdam's *collegium*
 - 1.3.2. The other *collegia*: Rotterdam, Leiden and Haarlem
- 1.4. Nonconformity as development of anticonfessional and anticlerical thought in the 17th century
- 1.5. Conclusions

1.1. Introduction

One of the problems entailed by the study of the Collegiant movement, is that it was nonuniform and variegated, which makes it difficult to grasp the nature of the organization. Further, the Collegiants, with their unsystematic production of texts, had a tendency to leave undefined certain important questions and themes. In particular, it is difficult to understand the nature of their anticlericalism because of the impossibility of determining the difference between the irenic demand and the criticism of clerical and religious institutional power. The themes of free prophecy and free speech in the assemblies represented clear opposition to the institution of priesthood, but are a slippery handhold for understanding the Collegiants' position regarding social (e.g. political) institutions.

The 17th century was an age in which all religious groups had to face religious plurality. The different movements were incapable of maintaining a certain uniformity: this problem made it impossible to use the religion as an *instrumentum regni*. The Collegiant movement was critical of such situations, but at the same time it felt the absence of an organizational structure, necessary for its religious existence. The multiplicity of faiths in the United Provinces, with their numerous and different confessions, explicitly presented a fragmentation of the religious life that in other countries was hardly masked by simulated uniformity. This plurality did not provide a possible solution to the redefinition of the institutional Church because, after the revolt

against Spain, these radical and diverse religious groups were unable to propose a different way to think about religious structures. The increasing division of Mennonite (*Doopsgezinden*) and Calvinist into different congregations and the existence of multiple groups or sects were not signs of the emancipation of the traditional Church structure. On the contrary, they repeated, on a lower level, the problems of authority, dogmatism, and exclusivity of faith that characterized the ecclesiastical institutions before the Reform (e.g. Roman Catholic Church). The questions that the Collegiants tried to face up to were of substantial importance: they asked themselves how it was possible to lead a religious life without joining a pyramidal organization and, at the same time, how might a religious movement be created that could include all believers in a "Universal Church". This new form of organization had to avoid the foundation of another Church or sect. Collegiants highlighted a problem about power and, since any type of movement is still an embryonic expression of power, they tried to organize themselves, leaving aside the aim of refounding or reforming their coeval religious institution. This was a hard task since the Collegiants tried to impose their point of view, which, although based on a vision of plurality and freedom, inevitably made them part of a power issue. The plan by which the Collegiants confronted such problems was absolutely practical and immanent. They constructed their alternative to the Church's power, refusing any form of theology or organization; their *vergadering* (assembly) was a living form of the alternative to the traditional Church. This process was not linear but, as we shall see, interacted with different tendencies with backgrounds in millenarianism, mysticism, or some humanistic legacy representing a rationalist approach.

An important influence on the Collegiants' religious vision was the European dimension in which they lived. Exiled Mennonites from Switzerland, persecuted antitrinitarians from Poland, and refugees from England (after 1660) enriched the already diverse and prolific religious world of the Dutch Republic. The Collegiant movement had the opportunity, via encounters with these other nonconformists, to hold discussions with the most radical actors of the age on the religious scene. Through these confrontations the Collegiants were forced to specify or elaborate important aspects of their positions, as well as being influenced by their adversaries. It is principally thanks to these conflicts, both internal and external to the Collegiants, that we have better knowledge of some of their positions. These conflicts also help us to better define the Collegiants' status, which until now we have referred to as a "movement."

In order to address the previous issues it could be useful to understand in which practical ways the Collegiants handled the problem of organization and which solution they found to escape institutionalization of their movement. Then we would like to spend some time on the different territorial characterizations of the *collegia*, paying particular attention to the case of Amsterdam's *collegium*. The context in which these *collegia* were organized and the polemics inside the Mennonite community of Amsterdam highlight some critical points about the nature of the Collegiants but also explain their behavior and their concept of the movement.

1.2. *The Rijnsburg general assembly: a network of Collegiants*

The history of the Rijnsburg assembly is deeply rooted in the rise of Calvinism and its first schism, in 1618, with the Synod of Dordrecht. This was an important event not only for Dutch religion, but also for political life.

The long and gradual imposition of the Calvinists' confession was based on the central role they played in the defense against the Spanish occupation⁹. The main precipitant of the revolt was Philip II's edict against Protestantism (1566). After the diffusion of an iconoclastic movement, the revolt broke out in 1572. Calvinism, at first valuable as a cohesive force and the basis for the construction of the Netherlands' identity, used this foundational power to impose itself as the dominant religion. As early as 1581 the political authorities in Leiden tried to disassemble this narration of the Netherlands' independence, protesting against the obligation for preachers to sign a confession. The Republican authorities tried to remind them that the revolt against Spain was the outcome of a popular resistance. They could not accept that from the struggle for independence there had emerged a new privileged class that resembled the papist clergy¹⁰.

Even in a formal religious plurality the Calvinist clergy obtained a large advantage when, in 1587, the prohibition of public Catholic services was proclaimed in all provinces. Freedom of belief and conscience was still permitted, but the magistrates began to look with apprehension to the increasingly dominant power of the Calvinists, who were officially recognized as the *Publieke Kerk* in religious and civil life. As noted by Kolakowski, moreover, the Netherlands' Reformation did not display, at its very beginning, pronounced Calvinist characteristics: "la Réforme hollandaise [...] s'était peu à peu 'calvinisée' en même temps que se constituait dans la vie religieuse la caste particulière des prêtres; ces pasteurs venaient, pour nombre d'entre eux, d'au-delà les frontières des Provinces-Unies; en particulier, les prédicants originaires de Flandres et du Brabant, élevés dans l'orthodoxie genevoise, imposaient aux fidèles l'esprit calviniste¹¹."

At the beginning of the 17th century a large share of the population in the South was still Catholic, while the Reformed part was divided into a Calvinist majority and areas belonging to different confessions: Anabaptists, Lutherans, and other groups. The federal structure of the United Provinces supported tolerance, but at the same time the whole of the 17th century saw tension between Republicans and Calvinists about how to understand the formation of the Netherlands.

The universities, and in particular the University of Leiden, played an important role in this friction¹². The University of Leiden was founded in 1574 by William of Orange and, when the Calvinist clergy try to extend their influence over the Dutch university, they found an obstacle in Leiden's relative open-mindedness. One of the most important conflicts between the orthodox vision of the Calvinists and freedom of

⁹On the role of Calvinism, the rise of the Dutch national identity, and the religious propaganda during these years, see: DUKE A. *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Low Countries*, Ashgate, 2009.

¹⁰KOLAKOWSKI L., *Chrétiens sans Église. La conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVIIe siècle*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1987.

¹¹Ibid. p. 79.

¹²On the consequences of the Synod of Dordrecht for the Dutch universities see: BROEYER F.G.M., *Theological Education at the Dutch Universities in the Seventeenth Century: Four Professors on their Ideal of the Curriculum*, in *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, vol. 85, nos 1-4, 2005.

teaching was the dispute between Arminius and Gomarus, both theologians and teachers at Leiden University. From this theological dispute the Calvinists took the opportunity to stabilize themselves and restore their power. The altercation touched one of the most important beliefs of Calvinist orthodoxy: predestination. The doctrine of predestination was, however, highly heterogeneous and a topic of argument not only in the Dutch Republic. Castellio's objection to Calvin's concept of predestination and the differences between the Heidelberg Catechism, Beza's model, and election, as it was understood in Zurich, are only a few examples.

After his studies in Genoa in 1578, Arminius returned to Amsterdam with ideas that distanced him further from the orthodox position of Theodore Beza. Arminius accepted predestination only in terms of damnation for sinners; the deterministic idea of election defended by the Calvinists, according to him, made God the author of sin. He also distinguished between two kinds of predestination, that of classes of people, which was predetermined, and that of individuals, which was conditioned by belief. In 1604 Arminius discussed the question of predestination and free will in a public disputation with Gomarus and in 1608 he rejected the doctrines of Beza openly. The power of Gomarus's party, and of the more intransigent Calvinism, *de precizen* as opposed to the broader-minded *rekkelijken*, have some important consequences in Dutch religious and political life. Most of the merchant bourgeoisie of Holland were represented by the position of the *rekkelijken*, who stressed the independence of the Church from secular power. They also saw in the Calvinist request for persecution of the unorthodox a new form of papism. This accusation was first made by the nonconformist Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert, protagonist of a polemic against Calvin about Nicodemism and author, in 1582, of *Synodus of van der Conscientien vryheit* (Synod or about the freedom of conscience), a passionate critique of pastoral power and oppression of consciences in both the Roman Catholic and Reformed Churches.

Like Arminius, Coornhert¹³ did not believe in the doctrine of Irresistible Grace; for them, God's redemption had to be considered a gift that can be freely received by the individual. The open discussion between Arminius and Gomarus made Arminius's heresy clear: he understood predestination only in the presence of faith. This position was unacceptable for Gomarus, who maintained that predestination intervened before each conversion. This discussion in Leiden suddenly became more than a dispute between theologians: heterodoxy in the matter of predestination and the activity of the Counter-Reformation in the South, diffused by the presence of Jesuits, were a serious menace to the integrity of Calvinism. After two inquiries by the provincial synod and consistory Arminius was never found to have contradicted the *Confessio Belgica* or the Heidelberg Catechism. To resolve the conflict definitively, the Reformed Church decided to convene a National Synod¹⁴.

When the Synod of Dordrecht assembled in 1618 the Contra-Remonstrant participants (as the Gomaristen were called) were the great majority. Arminius's death,

¹³Coornhert's position on predestination seemed to be the only one that could be described as close to Catholic teaching. His form of perfectionism was, however, far from the justification for rituals and ceremonies: he stressed the central importance of the necessity of ethical behavior for salvation. See: LECLER J, VALKHOFF M., BRACHIN P., ed., *A l'aurore des libertés modernes*, Les éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1979.

¹⁴For a detailed description of the events that led to the Synod see: ROHLS J., Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism in the Netherlands until the Synod of Dort, in MULSOW M., ROHLS J.,(eds.), *Socinianism and Arminianism. Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-century Europe*, Brill, Leiden, 2005. pp. 3-49.

in 1609, did not make confrontation less vigorous and the brilliant defense of Simon Episcopus (1583-1643), professor of theology in Leiden and successor to Arminius, was not enough to prevent the ban and deposition of all Remonstrant pastors (as the Arminians were called, taking this name from the *Remonstrantie* written by Uyttenbogaert¹⁵). Most of the Remonstrant leaders found refuge in Antwerp, where they reformed a Remonstrant Brotherhood, an exiled Church under Spanish domination. Secret congregations and Remonstrant meetings continued to take place in Holland until the death of Maurice de Nassau. In 1625 his successor, Frederick Henry, authorized the return of Remonstrant preachers, reversing the decision of the Synod. Only after 1630 did a tolerated Remonstrant Church begin to grow rapidly; in 1634 a Remonstrant seminar was held in Amsterdam led by Episcopus. The policy of tolerance was reestablished but the religious disputation between the two Calvinist parties inside the United Provinces never declined. What the Remonstrant party tried to achieve during the Synod of Dordrecht was of major importance in Dutch religious history.

The failed attempt by Arminius's followers was to subject the catechism and confession of Calvinism to constant revision, in order to continuously discuss its conformity to the Scriptures¹⁶. The Heidelberg Catechism and the *Confessio Belgica* could no more represent a strict norm that separated the heretical from the orthodox. The failure of this attempt proclaimed not only the success of the orthodox party but also the definitive constitution of Calvinism as a machine of subjection. One of the Remonstrants' main accusations was, indeed, that the refusal of an open examination of the confession gave the orthodox Calvinists the opportunity to introduce new teachings.

Such vituperation regarding religious belief had a correspondence in Holland's political situation. Before the synod, Arminius's follower, Johannes Uyttenbogaert, published the *Tractaet van 't Ampt ende Authoriteyt eener Hooger Christlicker Overheyd in Kerkelike Saecken* (1610) (Treatise about the office and authority of the high Christian authority in Church matters), a text in which he examined the necessity for the secular authorities to intervene in religious and Church affairs.

The provinces in the North of the Netherlands, a very special case in a Europe dominated by centralizing trends, reacted to this text by defending Uyttenbogaert's position and practicing a certain tolerance towards some Remonstrant preachers. The orthodox Calvinist party resisted the political influence of the provinces supporting the family of Orange and trying to limit the political autonomy of magistrates and the States-General. There was a meeting of the independent provinces, which existed until 1588, even under the domination of Spain. After the constitution of the seven United Provinces the Republicans saw the military figure of the Stadtholder, represented by the House of Orange-Nassau under the Spanish king, as a relic of monarchy. The large Republican force was embodied by the Raadpensionaris (Grand Pensionary) of Holland, the most important and populous province. Maurice of Nassau (1567-1625), as the powerful Stadtholder, made an effort to bring the United Provinces under the leadership of the Dutch nobility headed by the family of Orange. Jan van Oldenbarnevelt (1547-1619), Grand Pensionary of the States-General, on the contrary

¹⁵In 1610 Uyttenbogaert (another transliteration of this name is Wtenbogaert) wrote a text stressing God's mandate for the States (Parliament) of Holland and the importance of revising the confession of faith and the catechism; it was signed by 44 clergymen and took the name Remonstrantie.

¹⁶Ibid. p. 17.

stressed a federal solution for the United Provinces, economically dominated by the province of Holland. The two parties also desired different approaches to the truce with Spain, which expired in 1621. The Orangists and the Calvinist clergy applied pressure to renew the war against Spain, while Oldenbarnevelt's party favored a compromise. The majority of the population tended to support Calvinists and Orangists, regarding the Remonstrants as a turbulent element in the delicate political situation of the United Provinces. Adding more tension to the internal disputes was an external factor, the intervention of King James I of England and Ireland (King James VI of Scotland), who judged Dutch tolerance, especially towards the Socinians, too wide.

In 1611, the King ordered to be burned all the copies of the *Tractatus theologicus de Deo*, a text written by Conrad Vorstius, successor to Arminius in the theology faculty at Leiden, and charged with antitrinitarianism. Hugo Grotius entered the dispute supporting Vorstius and the policy of Oldenbarnevelt. In 1613 Grotius wrote the *Ordinum Pietas*, in which he emphasized the necessity of magistrates' control of religious synods; as Pensionary of Rotterdam he defended the admission and toleration of Jews, and, during 1611, he developed the idea that the Trinity should not be considered a central dogma of Christianity, with the consequence of attracting to himself the accusation of Socinianism. In 1617, in addition to these religious disputes, an infraction of the maritime laws led James I to openly sanction the Remonstrants' position and the tolerant policy of Oldenbarnevelt.

The two religious parties (Remonstrants and Contra-Remonstrants) at the eve of the National Synod reflected the political conflict between Oldenbarnevelt and Maurice of Orange. In an attempt to maintain his power over the Calvinist Church, Oldenbarnevelt prohibited, with the support of magistrates and troops, the meeting of the National Synod. However, the opposition of the other provinces and revolts in Amsterdam led Oldenbarnevelt to accept the synod proceeding. After the victory of the Contra-Remonstrants, generously aided by the English delegation, on 13 May 1619, Oldenbarnevelt was arrested and executed. His supporters, among them Grotius, lost their political power and were imprisoned or forced into exile. Uyttenbogaert and Episcopus sought refuge in Antwerp, while Grotius succeeded in escaping from the prison of Loevestein to refuge in Antwerp and then in Paris.

As it has been shown, the conclusion of the synod declared not only the victory of strict predestination but also the end of theological pluralism. The readmission of the exiled Remonstrants and the consequent religious turmoil with its parallel political developments characterized the whole of the Dutch Golden Age, with its multiplicity of confessions, religious publications, and acerbic disputations. This was the climate in which the Collegiant movement was born.

In 1619, according to the deliberations of the Synod of Dordrecht, Christian Sopingius, the Remonstrant preacher of Warmond (a village near Leiden) was suspended, the congregation refused to accept the new Contra-Remonstrant preacher (Rudolf Agricola), and started to hold secret meetings in order to pray. The suggestion to refuse any direction from the secret brotherhood of Remonstrants came first from Gijsbert van der Kodde¹⁷, an important figure in the intellectual life of Warmond and,

¹⁷VAN SLEE J.C., *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*, Utrecht, H&S, 1980. pp. 24-29. See also: LINDEBOOM J., *Stiefkinderen van het Christendom*, 's-Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1929. pp. 340-347.

at that time, the elder of the community. He descended from a line of dissenters, his father (“Ouden Jan”) was active in the Remonstrant Brotherhood, he offered refuge to persecuted members of this Church in his house in Rijnsburg, and he had open Socinian sympathies¹⁸. The other three Van der Kodde brothers, Johann (“Jong Jan”), Adrian, and Wilhelm (who wrote books with the pseudonym Guilielmi Coddaei) were also active in Warmond and Rijnsburg within the ranks of the radical Remonstrants¹⁹.

According to Paschier de Fijne, a Remonstrant pastor who was the first opponent of the Collegiants but also the author of the first Collegiant history, the opportunity to establish the first *collegia* was the issue of the *placcat* (poster) of 3 July 1619 against the Remonstrants:

De gelegentheydt die haer voorquam on het gemeyn Propheteren (soo sy het noemden) te beginnen, was het bannen van de Remonstrantsche Predicanten de Vereenighde Provintien en het Resort van dies, mitsgaders die twee felle Placcaten. Die tegen de Remonstrantsche Predicanten gepubliceert wierden, in de welke niet alleen die Predicanten gedreyght wierden, indien sy in 't Land quamen, met een eeuwige gevanckenisse ofte noch zwaerder, en 500 gulden den Verklicker voor elcke Predicant te winnen ghestelt: Maer in de welke oock eenen yeghelijck op een boete van 300 gulden verboden wierdt haer in eeniger maniere te herbergen ofte te assisteren. En op een boete van 25 gulden, neffens het verliesen van alle Officien en Beneficien haer te hooren predicken²⁰.

With this *placcat* the assemblies and sermons of Remonstrant preachers were officially declared illegal. In Warmond, Christian Sopingius, the suspended Remonstrant preacher, chose to sign the Act of *Stilstand* (Standstill) due to the risks that the infringement of the *placcat* could represent for the other dissident preachers and the whole community. This temporary power vacuum created the opportunity for a group of believers, led by Van der Kodde, to start their “Prophets’ Assembly” meetings, which, after a few, took the name of *collegia*. Not long after the first Collegiants' assembly followed a schism with the secret Remonstrant Brotherhood.

In the *Kort, waerachtigh, en Getrouw Verhael van het eerste Begin en Opkomen van de Nieuwe Seckte der Propheten ofte Rynsburgers in het Dorp van Warmont* (Brief, truthful, and faithful history of the beginning and origin of the new sect of the Prophets of Rijnsburg in the village of Warmont) De Fijne described the vigorous discussion between the Collegiants and some Remonstrants who tried to preach in Warmond. Henrick van Holten, Jan Wilelmsz, and De Fijne himself were all Remonstrant preachers who tried to control Collegiant activity, proposing themselves as the new Remonstrant leaders. The Collegiants’ answer was always the same: according to official pronouncements, meeting with a Remonstrant preacher would endanger the whole community, including the poorest²¹.

The confrontation with the Remonstrants became more strident when De Fijne came to Warmond. He tried a mediation, between the group of Collegiants and the Remonstrant Church, proposing to freely discuss the Bible after the official sermon.

¹⁸Ibid. p. 25.

¹⁹RUES M.S.F., *Aufrichtige nachrichten von dem gegenwärtigen Zustande der Collegianten oder Reinsburger. Einer mertwürdigen Kirchlichen Gesellschaft in Den vereinigten Niederlanden, in Aufrichtige Nachrichten von dem Gegenwärtigen Zustande der Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten wie auch der Collegianten oder Reinsburger*, N.p., 1743.

²⁰DE FIJNE P., *Kort, Waerachtigh, en Getrouw Verhael van het eerste Begin en Opkomen van de nieuwe Seckte der Propheten ofte Rynsburgers in het Dorp van Warmont, Anno 1619, en 1620, Tot Warstadt*, 1671. p. 13.

²¹Ibid. pp. 15-19.

For the Collegiants, however, the leaderless meeting had become the cornerstone of their assemblies and for this reason no longer questionable. Further, Collegiants saw the discussion linked with the preacher's sermon as a limitation on the practice of free prophecy²². It began a long quarrel about how to understand free speech and free prophecy. De Fijne tried to join the discussion with theological arguments, in particular challenging the validity of the interpretation of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, the biblical source of the Collegiants' free prophecy²³. The response of Van der Kodde to De Fijne is preserved in the *Kort, waerachtigh, en Getrouw Verhael*:

Dat hy niet en verstond dat een Predicant alleen in de Gemeynthe soude staen preecken en spreekken al wat hy wilde, sonder dat een ander, daer zijnde, mede soude mogen spreekken²⁴.

Because of that dispute the "Prophets' Assembly" decided to move to Rijnsburg. There the Collegiants could preserve the principle of free speech and the right to have a leaderless meeting, two points (see above) seriously questioned by the Remonstrant clergy.

In the *Kort, waerachtigh, en Getrouw Verhael* De Fijne provides a short description of activities in the *collegia prophetica*:

[...] by malkanderen quam, om malkanderen, in de waereheyd die na de Godtzaligheyt is te stichte, en dat sonder Predicant. Datter yemand eenige Capittelen uyt den Bybel soude konnen voorlesen en een Gebedt doen. En soo yeamndt yet konde coortbrengen tot vermaninge, tot stichtinge en onderwysinge van malkanderen, dat die sulks soude mogen doen. Dat sy daer toe, naer de kennisse die sy van Godt hadden, haer beste wilden doen. [...] Gijsbrecht Jacobsz vander Kodde met syne Broeders in den sin hadde, die maniere van doen als een noodtsaeckelijck gebruyck in de Gemeynthe Godts in te voeren, met verwerpinge van de maniere van 't prediken²⁵.

De Fijne seemed to find this practice eccentric, since:

Ja ich hebbe ghesien dat het Propheteeren duurde van's avonds tot dat het 's morgens hoog dag begonde te worde. Ondertusschen staten daer eenige vast en slapen die des morgens soo veel wisen als des avonts²⁶.

Even if this specific practice created turmoil and a defensive reaction, maybe excessive, among traditional religious institutions, it was not a new addition to the confessional overview. The Collegiants' decision to call themselves *gemeyn Propheteren* was, in fact, a reference to a polemic dating back to 1525, when Zwingli published his *Von Predigtamt*. In this treatise, the author tried to charge the Anabaptist doctrine with anarchy because of their use of free speech. Zwingli's exegesis was based on reading the Scriptures in their original text, and his philological work on the Bible was done with the intention of changing humanity through comprehension of the *Omnipotens verbum*²⁷. Despite this position Zwingli thwarted the Anabaptist

²²Ibid. p. 20. HYLKEMA C.B., *Reformateurs. Geschiedkundige studien over de godsdienstige bewegingen uit de nadagen onzer Gouden Eeuw, vol. I, Groningen, Amsterdam, Boum'a Boekhuis/Bert Hagen, 1978. pp. 1-16.*

²³Ibid. pp. 24-26.

²⁴Ibid. p. 16.

²⁵Ibid. p. 14.

²⁶Ibid. p. 21.

²⁷MAGNE S., *Hebrew Bible Old Testament: The History of its Interpretation II. From the Renaissance*

interpretation of the “office of prophet” in the Epistle of Paul (1 Corinthians 14). This passage concerned, according to Zwingli, only the public exposition of the Scriptures, and not the possibility of extending the ministry of preaching and prophecy to all Christians, as the Anabaptists maintained. The practice of prophecy, understood as biblical exegesis, had to keep its institutional character²⁸. It is clear how Zwingli's worry about the correct understanding of prophecy was not only tied to a theological problem, but primarily to the fear that these *collegia prophetica*, without the right leadership, could succumb to heresy or disputes. This meaning of prophecy was certainly well known to the brothers Van der Kodde since they were highly educated, a status that was not common among people of their social background²⁹.

Reference to such a tradition and discussion about prophecy meant that this practice could not have had the meaning of prediction or ability to see the future, but was strictly bound with Bible exegesis. The theme of free prophecy was highly topical, so much so that the dogmatic Calvinist Hendrik Alting asked in his *Theologica problematica nova*³⁰ if the “*Libertas Prophetia perpetuo in Ecclesia vigere debeat.*” The prophecy in this text was defined as “*donum non praedicandi, sed interpretandi Scripturam: idque non ex immediata revelatione, sed ex cognitione ejus studio acquisita Rom. 12.V.6.31*” This definition was perfectly proper for Collegiant practice, even if the consequences for Alting were diametrically opposed. Alting's argumentation was similar to that of Zwingli. The claim to have “*collegia prophetarum ex plebe*” was a request of the Socinians and regarded as fanatical; the right use of the *collegia* was possible only “*ut privatim sive in consistorio*”. Choosing their name and explicitly refusing to hold their assembly with a preacher, the Collegiants consciously joined the Anabaptist tradition and challenged the orthodoxy of the Calvinists.

If the term *collegia prophetica* tells us much about Collegiant history, the names Collegianten or Rijnsburger Collegianten are less clear and lost in the multitude of definitions of the movement. This was a name used to define which Anabaptists embraced the practices of the *collegia*; they had to be differentiated, according to the historian Jan Wagenaar³², from the “other” Collegiants who met in Rijnsburg. In 1695 the name *Collegianten* enjoyed high attestation and the members who founded “*De*

to the Enlightenment, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2008. pp. 420-422.

²⁸GASTALDI U., *Storia dell'Anabattismo. Dalle origini a Münster 1525-1535*, Turin, Claudiana, 1972. pp. 112-116.

²⁹Van Slee reports on a singular event in the life of Van der Kodde's family and insists on the linguistic skills of the Van der Kodde: “*De opvoeding, die hij aan zijn kinderen gaf, doet hem insgelijks kennen als een goed en berstandig vader. Prijs stellende op degelijke kennis en ontwikkeling, liet hij al zijn zonen in de latijnsche taal onderrichten, terwijl meer dan een hunner geen vreemdeling bleef in het Fransch, Engelsch eh Italiaansch. Bekend is, met betrekking hierop, de anecdote van Prins Maurits en den franschen gezant, Benjamin s'Aubéry, heer van Maurier. Bij gelegenheid van een wandelrit het land der van der Kodde's, die daar juist met den verldarbeid bezig waren, langs komende, deelde de Prins den gezant mede, dat de landlieden in Leidens omstreken even gemakkelijk een gesprek voerden in het Latijn en Fransch als in hun modertaal, De prins hield daarop zijn paard in en sprack de van der Kodde's beurtelings in beide talen toe, wat door hen tot groote verwondering van den gezant op alleszins voldoende wijze werd beantwoord.*” See: VAN SLEE., *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 21.

³⁰ALTING H., *Theologica problematica nova: sive systema problematum theologorum*, Amsterdam, 1662.

³¹Ibid. p. 683.

³²See: VV. AA., *Daar de Orangie-appel in the gevel staat. In en om het weeshuis der doopsgezinde collegianten 1675-1975*, Amsterdam, 1975. pp. 93-94.

Oranje Appel” (Collegiant orphanage in Amsterdam) described themselves as “Besorgers van de Weesen der Vlaamsche en Waterlandsche Doopsgesinde Broederen Genaamt Collegianten³³.” It is not clear, nevertheless, when the Collegiants or their adversaries started to use this name.

The German historian Rues, in an article in his book of 1743, *Nachrichten*, describe the contemporary situation of the Collegiant movement, saying:

Den Nahmen der Reinsburger haben sie von dem Dorfe Reinsburg, welches nahe ben der Stadt Leiden gelegen ist; denn sie pflegen, jährlich zweymahl, und zwar gegen Pfingsten und am Sonntage, der vor dem lezten Montag in Augustmonath vorhergehr, von verschiedenen Orten aus den vereinigten Nederlanden, in zuvirgenenntem Dorfe zusammen zu kommen, um das Abendmahl zu halten. Sie heissen Collegianten von den Collegien oder gemeinschaftlichen Zusammenkünften, die sie hir und da angelet haben. [...] Sie wurden ehemahls von ihren Geghern auch die neue Secte der Profeten genennt, in Absicht auf 1.Cor. 14. jedoch disen Nahmen hören sie nicht gerne, und er ist auch nicht mehr gewöhnlich. Das unwissende Wolk nennt sie in Reinsburg die Versammlung der Kwäker³⁴.”

It is evident how the label Collegiants was in the 18th century assimilated by the Rijnsburger movement. They declined the name Propheten and refused to be considered a sect. Rues's *Nachrichten* are precious not only for addressing the question of the Collegiants' name, but also because he gives us further information about the structure and coordination of the different *collegia* in the United Provinces. With the single exception of the “Bredenburgse twisten³⁵,” (Bredenburg dispute), which divided the Collegiant movement for 14 years, between 1686 and 1700³⁶, the network of *collegia* was always managed in the way that Rues describes.

Before examining the spread of the *collegia* in Holland, which had a separate history and developed differently according to the specific territorial layout, it is necessary to try to explain how the first Rijnsburger seed could become a widespread and well-established movement. The reasons were manifold: a major role was played by the awareness of the first Collegiants, which allowed the movement to grasp important theological and confessional ideas. This strong theoretical basis let the Collegiants overcome the eventual consequences of the Synod of Dordrecht and transform the lack of Remonstrant preachers into anticonfessional and anticlerical criticism. This significant strategy had the support of certain exiled Remonstrant preachers, who saw in the Rijnsburger the response to their previous antiorthodox position and a possible way to organize a new radical religious movement in Holland.

De Fijne's *Kort, Waerachtigh, en Getrouw Verhael* gives us important information about the Remonstrant preachers who, after the *Stilstand*, supported the Collegiants' initiative. Among these we find Dirk Camphuysen, an eminent preacher who, after the publication of the *placcat*, refused to sign the *Stilstand* and accommodated Remonstrants meeting in his house. After exacerbation of the actions taken against the

³³MEIHUIZEN H.W., *Collegianten en Doopsgezinden*, in *Daar de oranje-appel in de gevel staat*, Amsterdam, 1975. p. 94.

³⁴RUES, *Nachrichten*. pp. 243-320.

³⁵VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. pp. 238-266.

We write more extensively about this dispute in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

³⁶FIX A., *Prophecy and Reason. The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1991. pp. 229- 231.

Remonstrant Brotherhood, he decided to follow Collegiant practice³⁷. De Fijne asserted, maliciously, that Camphuysen supported the Collegiants only because “tegen welcke noch geen Placcaten gemaecht en waren, en daer geen perijckel te vreesen was³⁸.” He also accused Camphuysen of being like a trumpeter who incites soldiers to battle refusing to take part in the conflict, an unfounded accusation since Camphuysen was exposed to persecution all his life. Certainly the security of the religious community played an important part in the success of the Collegiants’ method, but there are theoretical and theological considerations³⁹, which De Fijne preferred to omit. Camphuysen’s cultural background and his thinking can tell us more about his choice, and his significance for the expansion of the Collegiant movement.

Dirk Rafaekssoon Camphuysen was born in Gorcum in 1586. He lost his parents, the surgeon Rafael Camphuizen and Maria van Mazeik, daughter of a Gorcum merchant, when he was a child; he was raised by his eldest brother. In 1608 he entered the University of Leiden, where, during the theological disputes between Gomarus and Arminius he supported the latter. Camphuysen, after his studies in theology, did not become a preacher but was a tutor with a wealthy family. He married Anneke Alendorp, the daughter of Govert Alendorp, a preacher in Dordrecht. It was only after his marriage, in 1613, that he decided to be baptized and moved to Utrecht, where he had a professorship and began at the same time to be active within the Waterland Mennonite community⁴⁰. The decision to support the Arminians and joining the Waterlanders were two important markers of Camphuysen’s beliefs.

In 1617 Camphuysen abandoned the professorial chair and finally became a preacher in the community of Vleuten. As a supporter of the Remonstrants he was, in 1619, suspended from his office and persecution began. During a sermon, which he continued to give against the ruling of the Synod of Dordrecht, he and the participants were attacked by the army. After this episode he decided to suspend any preaching in order to avoid undergoing, and reacting to, violence. Nevertheless, he decided to not sign the *Stilstand* and he did not attend the Provincial Synod of Utrecht, where he was

³⁷Pieter Smout, a Collegiant from Leiden, remembers Camphuysen’s choice in his *Het helder Licht der Vryheyd* of 1679 in these words: “Als uyt Campuysens andere schriften, bewesen eord; en word klaer getoont, dat hy het stuk van de vryheyd met ons volkomen van een verstant is geweest.” p. 150.

³⁸DE FIJNE, *Kort, Waerachtigh, en Getrouw Verhael*.

³⁹The importance of Camphuysen's works, especially his psalms, is stressed in VAN NIJMEGEN E., *Historie der Rijnsburgsche Vergadering*, Bij Jacob Burgvliet en Zoon, te Rotterdam, MDCCLXXV (1775). On page 266 the author states: “De gezangen, welke men meestal gewoon is te Rijnsburg te gebruiken, zijn de psalmen, door Kamphuizen berijmd, en de liederen van Oudaen en Rooleeuw, voormaels Leden van dit Gezelschap.”

⁴⁰The Waterlanders were a group who emerged from the first split within the Mennonites, when, in 1557, the leaders of the movement, Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, and Leenaert Bouwens, decided to use excommunication as a rigorous normative instrument. A number of moderates who disagreed with this move chose to separate from the rest of the Mennonites, assuming the name Waterlanders, from the Waterland area in North Holland where they were most numerous. From this moment, the Waterlanders represented the more liberal and less exclusive Doopsgezinde congregation. They practiced tolerance towards all other Churches, because they did not consider themselves the only true congregation. They rejected the use of violence and weapons, preferring to pay a duty instead of playing an active part in the war against Spain. It is not surprising that Camphuysen, worried about the imposition of a strict confession and the issues arising in a pyramidal organization, found in this congregation the most affinity with his thought. See: GASTALDI, *Storia dell'Anabattismo*, vol. 2. pp. 70-74. See also: KÜHLER W.J., *Geschiedenis van de Doopsgezinden in Nederland*, Haarlem, H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1940. pp. 30-70.

to discuss his definitive expulsion from the Church. For this reason he was arrested and imprisoned for 15 days; when freed, he lived in a semiclandestine way. During that time he translated the works of Fausto Socinus into Dutch and moved to Frisia, where he opened a printing house with another persecuted preacher: Geesteranus. After the death of his friend Camphuysen briefly returned to Holland, to Harlingen, but, persecuted by the authorities, he had to flee to the independent island of Ameland and then to Dockum. Here he received an order of expulsion but the city authorities refused to implement the injunction and Camphuysen remained in Dockum until he died. Camphuysen's exceptional life testified to his constant struggle against Church institutions and ecclesiastical authorities. In his letters and sermons published by Jan Rieuwertsz (well known as a Collegiant publisher) we find most of the theoretical elaboration of his positions in Camphuysen's *Theologische Wercken*⁴¹.

After the Synod of Dordrecht, Camphuysen occupied a special place in the debate about anticonfessionalism and the organization of a religious community. The Remonstrants, in fact, after their expulsion from the Calvinist Church had to face the problem of organizing their movement in an ecclesiastical structure. It was a matter of choice between their anticonfessional position and the constitution of another Church. Between 1624 and 1633⁴² the Remonstrants drew up the principal elements of their confession and attenuated their position on unlimited tolerance (a useful position when a minority section of a Church but less advantageous for a separate religious institution). The rules regarding the Remonstrants' confession conserved, nevertheless, an open character and the division between necessary and unnecessary articles of faith (adiaphora), thus conforming the members and maintaining unanimity within the group at a vulnerable time in its life. The Remonstrants tried to sustain the Bible as the only source of truth, avoiding linking membership of another Church to salvation. It is clear how at this specific historical point the position of the Remonstrants represented opposition to the strict and inflexible Calvinist doctrine but, at the same time, they saw Collegiant positions on tolerance and anticonfessionalism as a danger for their integrity.

At this delicate moment of defining their nature, the Remonstrants were opposed by Camphuysen, who supported the Collegiants, and presented them as the best example regarding rejection of the religious institution and the impossibility of living the true religion inside a Church. This position was unacceptable after 1619, when the priority for the Remonstrants was not to vanish under the persecution and to organize an illegal religious network in the United Provinces. It is easy to understand that the principal charge against Camphuysen and the Collegiants was that of supporting the Contra-Remonstrants in the demolition of the movement.

We will consider in chapter 5, with more attention, the whole of Camphuysen's thought and its implications for the rational vision of religion. Here we will write about Camphuysen's ideas on the religious institution and his criticism of the Remonstrant Brotherhood. The individualist vision of the faith and the identification of the true religion with a moral life induced Camphuysen to refuse orthodoxy, external rituals, the caste of preacher, and their professional speculation in theology. All that was

⁴¹Because of its importance within the Collegiant movement, this book has appeared in various editions: in 1661, 1672, 1682, 1699, 1723. The edition quoted in this dissertation is: CAMPHUYSEN D.R., *Theologische Wercken, Bestaende in drie Deelen*, Jan Rieuwertsz en Jan Hendricksz Boom Boeckverkoopers, 't Amsterdam, 1661.

⁴²KOLAKOWSKI, *Chrétiens sans Église*. pp. 85-86.

necessary for human salvation it was possible to find clearly expressed in the Scriptures, and since this truth was not part of complicated speculation but within moral attitude, with good works and intentions all human beings can attain redemption. In an extract from a letter with the theme of *saligheydt* (salvation), Camphuysen expressed himself against confessions:

Maer indien de Confessie een verklatingh van een-stemmingheyt is, daer toe ingestelt, om door een-parigh aen-nemen en belijden van dien, de Societeyt der N.N. helijck als te verzegelen en bekent te maecken, in sulcker voegen, dat men daer mede van de selfde Societeyt yeder een sal uyt-sluyten die de selfde Confessie sal komen tegen te spreken, al waer het schoon yemandt die by sententie der Schriftuere self niet en wort uytgesloten van de gemeenschap Christi, of die alleen ergens de woorden van de Confessie opentlijck tegen spreeckt sonder tegen te spreecken de woorden der Schriftuere, soo en kan ick niet anders bevroeden, of de voorschreven Confessie sal al wederom een nieuwen grondt van Scheuringh en Secterije zijn.⁴³

Here he opposed confessions, as impositions of a human interpretation of the Scriptures onto the simple following of Christ's word. The confession here was not only the reason for disputes and sectarianism but also caused the exclusion of those who tried to follow the teachings of the Holy Scriptures. Camphuysen's critique went beyond this: for him, religion was only a question of moral behavior, such as accomplishing the *exemplo Christi* through individual responsibility; trying to reform the clergy or a religious institution was a vain endeavor. The tendency to see the Antichrist only in the Roman papacy was, for him, a mistake of the Reformed Church, which repeated in another form the same papacy structure, which had no divine authority to interpret the Scriptures⁴⁴. The principle of the *alleensprecken*, which strengthened the power of the clergy in the interpretation of the Scriptures, prevents the possibility of egalitarian participation in the Gemeente⁴⁵. The reasons for division and sectarianism, added Camphuysen, lay always in the authority of the *Leeraer, Meester, Herder, and Bisschop* but never at the base of the religious community, in the *gemeen Corpus*⁴⁶. The justification for this egalitarian participation in the religious life was taken from Paul's writings in the Gospel and, as happened in numerous Collegiant works, the main reference was the First Epistle to the Corinthians:

[...] het Propheteeren tot stichtinge, vermaningh ende onderwijsingh, is noodigh, als in het gemeen, ende niet den Predikanten alleen, bevelen, 1. Corinth. Cap.14⁴⁷.

These motivations were evoked again in the letter in which Camphuysen explained the reasons that drove him to abandon the Remonstrants. He stated that he had no intention of forming "een nieu Pausdom ande secterije⁴⁸."

Criticism of religious institutions was broadened in the perspective of Camphuysen's theology to all institutions. He opposed the participation of Christians in politics office, and disapproved of the political use that theologians made of the religious community: "de Remonstranten [...] half Religie / half Politie willen maken⁴⁹."

⁴³CAMPHUYSEN, *Theologische Wercken*. p. 569.

⁴⁴Ibid. p. 573.

⁴⁵Ibid. p. 571.

⁴⁶Edition of 1682. p. 634.

⁴⁷Ibid. p. 570.

⁴⁸Ibid. p. 594.

⁴⁹Ibid. p. 596 and (1682) p. 635, p. 638.

Following the indication of the apostle Paul (Romans 12.2), Camphuysen considered the world a deceptive place; the only right behavior for a Christian was to act in a nonconforming way in response to it. The outcome of this vision of religion was the devaluation of the rituals and their capacity to bring redemption. This was a direct attack on the Roman Catholic doctrine of good works, but also a way to regain Paul's words to the Romans (Romans 2.25) in a radical and anticonfessional interpretation⁵⁰.

This sharp criticism of all religious institutions and organizations represented a powerful foundation for the development of the Collegiant movement. A good Christian had to renounce the authority of a preacher and start to think of his religion in a moral and individual way. Since there were no existing institutions that acted in this way, the Collegiant movement represented for Camphuysen a possible answer, a practical example for his theories. The future of religion can be only in this form of organization, within which the teachers and the pupil occupy the same place, a movement inspired by the first apostolic Church:

Ten anderen en souden ich niet wilen spreken tot stichtinge als alleenlijck in soodanige by-een-komste, daer geen onderscheyd en waer tusschen leeraer ende lerlingh, maer daer 't al 't samen d'een soo wel also d'ander leeraers, indien 't haer beliefdende ende leerlingen teffens waren: niemand meester ofte docter, niemand eygentlijkck onder oft boven een ander, niemand meer autoriteyt hebbende om te spreecken als een ander, ende dat niet alleenlijck in der daet maer oock in den schijn⁵¹.

The Collegiants represented for Camphuysen the realization of the possibility to be a “Chrétien sans Église”, to free belief in a radical and anarchical manner. This exigence was the basis of the development of the *collegia* all over the United Provinces.

The spread of the Collegiants was impossible to explain only as a consequence of the persecutions or the opposition that orthodox Calvinism kept inflicting on the Remonstrants. We will see that the Collegiant movement evolved in most cases as a critical trend within other confessions and Churches, and its *modus existendi* was as a radical expression inside them. In each city of the United Provinces the Collegiants developed a different mode of acting and a different way to respond to the problem of authority. They also had different priorities, depending on the institutions and confessions involved. Camphuysen's works were, therefore, the first theoretical elaboration, which gave to the newborn movement the necessary strength to spread, and provided a landmark to quote and refer to throughout Collegiant history. Despite this strong link with Camphuysen's theories, the Collegiants developed different solutions to problems like redemption, the unmediated relationship with God, and, of course, the religious organization. Many of these answers distanced them significantly from Camphuysen's assumptions. The Collegiants were able to work through and discuss different approaches to secular institutions, and had strong mystical leanings that were unknown to Camphuysen's principles.

1.3. Spread of the *collegia prophetica* and their territorial

⁵⁰See “Predicatie over Rom.15 vers 8.” Ibid. p. 635.

⁵¹Ibid. (1682). p. 640.

characterization

As explained above, throughout all the Collegiants' history, Rijnsburg remained the main location for their two annual meetings. These were important occasions for discussion about the different positions within the *collegia*, but also opportunities to solve internal controversies as well as doctrinal problems. Not infrequently they were useful events at which to find out about the nature and organization of the movement. Rijnsburg was a place to exchange ideas but it never functioned as national supervision of the single assemblies, which developed their own specific territorial peculiarities. The main cities where the movement was present were Rotterdam, Leiden, Haarlem, Amsterdam, Alkmaar, Hoorn, Zaanstreek, Groningen, Leeuwarden, Grouw, Harlingen.

Between the beginnings of the Rijnsburg *vergadering* and the early 1650s, various important, persecuted Remonstrants went to Rijnsburg to find refuge and to participate in the *collegia prophetica*. The Rijnsburger Collegiants were well known and Rijnsburg became a center of toleration for all afflicted by persecution. It is important to remember that it was in these years (1661-63) that Spinoza, after the *herem* (expulsion) from the Jewish community in 1656, moved to Rijnsburg, probably at the suggestion of Pieter Balling and Lodewijk Meijer. These years were very productive: in 1661 Spinoza wrote the *Korte Verhandeling van God, de mensch en deszelvs welstand*⁵² (A short treatise on God, man and his well-being) and in 1663 published the *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae*⁵³; at the same time he also worked on the first part of the *Ethics*. In a letter of December/January 1661/1662 Spinoza confessed to Oldenburg that he planned to publish the *Korte verhandeling* but that the hate and incomprehension of the theologians discouraged him. These works, published and unpublished, were certainly circulated among the Collegiants, and represented themes for discussion. One of the most important and productive persecuted Remonstrants to seek refuge in Rijnsburg was Joachimsz Oudaen (father of the well-known poet and Rotterdam Collegiant Joachim Oudaen). The former, after the death of Van der Kodde, made the chief contribution to the holding of the assemblies in Rijnsburg; the assemblies had taken place in the Oudaen house since 1630. Of the numerous students of the University of Leiden who participated in the *collegia* there was Coenraad van Beuningen⁵⁴, a law student, who moved to Rijnsburg in 1640. Hugo de Groot, in 1642, made him his secretary for a diplomatic mission to Paris. After a career as an ambassador Van Beuningen became, six times (1669, 1672, 1680, 1681, 1683, 1684), burgomaster of Amsterdam. It was probably in Rijnsburg that Beuningen met Daniel de Breen for the first time⁵⁵, from whose book

⁵²SPINOZA B., (MIGNINI F., ed.), *Korte Verhandeling van God, de mensch en deszelvs welstand*, in *Werken van Spinoza*, vol. III (*Korte Geschriften*), Amsterdam, 1982.

⁵³SPINOZA B., *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae pars I & II, More geometrico demonstratae per Benedictum de Spinoza Amstelodamensem. Accesserunt Ejusdem Cogitata Metaphysica, In quibus difficiliore, quae tam in parte Metaphysices generali, quam speciali occurrunt, quaestiones breviter explicantur*, Jan Rieuwerts, 1663.

⁵⁴For a comprehensive monograph on Beuningen see: ROLDANUS C.W., *Coenrad van Beuningen. Staatsman en Libertijn*, 's-Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1931.

⁵⁵VAN NIJMEGEN, *Historie der Rijnsburgsche Vergadering*, pp. 83-84; VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 91.

*Hoedanigheid des Rijcks Christi*⁵⁶ (Quality of the kingdom of Christ) he drew many of his chiliastic (millenarian) ideas.

De Breen⁵⁷ was one of the many persecuted Remonstrant preachers who took refuge in Rijnsburg. He was born in Haarlem in 1594 and studied theology in Leiden. It was there that he participated in the dispute between Arminius and Gomarus and became a disciple of Simon Episcopus. De Breen took part in the Synod of Dordrecht as a student and assistant of Episcopus. After the synod and the sentence against the Remonstrants he was forced to abandon his studies and moved to Strasbourg. During his travel in Germany he had his first contact with Kaspar Schwenckfeld's theology. It was due to his contacts with Schwenckfeld's followers in Strasbourg that he became involved in millenarian ideas as well as Church universalism and the concept of the invisible Christian community⁵⁸. The contact with these ideas made his thought incompatible with the Remonstrant doctrine and, when he went back to Holland he found with the Collegiants a way to put his beliefs into practice. This was probably the consequence of a serious dispute with Episcopus, regarding the possibility, for Christians, of holding public office. Before 1639 De Breen, with Hermannus Montanus, went to Rijnsburg several times to attend the Avondmal (Supper) and during this time occurred the breach with the Remonstrant Brotherhood⁵⁹. In 1621 he, with Montanus, tried to establish a Remonstrant assembly in his city of origin, Haarlem, but he was arrested during a meeting, with another 25 participants, and accused of subversion. After 15 days in prison he was freed and moved to Amsterdam, where in 1650, with Adam Boreel and Galenus Abrahamsz, he founded the *collegia prophetica*.

As stated above, 1640 was an important year in Collegiant' history because the cultural and religious milieu, which developed in Rijnsburg, rooted itself in the most important cities in the United Provinces. The spread of the *collegia* into all the United Provinces meant overcrowding in the two general assemblies held in Rijnsburg; for this reason a common house was built in 1639 to accommodate the Supper's numerous participants. After the "Bredenburgse twisten" the house was used again in 1704 and at the opening Jakob Le Pole used these words:

Aen en ten behoeve van de Broederen Collegianten, hunne vergadering binnen Rijnsburg houdende, niet alleen om te hooren, en het Heilige Avondmael des Heeren te houden, maer ook om zelfs stichtelijk te mogen spreken, en het Avondmael des Heeren te bedienen.⁶⁰

This speech testified to the importance that, even at an advanced stage in the progress of the movement, free speech and anticlericalism were kept inside the *collegia*.

⁵⁶EVENHUIS R.B., *Ook dat was Amsterdam*, Amsterdam, Uitgeverij ten Have N.V, 1971. p. 190.

⁵⁷Most of the information on De Breen is taken from VAN NIJMEGEN, *Historie der Rijnsburgsche Vergadering*,; VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. See also: KOLAKOWSKI, *Chrétiens sans Église*. pp. 199-205; MEINSMA K.O., *Spinoza et son cercle*, VRIN, Paris, 1983. pp. 147-162; FIX, *Prophecy and Reason*. pp. 41-44.

⁵⁸VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 136 ; FIX, *Prophecy and Reason*. p. 67.

⁵⁹VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*, H&S, Utrecht, 1980. p.92

⁶⁰VAN NIJMEGEN, *Historie der Rijnsburgsche Vergadering*. p. 250.

1.3.1. The case of Amsterdam's *collegium*

We have already mentioned the *collegia prophetica* in Amsterdam. The history of this *collegium* is important for understanding the spread of the Rijnsburger vision of Church organization and the evolution of criticism of the confessional institutions. When Daniel de Breen⁶¹ arrived in Amsterdam, after his break with the Remonstrants, he found a fertile cultural background for the diffusion of Rijnsburger practices. Since 1646 Adam Boreel had tried to establish “Boreelist colleges,” near to the concept of *collegia* in Rijnsburg.

Adam Boreel was a prominent theologian with extensive education at the University of Leiden in the Hebrew and Greek languages. He was born in 1602 in the city of Middelburg; his family was composed of convinced Protestants and Calvinists, who actively resisted the Duke of Alba's armies. His brother Johaan was in contact with Hugo Grotius since Boreel's father was in a legation to England with him. In 1628 Boreel was a student of theology in Leiden under the mentorship of the conservative Andreas Rivertus (1572-1651); the distance to Rivertus's orthodox teaching was soon evident. It was probable that at the time Boreel already attended the *vergadering* in Rijnsburg, as was usual among theology students. After the end of his studies, in 1632, Boreel traveled for the first time to England, where he came into contact with millenarian Christians and Jews at Hartlib's circle and with the Cambridge Neoplatonics. Due to his association with radical religious groups he was arrested and imprisoned for several months. He was released on condition and he left England, for this reason returned to Middelburg, where after more studies in theology started to write his main work: *Ad legem et ad testimonium*⁶².

The main theme of Boreel's book is the relationship between Christ's authority and ecclesiastical institutions. In this work he summarized all his anticonfessional and anticlerical views. Deeply inspired by Schwenkfeld and Frank's theory of the “invisible Church,” he sharpened his criticism of the Reformation and expressed his pessimism about the decline of the Church⁶³. Boreel's perspective was essentially spiritual: he saw the proliferation of Church institutions as a sign of the failure of the Reformation, of which the main cause was the loss of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. *Ad legem* represented another theoretical step to the justification of the *collegia prophetica*. In this text Boreel was an interpreter of a particular position of the “spiritual reformation” in Holland, that of Coornhert's “Church of toleration.” In the absence of inspiration and gifts of the Holy Spirit it was impossible to initiate the building of a Church; the “Church of toleration” represented the human and secular ensemble of believers without the presumption to have a divine authority. This spiritual vision was near to the first Collegiant position and integrated perfectly with the more explicit critique of ecclesiastical institutions and clericalism made by Camphuysen.

The “Boreelist colleges,” first in Middelburg and after that in Amsterdam, were the

⁶¹See: SCHNEIDER W., *Adam Boreel. Sein Leben und seine Schriften*. Giessen, 1911; MEINSMA K.O., *Spinoza et son cercle*.

⁶²BOREEL A., *Ad legem et ad testimonium*, 1645. (no p. no.).

⁶³On the influence of Frank and Schwenkfeld on the Collegiants see: VOOGT G., “Anyone who can Read may be a Preacher”: *Sixteenth-century Roots of the Collegiants*, in *Dutch Review of Church History / Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, vol. 85, issue 1, 2005.

practical application of the theoretical elaboration of the *Ad legem*. Boreel saw this meeting as the last refuge for believers who wanted to escape from the corruption of the Church. Despite this strong position the “Boreelist colleges” had no significant impact on Amsterdam’s religious life. In 1646 the Amsterdam magistrates conducted an inquiry to verify the nature of the colleges but they came to the conclusion that they were a “verzameling van Mennisten⁶⁴.” The situation changed when in 1650 Boreel’s spiritual views met with Daniel de Breen’s chiliasm and millenarianism. These ideas, the successful spread of the Rijnsburger *collegia*, and the penetration into ecclesiastical institutions of various criticisms were the main elements of the Amsterdam *collegium*. Boreel’s meetings were transformed from private worship to places of collective exegesis.

In the same year that Amsterdam’s *collegium* were officially born (1650), Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan (1622-1706)⁶⁵ became one of the important members. Galenus Abrahamsz was born in 1622 in a little village near Middleburg, Zierikzee. He also attended the University of Leiden, in 1645 finishing his studies in medicine and Latin. In 1646 he moved to Amsterdam, where he started to practice medicine and married the daughter of the *Doopsgezinde* preacher Abram Dirksz. Bierens. In 1648, after the death of Bierens, Galenus Abrahamsz became the young pastor of the Flemish community in Amsterdam, who assembled by “het Lam” (now the Singelkerk). Following his “conversion” to the Rijnsburger principles the history of the Collegiants in Amsterdam became profoundly connected with the Flemish Mennonite community.

Galenus Abrahamsz’s encounter with the Collegiants Adam Boreel and Daniel de Breen was of central importance for his position on the form and organization of the Mennonite Church. Abrahamsz, before becoming a supporter of the Collegiants’ ideas and sharing the concepts of deconstruction of the clerical institution and the absence of God’s gifts in the Church on Earth, had different ideas about Mennonite congregations, and was the main proponent in refusing the reunification offered by the Waterland community⁶⁶. The schismatic history of the Anabaptist movement in Holland and the numerous disputes about the true Christian Church had played a key role in Abrahamsz’s decision to embrace Collegiant principles⁶⁷.

The main accusations that the orthodox Flemish directed against Abrahamsz were of admitting outsiders inside the community: “broederschap tot het Avondmael soude toe-gelaten worden ’t zy Papisten, ’t zy Lutheranen, ’t zy Socinianen, ’t zy Remonstranten, ’t zy Gereformeerde, ’t zy gedoopt, ’t zy ongedoopt wanner zy slecht met hem ’t Verval der Kercken, de vryheydt van spreecken, en ’t duysent-jarig Rijk verstaen⁶⁸.” Outside the Mennonite Church Abrahamsz had contacts not only with

⁶⁴MEINSMA, *Spinoza et son cercle*.

⁶⁵MEIHUIZEN H.W., *Galenus Abrahamsz 1622-1706. Strijder voor een onbepaalde verdraagzaamheid en verdediger van het Doperse Spiritualisme*, Haarlem, H.D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon N.V., 1954. See also: HYLKEMA, *Reformateurs*, vol. I. pp. 17-20.

⁶⁶Galenus Abrahamsz refused this reunification probably because of pressure from the conservative leader of his congregation. We do not have records of Abrahamsz’s thinking before 1650 because his works are absent. See: ABRAHAMSZ G., *Antwort op de Vrede-presentatie, gedaen door de Waterlandsche aen de Vlaemsche, Duytsche en Vriessche Doopsgezinde Gemmentes*, Amsterdam, 1664; VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 150; KOLAKOWSKI, *Chrétien sans Église*. p. 241.

⁶⁷FIX, *Prophecy and Reason*. p. 108.

⁶⁸ ANONYMOUS, *Copie van seecker Vreden Concept, tusschen de Waterlantsche en Valesmsche Doopsgezinde Christenen, Door een Valesmsche aen een Waterlantsch Broeder Geschreven*,

Collegiants, but also with English Quakers⁶⁹ and Socinians. George Fox met him in Amsterdam while traveling in Holland in 1677. Abrahamsz organized refuges for the Socinians banished from Poland after 1653, as well as for the Anabaptists persecuted in Switzerland (1672). He was also a major personality in the European scientific community; he was in contact with Hartlib and his circle regarding an alchemical project⁷⁰.

The orthodox Flemish formalized their accusations in the *Oogh-water voor de Vlaemsche Doopsgesinde Gemeente tot Amsterdam* (Collyrium for the Flemish Mennonite community of Amsterdam):

[...] dat de *onbepaalde veyheyt om tegens de Confessien te Prediken*, de eenige oorsaeck daer van is: welcker eevoudige namen; misbruyckt van die Collegianten die soo driftich door *Galenus* yveren [...] Ende soo sult ghy sien dat hy t'elekemael d'eevoudige waerheydt; die aan der *Oude Dienaren* sijde overslaet; sal contrabalanceren met zijn veelvoudige lifticheyt die in *hem* door lange ervarentheyt seer uyt streeckt. Tusschen welcke beyde de Ghemeynte, als in een evenaer heen en werder swierende; allenkens sal slijten en verteren ten deel *Waterlandts* werdende ten deel *Remonstrants* (die ons vuur maer aenblasen, on de sijlen van onse brandende kerck tot stutsels van haer vallende kerck te moghen krijghen) ten deel *Libertyns*, ten deel *Naturalists*, de (de goede niet te na gesproken) met alle Religie ja zelfs met de *H. Schrift* ende *Geest*, den spot drijven ende eerst in scherts *Twijffelende of zy selfs sijn*: wel haest in ernst komen te twijffelen *datter een Godt is*, of ten minsten een Godt die zich bekommert met de Aerdtsche saken: hoedanige misdachten ban ware *Theologie*, en grondige *Cartesianische Philosophie*; onse Gemeente nu reedts by na soo veel heeft opgeworpen als er namen in 't groot *Maertelaers Boeck* komen⁷¹.

The first meeting of Amsterdam's *collegium* was held in a private house on the Lindengracht. Suddenly, a preacher from Amsterdam, Roelof Pieters, started to accuse the Collegiants of spreading antitrinitarian ideas and organizing heretics⁷². The accusation of Socinianism was addressed to Galenus Abrahamsz and the religious dissidents among the ranks of the Collegiants. This accusation was used often and did not designate specifically the theological unitarian formulation of God⁷³ but was addressed generally to anticlerical groups or dissident movements who used a rational approach to Bible interpretation⁷⁴.

The Collegiants, indeed, partly shared Socin's Bible exegesis, stressing the importance of human knowledge in understanding the Scriptures and giving credit to the essential rational core of the revelation. Also similar to Socin was the antiphilosophical position of the Collegiants, the aversion, for example, to all useless disquisition and speculation around theological dogmas of which the only function was to alienate believers from the only authentic source of revelation: the Scriptures.

Gedruckt by Steven van Lier, 't Amsterdam, 1662. (no p. no.). See also: VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 146.

⁶⁹MEIHUIZEN, *Galenus Abrahamsz 1622-1706*. p. 59.

⁷⁰See: GASTALDI, *Storia dell'Anabattismo*, vol. 2. p. 644; BANGS J.D., *Letters on Toleration. Dutch Aid to Persecuted Swiss and Palatine Mennonites 1615-1699*, Rockport, Maine, Picton Press, 2004; LAMBOUR R., *De alchemistische wereld van Galenus Abrahamsz (1622-1706)*, in *Doopsgesinde Bijdragen*, no. 31, 2005.

⁷¹WIJNGAERDT T.G., *Oogh-Water voor de Vlaemsche Doops-gesinde Gemeente tot Amsterdam*, By Johannes van Someren, Boek-verkooper op den Dam, 1664. pp. 18-19.

⁷² VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 142.

⁷³The negation of the person of the Holy Spirit and the recognition of God as the only true divinity.

⁷⁴ See: MEINSMA, *Spinoza et son cercle*. p. 130. See also: KÜHLER W.J., *Het Socinianisme in Nederland*, Leiden, 1912; reprint Leeuwarden, 1980.

As showed by Mulsow, in the Netherlands, Socinianism acquired a new identity influenced by the rational approaches of Cartesianism and Spinozism⁷⁵. Wiszowaty stresses the importance of the rationalist tendencies inside the Socinians, especially in the 17th century, when they proposed a theology based on rational examination and increasingly independent from the Scriptures⁷⁶. Further, these accusations were mitigated to a large extent by the objective and open sympathies that antitrinitarianism expressed inside the *collegia*, as proved by the later publication of the *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum* by Collegiant Frans Kuyper (1629-1691)⁷⁷ and Abrahamsz's help to the Polish refugees. The authorities did not react immediately to the accusations, but the spread of the news that "Socinians meetings" were held in Amsterdam caused alarm and agitation among Calvinist citizens. It was due to this reaction that the authorities suggested closing the *collegia* in 1652. The meetings continued discreetly in Galenus Abrahamsz's house on the Elandstraat until 1653,⁷⁸ when the States-General of the United Provinces issued a general decree forbidding all Socinian books and meetings. Following this decree the Collegiants officially suspended their meetings for one year (1654).

These Calvinist accusations against other confessions or religious movements and the resistance that the political authorities in Holland exerted to oppose them can be considered another factor increasing religious pluralism and then the spread of Rijnsburger meetings. As argued by Fix, "the history of free thought in the Dutch republic during the seventeenth century was in large part the story of a constant struggle between the Calvinist clergy and the regents. The clergy demanded closer control of the government in many areas. The regents, however, favored a much looser relationship between church and state because they had no desire to strengthen the clergy politically and see a militant church compete with them for power in the republic⁷⁹."

In 1655 Galenus Abrahamsz attempted for the first time to move the meetings to the Mennonite Church, but this proposal aroused fierce opposition from the conservative members and the assemblies returned to being held in a private house⁸⁰. In the same year Tieleman Tielen published two pamphlets⁸¹, the *Renovation van de Commonitio*⁸² (Renovation of the admonition), and the *Winckelpraetjen*⁸³ (shop

⁷⁵MULSOW M., *The "New Socinianism": Intertextuality and Cultural Exchange in Late Socinianism*, in: MULSOW, ROHLS, *Socinianism and Arminianism*.

⁷⁶WISZOWATY A., *Rational Religion, or a Tract concerning the Judgment of Reason to be used even in Theological and Religious Controversies*, in WILLIAMS G.H., *The Polish Brethren*, Harvard, 1980. pp. 152-158.

⁷⁷See: KNIJFF P., VISSER S.J., eds, *Bibliographia Sociniana. A Bibliographical Reference Tool for the Study of Dutch Socinianism and Antitrinitarianism*, Amsterdam, Doopsgezinde Historische Kring, 2004.

⁷⁸MEIHUIZEN, *Galenus Abrahamsz 1622-1706*. p. 56.

⁷⁹FIX, *Prophecy and Reason*. p. 53.

⁸⁰ VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 149; ANONYMOUS, *Lammerenkrijgh: Anders Mennoniten Kercken-Twist*, 1663. (no p. no.)

⁸¹In this dissertation we chosen to use the word pamphlet, although it is anachronistic for the 17th century. About pamphlet production, censorship, religious and political control of printed text, see: HARLINE C.E., *Pamphlets, Printing, and Political Culture in the Early Dutch Republic*, M. Nijhoff, Dordrecht, 1987.

⁸²ANONYMOUS, *Renovatio van de Commonitio*, Amsterdam, 1655. Meihuizen attributes this work to Tieleman Tielen, see: MEIHUIZEN, *Galenus Abrahamsz 1622-1706*. p. 49.

⁸³ VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 145.

talk), which accused Galenus Abrahamsz and David Spruyt of Socinianism. Simultaneously a Flemish *Doopsgezinde* under the pseudonym Radbodus Reinardi published *De ontdekte veinsing der hedendaeghsche geestdrijvers en Socinianen*⁸⁴(The discovered sham of the present-day spirit drivers and Socinians). In this book the “Boorelist”, “Bereenist”, and “Galenist”, describing the different tendencies within the Collegiants, were again accused of Socinianism. Galenus Abrahamsz and Spruyt were questioned several times: they had to justify their faith and officially keep their distance from the Socinians⁸⁵. It was following these criticisms that Abrahamsz and Spruyt decided to write, in 1657, 19 articles (*XIX Artikelen*) to explain their position on the Church as an institution, this work circulating at first unpublished among the community. The *XIX Artikelen* did not mitigate the accusations but gave rise to a new one. Nevertheless, from 1657 to 1659 the *Lam* community agreed a pause in the production of polemic works.

Between 1660 and 1667 the *collegia* were held in a house on the Rokin rented by Boreel, but the interventions of the Amsterdam authorities, which tried to close the meetings, never failed. The Collegiants were again obliged to suspend the meetings because of the abomination of free reading of the Scriptures and the offense to the clergy. In that period the *collegia* attendance reached 400 participants⁸⁶.

From 1668 to 1675 the Collegiants' meetings were held in the Mennonite Church on the Singel Canal. After 1675, thanks to burgomaster Nicolaes Opmeer, they obtained an orphanage, the Oranje-Appel, and moved the assemblies there. During these years the issues about the nature and organization of the movement never vanished but assumed a peculiar tendency due to the influential presence of Collegiants inside the Mennonite Church of Amsterdam. We can consider this period the end of the productive and radical presence of the *collegia* in Holland, before the schismatic debate about tolerance and participation that goes under the name of the “Bredenburgse twisten.”

When Galenus Abrahamsz became close to the Collegiants and tried to relocate some of the Rijnsburger principles to the hearts of the Mennonite community there were numerous reactions. At that time the Amsterdam Mennonite community was split between the Flemish (*Vlaamsche Doopsgezinden*) and the Waterlanders. Unlike what happened in the Waterland community, where the penetration of Collegiant ideals was relatively easy, the Flemish community displayed more resistance. It was for this reason that the affinity that Galenus Abrahamsz demonstrated for the Collegiants provoked serious tension among the Flemish Mennonites in Amsterdam that culminated, in 1664, with the last schism in Mennonite history. The Collegiants' position and the orthodox orientation were represented inside the Flemish community by two charismatic personalities: Galenus Abrahamsz and Samuel Apostool⁸⁷. The numerous pamphlets and works printed in these years, which included the bitter polemic against Socinianism and the fundamental issue about the meaning and

⁸⁴EVENHUIS, *Ook dat was Amsterdam*. p. 105. Van Sleen (*De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 145) attributes the three pamphlets to the same Flemish pastor, but did not identify him as Tieleman Tielen.

⁸⁵MEIHUIZEN, *Galenus Abrahamsz 1622-1706*. pp. 51-52. See also: ANONYMOUS, *t' Samenspraek tusschen een Doopsghesinde ende Sociniaen*, 1653.

⁸⁶MEINSMA, *Spinoza et son cercle*. p. 295.

⁸⁷Unlike Abrahamsz, Samuel Apostool produced no important works: his name is tied to the dispute and the split inside the Mennonite community. See: GASTALDI, *Storia dell'Anabattismo*, vol. 2. pp. 642-662.

organization of a religious community, was sarcastically named the *Lammerenkrijg* (The Lamb's War)⁸⁸.

The main provocation reawakening the debate after the short break of 1657-59 was the profound influence of Collegiant principles on the community and the renewed possibility of holding the *collegia* inside the Mennonite Church. The spark that inflamed the already tense situation was the publication, in 1659, of the *Nader verklaringe van de XIX. Artikelen*⁸⁹ (Further clarification of the XIX Articles). Galenus Abrahamsz and David Spruyt published this second edition of the *XIX Artikelen* to answer Laurens Hendricksz, who, in a previous work, asked about the passage in the Scriptures that could justify the first apostolic Church's theory of the Fall. Abrahamsz and Spruyt denied for the second time the possibility for any Church on the Earth to represent a divine institution, declared freedom for the believers to have as reference only the Scriptures, and the necessity of extensive and mutual tolerance (*verdraagzaamheid*) as a means of eliminating all authoritarian claims in the religious community. In a letter from Galenus Abrahamsz and other Collegiants⁹⁰ (1662) and in a text of 1663, the *Zedighe Overweginghe over den Toestandt de jegenwoordighe Onlusten en Gheschillen*⁹¹ (Pious considerations on the present state of the troubles and disputes), particular attention is paid to the question of *onderlinge verdraagzaamheid* (unlimited tolerance), especially concerning the teaching and the administration of the religious community. The concept of *verdraagzaamheid* has to be understood as a democratic and egalitarian claim inside the community.

In June 1660 the so-called *Leidsche Synode*⁹², a meeting between the 22 Flemish congregations in the United Provinces, was held in Leiden. It proceeded under the chairmanship of Tieleman Jansz van Branght, who represented the conservative side of the *Doopsgezinden*. The synod had the purpose of deciding about a new confession of faith that could replace the collection of the *Algemeene Belijdenissen*⁹³ and of discussing the situation of each single congregation. The positions of Galenus Abrahamsz also demanded discussion. The synod declared him a dissident, did not recognize the possibility of admitting Collegiants or Remonstrants inside the community, and did not accept the practice of widespread tolerance. Despite the decisions of the Leiden Synod, Abrahamsz and Spruyt had the support of the majority of the community. Abrahamsz's supporters ignored most of the synod's injunctions and, even with various attempts at pacification, the confrontation became more polarized when, after 1662, Samuel Apostool was elected preacher of the Flemish community.

⁸⁸See: HYLKEMA, *Reformateurs*, vol. I. pp. 24-27.

⁸⁹ABRAHAMSZ, SPRUYT, *Nader verklaringe*, Jan Rieuwertsz, 1659.

⁹⁰See: Letter D. Copie van 't Concept van Verdragh, in BALLING, *Verdediging*.

⁹¹ANONYMOUS, *Zedighe Overweginghe*.

⁹²The report of the meeting was published in 1661: *Verhaal van 't gene verhandelt ende besloten is, in de By-een-komste tot Leyden: door eenige Doops-gezinde Leeraren en Diacone, die men Vlamingen noemt, tot dien eynde uyt verscheyde Plaatzten vergadert in de maant Junii 1660*, By Jan Rieuwertsz, 't Amsterdam, 1661.

See also: VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 150; VAN DER ZIJPP N., *Leidsche Synode*, in Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, 1955. From <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/L4493.html>.

⁹³Aim that was never achieved. Only in 1665 there was published by Wygaert *De Algemeene Belydenissen der Vereenighde Vlaemsche, Vriesche en Hoogduytsche Doopgesinde Gemeeynte Gods*, a collection of the confessions recognized by the Mennonites.

In 1663 the Flemish *gemeende* issued 11 articles⁹⁴ of confession, which were criticized by the Galenist party as coercion of consciences and a minor form of inquisition⁹⁵. Galenus Abrahamsz was again brought in front of the Dutch court but avoided prison thanks to the intervention of Pieter de Groot, who wrote a letter to the Grand Pensionary, De Witt⁹⁶.

The sermons given by the two parties developed into occasions to criticize adversaries or to emphasize doctrinal difference⁹⁷. Pieter van Locren, supporter of Abrahamsz, declared in a sermon that Christ has to be considered a simple man, and that he never died to liberate mankind from sin but to confirm Christian teaching. Van Locren argued that faith is not sufficient for redemption but mankind will be judged by good works: “den mensch in het oordeel niet gevraagd zou worden wat hij geloofd, maar hoe hij geleefd had⁹⁸.” This way of considering faith and good works was, legitimately, suspected of Socinianism. Samuel Apostool responded to this position, stressing the importance of Christ's death for mankind's redemption and the significance of faith at the divine judgment. Galenus Abrahamsz replied, emphasizing the crucial nature of good works, and highlighting the implicit Calvinist connotation of the only faith doctrine and the disastrous consequences it has for active resistance to sin⁹⁹. The disputes gave rise to an enormous number of pamphlets¹⁰⁰, most of them personal charges against Abrahamsz, including various allegations: hypocrisy, Socinianism, polygamy, plotting the transformation of the Flemish congregation into *collegia*.

The anonymous work with the title *Lammerenkrijgh*¹⁰¹ recapitulates the causes of this quarrel. The book was written in the form of a conversation between a Remonstrant, a Waterlander, a Flemish, and a Collegiant. It tries to reconstruct different perspectives of the dispute, but the voice of the Collegiant is of a minority and his intervention is reduced to a few lines. Indeed, the different positions of the Remonstrant, the Waterlander, and the Flemish are better delineated. The Flemish has the function of internal criticism, which at a certain point abandons the personal accusations against Abrahamsz and discusses very important issues in the Collegiant movement. Remonstrant and Waterlander assume the roles of external observers of the dispute.

⁹⁴*De Artyckelen, Die wy door onderteekeninge bekennen metter herten te gelooven, ende metten monde te blijden, zijn dese*, By Peter Arentsz, 1664.

⁹⁵ANONYMOUS, *Waerschouwinge voor het soo-genaemde Oog-Water: Waer in de waerheydt van de Aenmerkingen op de Vrede-Praesentatie wort verdedight*, By Jan Rieuwertsz, 't Amsterdam, 1664. pp. 6-7. See also: ABRAHAMSZ G., *Copie Van het schriftelijck Voorstel 't welck Dr. Galenus Abrahamsz, Door order van het meerderdeel der Dienaren, op den 1. junii 1664, de Broederen der Valemsche Doopsgesinde Gemeente, getracht heeft voor te lesen*, By Pieter Arentsz, 1664.

⁹⁶LAMBOUR, *De alchemistische wereld van Galenus Anrahamsz* p. 96.

⁹⁷ANONYMOUS, *Reductie van de soo genaemde Deductie, ofte Zedige overweginge van den toestant der jegenwoordige Onlusten en Geschillen in de Vlaamsche Doopsgesinde Gemeynte binnen Amsterdam gemaect*, Amsterdam, 1663.

⁹⁸VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 153.

⁹⁹ANONYMOUS, *Lammerenkrijgh*. (no p. no.); GASTALDI, *Storia dell'Anabattismo*, vol. 2. p. 646; VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 158.

¹⁰⁰To cite some of them: *Het gescheurde schaepskleed van Dr. Galenus Abrahamsz; Het gekraaij van een Sociniaanse haan onder Doopsgesinde veedere; Hircus iratus oft den verstoorden bock op de Haverkist; Samenspraek tusschen een Mennonisten broeder en een Gereformeerden vriend*. See: VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. , pp. 154-155, 158.

¹⁰¹ANONYMOUS, *Lammerenkrijgh*.

The most interesting pages of the *Lammerenkrijgh* are those dedicated to the question of authority inside a religious community. To tie faith to the conscience and not to the *belijdenis* (confession) were, for the Flemish, advantageous for those who were independent from the sermon but not for those who need the leadership of a preacher.

Doch am dat die te weynig in getal waren, so mostmen een middel aanwenden om andre die soo Preeksuchtick niet zijn, aan zijn snoer te krijgen, en voornamenlijk de aansienlijkste en rijkste: dat was. Ten vierden, haar te mets particulier aen de huzsen te gaan bezoeken, en by alle gelegentheyte voor te geven dat het oogmerk allenigh was de Christelyke verdraagsaamheyt in de Gemeente in te voeren, op datmen de conscientien der menschen so precijs aan de confessien en formulieren van belydenisse niet soude verbinden¹⁰².

The same pages raised the question about the decision to renounce the authority. The Remonstrant doubted that such a choice could represent emancipation for the community. For him it was more probable that this anarchy would turn into new power for those who were most charismatic and good at rhetoric.

Galenus tracht insgelijc de reggerders der Gemeenten door het nageven van al te grooten autoritteyts-pleging, by de ledematen in kleyn achtung te brengen, en die afgeschafft zijnde, ook yder een even veel Preeck- en spreekrecht toeschrijvende de gemeente also in een Collegie of Kerk der oogluysing te vervormen, daar hy wel weet dat men hem (om alle confusie te vermyden) nootsakelijc tot Regeerder en Directeur sal moeten aan-nemen, gelijk nu reedts in zijn Collegien blijkt: want als hy daar niet tegenwoordigh komt, soo is de Mester van 't School.

Rem: My verlangt te hooren hoe hy door een Anarchie tot een Monarchie heeft soeken te geraken, dat is: van de grondt op sijn oogluyskende Kerk te stichten, daar hy Regeerder en opper-hoofd van soude zijn¹⁰³.

This critique certainly included elements of truth. It was not sufficient to enlarge the institution of preacher with free prophecy to have within the community the same theological comprehension or the same charismatic level. Due to this vulnerability of the religious community it was justified, for the Flemish, to have the presence of an authority, a preacher, and a confession, which function as guides:

De menschen zijnt menschen / en zy en kunnen de Menscheyd soo gheheel niet uyt trekken: daar moeten in een Gemeente / om die vredigh te regeeren / regulen en orders zijn gericht / niet / na dat de Mensche behooren te zijn / maar na dat zy in der daat zijn¹⁰⁴.

In 1663 the dispute reached its most bitter moment: the sermons given by the two parties degenerated into brawls. The conservative section of the Flemish community did not hesitate to denounce Galenus Abrahamsz for Socinianism to Holland's authorities. He was again found innocent but, to maintain public order, the authorities intervened to ban new disputes or sermons.

The complete separation of the conservative Flemish and the "Galenists" was inevitable by 1664, although several attempts at appeasement (*vrede-presentatie*) were made. In the same year Antonius van Dale published the *Boere-Praetje*, (Peasants'

¹⁰²Ibid. (no p. no.)

¹⁰³Ibid. (no p. no.)

¹⁰⁴Ibid. (no p. no.)

talk)¹⁰⁵ which was answered by David Spruyt's *Vrede presentatie*¹⁰⁶ (Presentation of peace). Between 1663 and 1664 Pieter Balling wrote his *Verdediging van de regering der Doopsgezinde Gemeente*¹⁰⁷ (Defense of the government of the Mennonite community) and the *Nader verdediging*¹⁰⁸ (Further defence), texts in which he supported Abrahamsz's antiauthoritarian view against the imposition of a confession of faith and against Apostool's *11 Articles*. In 1664 an anonymous author answered Balling in a text entitled *Goliadts Swaart, of Pieter Ballings soo genaamde Nader Verdediging*¹⁰⁹. (Golia's Sword, or Pieter Balling so called further defence). The author, drawing parallels between a political organization and a religious community¹¹⁰ answered Balling using Cartesian argumentation¹¹¹. He criticized Collegiants' claim to have no confession and their aversion to authority. The author further accused the Collegiants of having organized a conspiracy inside the Flemish community, using the argumentation of tolerance and anticonfessionalism to substitute the confession of the *Gemeente* with a different one. He bitterly criticized this behavior, which led to the separation of the community. The majority (1500 of 2000)¹¹² in the community was favorable to the Collegiants' position and adopted their meeting place, the *Bij 't Lam*; the minority moved to an *ex-brouwerij*, the *Zon* (Sun)¹¹³. The two parties, after the schism, took the names Lamists and Zonists. This division was not only to Amsterdam's congregation but spread across all the United Provinces.

After Amsterdam's split, all Flemish communities separated on the same basis, Lamists and Zonists, even if they did not always use these names. The conservative element refused to recognize Christ as a simple man and his death as simple ethical teaching, refused to think of the Holy Spirit as cognizable with the Bible's word, and refused to accept the nonexistence of the visible and holy Church. This turmoil rearranged the traditional division between Flemish, Waterland, and Friezen: these factions of the *Doopsgezinden* found positions in a more tidy allocation. After 1664 the communities that recognized themselves as *Zonists* subscribed to a pact of unity

¹⁰⁵VAN DALE A., *Boere-Praetje, tusschen vijf Persoonen, een Huysman, out Vlamigh, Remonstrant, Waterlander en Collegiant. Handelende, of Galenus te recht voor en Hypocrijet is beschuldigt; en of de Vrede-presentatie, bestaende in elf artijckelen, overgelevert op den 20 December 1663 oock met de H. Schrifture accordeeren*, Door A.T.V.D., By Jan Rieuwertsz Boekverkooper, 't Amsterdam, 1664.

¹⁰⁶SPRUYT D., *Vrede-presentatie, uyt den naem van het meerendeel der Dienaren der Vereenighde Vlaemsche, Duytsche, en Vriessche Gemeente, aen die Dienaren, de Wlecke uyt de gewoonlijke Vergaderplaats gewecken zijnde, tegenwoordigh een besondere vergaderinge houden*, By Jan Rieuwertsz, Amsterdam, 1664.

¹⁰⁷BALLING P., *Verdediging van de Regering der Doopsgezinde Gemeente, Die men de vereenigde Vlamingen, Vriezen, en Hoogduytsche nomen, Binnen Amsterdam*, By Jan Rieuwertsz, 't Amsterdam, 1663.

¹⁰⁸BALLING P., *Nader verdediging van de regering der Doopsgezinde gemeente, die men de Vereenigde Hoogduytsche, Vriezen, en Vlamingen noemt, binnen Amsterdam, zijne een wederlegging van d'Antwoort op de verdediging*, By Jan Rieuwertsz, 't Amsterdam, 1664.

¹⁰⁹ANONYMOUS, *Goliadts Swaart, of Pieter Ballings sso genaamde Nader Verdediging*, By Arent van den Heuvel, 't Amsterdam, 1664.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p. 11.

¹¹¹ Ibid. p. 6. The quotation by Descartes seems, however, to be ironical.

¹¹² See: GASTALDI, *Storia dell'Anabattismo*, vol. 2. p. 647.

¹¹³ See: ANONYMOUS, *Besluit van de Vereenichde Vlaemsche, Vriessche en Hoochduitsche Gemeente, in hare gewoonlijke Vergader-plaats, eendrachtelijk op den 3 Augusti 1664 binnen Amsterdam genomen; misgaders een Vertooch, van eenige Broederen, der zelve Gemeente aan hare mede-Broederen, rakende 't voorgaande Besluit*, By Jan Rieuwertsz, Amsterdam, 1664.

(*Oprecht Verbondt van Eenigheydt*) and chose to be named Mennonites. According to Ugo Gastaldi¹¹⁴ this separation introduced a progressive institutionalization of the *Doopsgezinde* community, which tried to find in the *Algemeene Belijdenissen* a stable confession of faith. The main purpose was not only to avoid further divisions but also to defend themselves from the spread of Socinian and rationalist ideas; in 1673 some Waterlander communities, with the same concerns, decided to expel those who participated in the *collegia*. This strictness was not advantageous for the community, which lost, in those years, a steady number of their members.

The presence of the *Rijnsburger* was certainly the main factor instigating these fractures, but we must not make the mistake of confusing the Collegiants with the *Doopsgezinden*. In the particular case of Amsterdam, until 1675 the Collegiants, through Galenus Abrahamsz, represented an important trend inside the Flemish community, but the Rijnsburgers never renounced their independence. It was for this reason that in 1745 the historian Jan Wagenaar proposed to distinguish the Collegiants who had separate meetings from those who were internal influence on the *Doopsgezinden*. In 1675, after a long negotiation with the Amsterdam authorities the Collegiants moved their assemblies to an orphanage named the “*De Oranje Appel*”. Van Slee argues that one of the main motivations was to achieve independence from the Lamists but this decision can also depend from the progressive loss of influence over the movement by Galenus Abrahamsz. He developed different positions on the necessity of conforming to the first apostolic Church¹¹⁵ and about the role of preachers inside a religious community. As noted by Kolakowski¹¹⁶, the most radical writing of Galenus Abrahamsz on *vrij spreken* (free speech) remains the *Nader Verklaringe*. After this work Abrahamsz developed a moderate position¹¹⁷ about free prophecy and he recognized the necessity to maintain equality among the believers, but also the utility of a noncharismatic priesthood to support unity in the community. Further, his universalism and his radicalism in the matter of irenicism underwent some limitation in his last years, especially in his work in defense of the Mennonites, the *Verdediging der christenen dei Doopsgezinde genaam worden*¹¹⁸ (Defence of the Christians which are named *Doopsgezinden*).

In 1681 the *collegia* were again suspended and after 1685 the *Rijnsburger* experienced their first rift due to the dispute between Lemmerman and Bredenburg. The resolution took place only after 1700; the last general meeting in *Rijnsburg* was held in 1787.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. pp. 648-649.

¹¹⁵ VV. AA., *Daar de Orangie-appel in the gevel staat. In en om het weeshuis der doopsgezinde collegianten 1675-1975*, Amsterdam, 1975. p. 92; VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 162.

¹¹⁶ KOLAKOWSKI, *Chrétiens sans Église*. p. 188.

¹¹⁷ KOLAKOWSKI L., *Dutch Seventeenth-century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion: the Mennonite, Collegiant and Spinozan Connections*, in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, no. 3/4 (Jul/Oct) 1990. p. 282.

¹¹⁸ ABRAHAMSZ G., *Verdediging der christenen dei Doopsgezinde genaamd worden*, By Jan Rieuwertsz, t' Amsterdam, 1699. Galenus Abrahamsz was always a propagator of a Christian irenicism, but he never involved his universal vision of Church Pagan, Jews, or Muslims. The use of Coornhert's perfectibility opened, however, a way to the redemption of all souls.

1.3.2. The other *collegia*: Rotterdam, Leiden and Haarlem

The Rijnsburg movement assumed different forms, as we outline above, depending on its territorial characterization. It was certainly always present due its pluralist character as a critical influence inside other religious communities but in the other important cities in the United Provinces displayed a different character compared to that of Amsterdam. In Rotterdam, Collegiant ideas gained most of the Waterlanders, in Haarlem the majority was of Mennonite origin.

Compared with what happened in Amsterdam, the *collegia* in Rotterdam had a more direct affiliation with Rijnsburg. Among the principal participants in the construction of the Collegiants' network in Rotterdam was Joachims Oudaen, a name that we already found in the chronicle of the movement's birth in Rijnsburg. The Oudaen family had many relationships in Rotterdam: it was their city of origin, and where they pursued commerce.

In the 1630s Rotterdam already held some “zelfstandig onderzoek en onderlinge bespreking der godsdienstige waarheid¹¹⁹.” As in Amsterdam, with this preexistent environment the Rijnsburger ideas found fertile ground and, with the influence of Oudaen, they spread. When the Waterland and Remonstrant assemblies started to be penetrated by the Collegiant practice of free prophecy, the conservative members immediately accused them of Socinianism. When the Collegiants' position became prominent inside the Waterland community the conservative contingent tried to close the *collegia*, which were held each Wednesday following the Rijnsburg principles. The Remonstrants opposed the practice of free prophecy inside their groups and, with a resolution of 13 May 1654, succeeded in closing the premises. The accusations involved trying to bring believers to follow another sect with the promise of a different religion. After this resolution Jan Dionysz Verburg, Gerrit van Velzen, and Jan Hartigveldt, the prominent personages among Rotterdam's Collegiants, decided to build independent *collegia*. At the beginning the assemblies were held in the private house of a Remonstrant and, because of their tolerance and freedom of speech, the *collegia* were deemed the union of the Remonstrant and Waterland congregations.

In the Waterland community the baptism of a Remonstrant in 1661 caused a sharp polemic: unlimited tolerance, which was one of the cornerstones of the Rijnsburger movement, was not accepted. To contrast the Collegiants' attitude inside the congregation the conservative members decreed six articles:

1°. dat niemand gedoopt zou worden, die niet vooraf aan de broeders was voorgesteld; 2°. dat bij den doop niet gezegd zou worden, dat men dien bediende als particuliere broeder en niet tot opname in eenige secte maar in de algemeene christelijke kerk; 3°. dat wie het avondmaal bediende niet zou verklaren zulks te doen als particulier persoon, en dat slechts zij die ot de gemeente behoorden daartoe genoodigd zouden worden; 4°. dat de leeraars, die in eenig punt verschilden, in hin dienst zouden stilstaan; 5°. dat tot dienaars en diakenen alleen zij verkozen zouden worden, die met de gronden der Waterlanders overeenstemden; en 6°. dat geen veranderingen zouden worden ingevoerd buiten medeweten en goedachten der buitenmannen¹²⁰.

These articles had the function of damaging the Collegiant components in the

¹¹⁹ VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 95 See also: VAN NIJMEGEN, *Historie der Rijnsburgsche Vergadering*. pp. 104-105.

¹²⁰ VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 111.

Waterland communities but, as we already observed in the Flemish community, they produced the effect of strengthening congregations' structure and belief system.

The principal conflict between Rotterdam's Collegiants and the Mennonite and Remonstrant congregations was, therefore, about tolerance. In 1671, with the publication of *Een Praetje over Tafel*¹²¹ (A table talk) written by Jan Bredenburg began a pamphlet dispute about the sense of tolerance and the way to obtain peace within the different religious congregations.

Bredenburg was born in Rotterdam in 1640 and spent most of his time as a merchant in the city. In 1666 he married the sister of Joachim Oudaen and became an active member of the Collegiants in Rotterdam with Joan Hartigveldt and Jan Dionysius Verburg. Like Oudaen, who was already involved in a dispute with the Remonstrants in Rijnsburg, Bredenburg thought that the absence of nonexclusive tolerance was a sign of the decay of the first apostolic Church. In *Een Praetje over Tafel* he implicitly accused Mennonites and Remonstrants of being less tolerant than Collegiants.

Bredenburg's second work the *Heylzame Raad tot Christelijke vrede of te aanwijzing van het rechte tot Christelijke vereeniging*¹²² (Beneficial Council for Christian peace of the designation of the right to Christian unification) was a more direct attempt at *vrede-handel* (pacification) between the Mennonite and Remonstrant congregations in Rotterdam. Bredenburg tried to introduce the idea that the only possible reformation of a Church was through acceptance of the necessary dogmas of salvation and through the practice of mutual and extensive tolerance. Not only did Bredenburg's intention fail but the lesson of tolerance that he tried to teach was interpreted by the Remonstrants as an accusation. It was principally for this reason that in 1671 the son of the Remonstrant pastor Paschier de Fijne published the *Kort, waerachting, en getrouw Verhaal*¹²³. This book was written essentially to demonstrate, through a direct statement, that the Rijnsburger since the very beginning practiced exclusive tolerance and refused to welcome the Remonstrants in their assemblies.

To the *Kort Verhael* there followed different answers. In 1672 Joachim Oudaen wrote the *Aanmerkingen op het Kort Verhael*¹²⁴ (Advice on the brief history) essentially to defend Van der Kodde from De Fijne's accusations. Jan Hartigveldt had the same intention when he wrote the *Bijvoegsel bij de aanmerkingen over het verhaal van het eerste begin en opkomen der Rijnsburgers* (Endorsement to the advice about the story of the first beginnings and rise of the Rijnsburger) and, in 1672, the *Schriftuerlycke waerdeering van het hedendaagsche predicken en kerckgaen* (Written appreciation of the present-day preaching and attending the Church). In these works Hartigveldt underlined the necessary of tolerance to practice *vrijspreken* (free speech) in the religious community in order to understand the Scriptures. Also, a preacher inside Rotterdam's Remonstrants, Christiaan Hartsoecker, supported the Collegiants in

¹²¹ BREDEBURG J., *Een Praetje over Tafel tusschen een Remonstrant, Waterlands-Doopsgesinde, ende den Waerd. Behelsende Consideratien over den vrede-handel Nu tusschen de Remonstranten en de Waterlandsche-Doopsgesinden tot Rotterdam, voorgefallen. Waer van zy nu beyderzijds de Stucken hebben uytgegeven. Betoonende oock, ter dier occasie, de rechte Natuur der Onderlinge Verdraeghsaemheydt, en hoe die beyer zijden gepractiseert word.*, Tot Amsterdam, 1671.

¹²² BREDEBURG J., *Heylzame Raad tot Christelyke Vrede, ofte Aanwijzinge van het Rechte Middel tot Christelijke Vereeniging, volgens de eyge Natuur der Onderlinge Verdraagzaamheid, aan alle Christenen, die elkanderen de broederschap waardig oordeelen*, Tot Rotterdam, n.d.

¹²³ DE FIJNE, *Kort, Waerachtigh, en Getrouw Verhael*.

¹²⁴ OUDAEN J., *Aanmerkingen over het Verhaal van het eerste Begin en Opkomen der Rynsburgers*, Isaak Naeranus, Boekverkoper, op 't Steyger, in den Boekbinder, 1672.

defense of tolerance. He wrote the *Aanspraak tot christelijken vrede* (Claim to the Christian peace), where he defended unlimited tolerance as the best practice to find peace within the different communities. In the same book, however, he fiercely attacked Bredenburg's position and refused to recognize that the Collegiants were the only ones to truly practice unlimited tolerance.

The Rijnsburger were seen as a particular and separate community, as were Remonstrants and Mennonites. This discussion about the *begrensd* (limited) or *onderlinge* (unlimited) tolerance soon became an internal discussion within the Collegiants. This question implicitly involved Collegiant organization. How to understand the *vergadering* in Rijnsburg? The chiliastic trend supported by Joachim Oudaan (son of the aforementioned Frans Joachimsz Oudaen in Rijnsburg) saw in the Church organization an indispensable instrument to reach the "rijk van Christus hier op aarde" (realm of Christ here on the Earth). The opposition to this vision was led by Joost van Geel, a merchant in Rotterdam, though he was more popular as a writer and painter. In 1666 he married one of Van der Kodde's daughters.

Van Geel wrote the *Redevoering over de algemeene Christelijke kerk ofte het rijk der heiligen*¹²⁵ (Discourse about the universal Christian Church or the kingdom of the blessed) in 1687 and the *Nader verklaringe eeniger zaken in zijn redenering over de algemeene kerk, tegen de overweging van J. Oudaan Fransz*¹²⁶ (Further explanation on some things in his reasoning on the universal Church, against the consideration of J. Oudaan Fransz). In these works Van Geel expressed his Collegiant position, and his anticonfessionalism. According to the positions of Bredenburg and Abrahamsz, Van Geel saw the absence of the Holy Spirit from all Church institutions and for this reason the need for toleration. No doctrine was then infallible and claims to be the true and only Church could not aid the peaceful cohabitation of different confessions. According to Van Geel no indication could be found in the Holy Scriptures about the construction of a Church or human institution claiming to be led by the Holy Spirit¹²⁷. Unlike Galenus Abrahamsz, Van Geel proposed in his criticism a necessary Reformation of the institutional Church. In his pamphlet extensive space is dedicated to the failure of the Protestant Reformation and the necessity to fight against the intolerance and exclusivity most exemplified by the Roman Catholic Church¹²⁸.

The importance of tolerance and the elaboration of this concept in the Rijnsburger network in the second half of the 17th century reached its radical expression with the penetration of Spinoza's thought inside the works of the Collegiant Jan Bredenburg. Because of the dense development of this debate and its distance in many respects from the aim of this chapter, the description of the organization of the Rijnsburger network and the discussion about the formulation of a religious institution, we are addressing this issue in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

In Leiden and Haarlem the *collegia* developed inside the Mennonite movement both Flemish and Waterlander. In Leiden the first *collegia* were already held in 1630, founded by Quirijn van Vissendiep. At very beginning, as happened with the other

¹²⁵ VAN GEEL J., *Redevoering over de algemeene Christelijke kerk ofte het rijk der heilige*, Rotterdam, 1687.

¹²⁶ VAN GEEL J., *Nader verklaringe eeniger zaken in zijn redenering over de algemeene kerk, tegen de overweging van J. Oudaan Fransz*, Rotterdam, 1689.

¹²⁷ VAN GEEL, *Redevoering*. p. 1- 10.

¹²⁸ See: VAN GEEL, *Nader verklaringe*.

collegia, the assemblies were held in a private house on the Heerengracht but at the beginning of the 18th century the *vergadering* moved into the *Doopsgezinde* Church of Leiden, which at that time (1701) gathered together the reunited Waterlander and Flemish congregations.

The *collegium* in Leiden played an important role in the pacification of the Rijnsburger movement during the dispute arising from Bredenburg's positions. One of the most important participant in this diplomatic drama was the Mennonite pastor Laurens Klinkhamer. In 1686 he wrote the *Losse en quaade gronden van de scheurkerk*¹²⁹ (Loose and bad grounds of the schismatic church), where he tried to highlight the negative effect of the Collegiants' split. Klinkhamer, son of a Mennonite pastor, was born in Leiden. During his medical studies in Leiden he had the opportunity to read the Bible attentively, and under Collegiants' influence he developed the idea that no religious doctrine or confession of faith had to be accepted if in disagreement with the teaching of the Scriptures. Klinkhamer was a defender of the Collegiants' principle of free prophecy and in the first dispute with the Remonstrants in Rijnsburg he asserted the necessity of renouncing participation in services that were held without respecting the principles of free prophecy and free speech. In 1662 Klinkhamer published the *Verdediging van de Vryheyt van Spreken in de Gemeente det Gelovigen*¹³⁰ (Defence of freedom of speech in the community of believers), where he responded to the Remonstrant preacher Pontanus¹³¹ about the utility and the practice of free prophecy in the Collegiant community. For Klinkhamer not only was free prophecy the best method to educate a religious community in exegesis but it offered the only way to discuss the content of the Scriptures at a time when the Holy Spirit's gifts were absent.

Klinkhamer was a close friend of the Haarlem Collegiant Pieter Langedoult¹³², and in 1684 he edited Langedoult's *Ethics*. Langedoult probably came in contact with Collegiants during his medical studies in Leiden in 1660. Despite his doctoral degree in medicine his name never appeared in the list of physicians in Haarlem, the city where he settled after 1668. Like Klinkhamer, Langedoult was a fervent supporter of Rijnsburger ideals of free speech. In 1672, as member and minister of the Flemish community of Haarlem, he engaged in a dispute with the traditionalist Antonius van Dale about the possibility of bringing inside the community the practice of *vrijspreken*.

In 1672 Langedoult wrote his first treatise, the *De apostolice outheyt van de vryheyt van spreken in de vergaderingen Christenen*¹³³ (The Apostolic antiquity of the freedom of speech in the Christian assembly). He started with a biblical quotation, I Thessalonians 5.19, to introduce and justify his position. In this work he defended the practice of free prophecy, justifying it, similarly to Klinkhamer, as human intellectual

¹²⁹ KLINKHAMER L., *Losse en quaade gronden van de scheur-kerk*, Amsterdam, 1686.

¹³⁰ KLINKHAMER L., *Verdediging van de Vryheyt van Spreken in de Gemeente det Gelovigen*, ter Druckerey van Daniel Baccamude, t Amsterdam, 1662.

¹³¹ PONTANUS, *Tractaet van de sichtbare kerke Christi op aerden, mitsgader de ampten, diensten en ceremonien der selve*, By Jan de Jonge, Amsterdam, 1660. This was a work written in direct opposition to the first text of Klinkhamer about freedom of speech, the *Verdediging van de vryheit van spreken*. The author openly opposed the concept of *sichtbare kercke*, Galenus Abrahamsz's idea of the visible Church.

¹³² See: ZILVERBERG S.B.J., *Peter Langedoult: A Contribution to an Understanding of his Life and Work*, in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Goshen, Indiana, July 1967.

¹³³ LANGEDOULT P., *De apostolice outheyt vande vryheyt van spreken in de vergaderingen Christenen. Tegens Dr. A. van Dalens aleen-spreken*, by Jan Gerritsz Geldorp, tot Haarlem, 1672.

practice. He also pointed out the impossibility of a widespread presence of the Holy Spirit's gifts among the members of the first apostolic Church.

Van Dale answered by defending the prerogative of having a leading preacher writing the *Historie van't Predik-ampt*¹³⁴ (History of the ministry) Langedoult preferred not to go further with this dispute and, after 1672, wrote a report on the Haarlem revolt against the French invasion. This year was commonly known by the name *het rampjaar* (year of disaster). The political position of Langedoult did not reflect his religious radicalism; he expressed negative opinions about the Revolutionary soldiers and about the role that the Calvinist preachers played in the fighting. He was a moderate sympathizer of the House of Orange.

In 1676 he wrote *Die Nietigheyd der Chiliastry* (The invalidity of chiliasm), turning again to theological themes, this time, however, not opposing Van Dale but the chiliastic and mystic positions of De Breen, the founder of Amsterdam's *collegium*, who we have already mentioned above. For Langedoult, taking the Gospel of Luke (17.20) too literally, i.e. as the advent of God's kingdom, was an error. Further, he disagreed with the concept of a dualistic kingdom of Christ, a spiritual one and a material one, and judged negatively the De Breen project of converting Jews to the word of Christ.

We can find similar visions in another important work by Langedoult, *Christus lydende en verheerlykt* (Christ suffering and glorified) of 1680. This was a transposition idea for the theater of Jesus' passions and life. Langedoult shows in the production of this text important knowledge of theater history and poetical talent. He seems also to be very conscious of the use of the theater to transmit important messages. In some instances he interprets the Gospel in order to speak directly with his public about some contemporary events or debates. Referring to the division within the *Doopsgezinden* he painted the work of Satan as the cause of all schism and division within the Christianity. In order to reconsider the role of the sacraments and external rituals he represented the baptism as the only work of the Holy Spirits, remarking that the apostles were not baptized. He describes Christ's ascension in antichiliastic tones.

1.4. Nonconformity as development of anticonfessional and anticlerical thought in the 17th century

In the previous paragraph it has been shown how the rise and spread of the Collegiant movement was strictly bound to the development of thought of the Spiritual Reformation and its anticlerical position in the first Reformation. Collegiants' contribution to the religious life is measurable in terms of development of a new kind of religious organization, democratic meetings, and with the exigency to release the reading and the moral interpretation of the Scriptures from a religious caste. However, Collegiants' behavior towards the religious caste involved a more comprehensive and radical discussion of the role of the Church in the 17th century. The widespread anticonfessionalism in the Dutch Republic was only an aspect of the crisis of religious institutions of that period. The Collegiants' answer to this emergency, with a reflection on the role of Church organization, included radicalizing the discussion around anticonfessionalism and anticlericalism, abandoning strict indifferentism, and

¹³⁴ VAN DALE, *Historie van 't Predik-ampt*, by Jan Gerritsz Geldorp, te Haarlem, 1674.

developing a theory about religious life that represented an important tendency in the direction of secularization.

Central to the change in the religious life and to the parallel development of a new form of religious associations, is the concept of nonconformity. It was a useful idea to delineate the opposition to the religious caste and authority but also to understand the modification of certain behavior regarding the ceremonies and the rituals. It involves a reflection on the architecture of power but also on the possibility of constructing outside the traditional Churches a new kind of belief. The concept of nonconformity was very fortunate in the 17th century, especially because it was the label that identified English dissidents. The English discussion about nonconformity had not only the function of creating and identifying a group of dissidents but it constructed a special debate about the form in which the nonconformity manifested itself as a public and political danger. Nonconformity involved in different measures the juridical disobedience to a norm, which in the English context was identifying with a more general form of disloyalty toward the king¹³⁵ and, on another side, it was assumed to be a connotation for specific moral behavior. This moral behavior involved, according to Paul's Epistles, a form of separation from the material or secularized world and an internal adherence between the personal belief and the way of behaving. This position assumed a pregnant meaning in the context of clerical criticism when the English dissenters began to announce the idea of a performative practice of self-recognition as nonconformists.

Even if in the whole of Europe the label of nonconformity crystallized itself around the identification of English dissident groups, in the Dutch Republic it identified a particular behavior and critique of clericalism. Developed simultaneously with the English debate, the Collegiants' reflection about religious organization resulted in a different use for the same concept. It was during occasions of dispute within the Flemish community in Amsterdam that Collegiants Galenus Abrahamsz and David Spruyt defined the nonconformist vision with an idea as simple as it was radical: Churches, congregations, and religious groups have to be recognized as simple human assemblies without God's mandate or inspiration. The consequence of this position was unacceptable to the majority of confessions because it entailed the absence of whichever God intervened in human actions. Rituals, ceremonies, and each action regarding salvation lost their sense. Even predestination, once affirmed as the indifference of the Holy Spirit, could not provide anymore a possible argumentation for salvation. The true and original Church inspired by the Holy Spirit was known in this form only by the apostles, because since the time of Constantine the Church has been *verval* (decayed).

This reflection also involved a judgment about the Reformation. The first reformers, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and their vision of the Reform pervaded religious movements as the Anabaptists or Mennonites. They were unable to redefine the structure of the Church because they all believed in God's inspiration. They were moved by the purest intentions but, according to the Collegiants, the consequences of their actions led only to divisions and disputes¹³⁶.

Without divine right, divine authority, or divine delegation, what remained relevant

¹³⁵For the image of the king in early modern England see: CUTTICA C., "Adam and the King": the Fatherly Image of the State. Patriarchalism as Political Language in Early Seventeenth-century England, CEU, Budapest, conference paper abstract, www.concepta-net.org/links

¹³⁶ABRAHAMSZ, SPRUYT, *Nader verklaringe*. See; *Aenspraeck aen den Leser* (no p. no).

for the congregations and the believers was to follow Christian moral precepts. Ethical behavior was, for the Collegiants, clear and without ambiguity: the believer could find the moral precepts in the Bible and they do not require any speculation or particular form of interpretation. The consequences of such a position were manifold: the active understanding of the Bible and human reason are not more to be despised in favor of a blind belief but, at the same time, religion could no longer be understood as an exclusive speculative attitude. The extensive interest that arose from this position, partly already developed by the radical Reformation, caused the ability to move the religious discussion from external participation and sacraments to inner values and moral behavior, a problem that was dominant in the Spiritual Reformer currents of the 16th century.

If we look at the whole Anabaptist movement and also the 16th-century religious debate, we see that it was dominated by the problems of sacraments and participation in external cults. It was not a coincidence that the main form of religious dissidence in that century expressed itself through an intense debate about Nicodemism. Carlo Ginzburg has demonstrated that a significant part of theological argumentation for the radical religious movement in the 16th century focused on the justification of sacramental indifference, expressed in an elitist way before and, in the second part of the century, as a request for tolerance of all religious practice¹³⁷. The main protagonists, who represented the link between the second Nicodemism and the Collegiants' idea of the unholy Church was Dirk V. Coornhert (1522-1585)¹³⁸. This author was explicitly quoted by Oudaen, together with Aconcio and Castellio, as one of the main theoretical sources of the Collegiants¹³⁹. Oudaen issued for the first time in his *Aenmerkingen* a significant indication of these three names:

[...] en hiertoe quamen hen al vroeg de schriften van Jakobus Akontius (dat boek dat Uyttenboogaart eerst de ooghen opende) van Kastellio, en andere hunne Tijdgenooten die in de wereld geen onvermaarde naam negelaten hebben in handen en te pas; waar op gevolgt de snedige oeffenschriften van Koornhart, in onze Moedertaal heeft hen dit zoodanig van de doederen des gemoeds bevoorraad dat wy haare Dakomekingen noch roemen dur venop zulk een schat by haar in aarde varen gevragen; daarwe nu tot een krachtige en onwederleggelijke bevestiging by moeten voegen het getuychenisse zelfs van deze onze Schrijver, van het nu in handen zijnde Verhaal, Datse al te zamen waren Mannen van een vroom leven, van groote kennisse in de H. Schrift, en by alle Inwoonders, zoo tot Warmond, Rijnsburg, als Oest-geest, en by alle daar zy mede ommegingen, voor goede oprechteluyden geacht; en dat ook den Schrijver zelfs dat gevoelen van haar heeft¹⁴⁰.

The importance of these three authors stems also from the translation and republication of their works. Those of Dirck Raphaelsz Camphuysen, one of the most important contemporaries of the Collegiants, were republished in 1661, 1669, and 1675 by Jan

¹³⁷GINZBURG C., *Il nicodemismo. Simulazione e dissimulazione religiosa nell'Europa del '500*, Turin, Einaudi, 1970.

¹³⁸BECKER B., *Bronnen tot de kennis van het leven en de werken van D.V. Coornhert*, 's- Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1928; BONGER H. *Leven en werk van Dirk Volckertsz Coornhert*, Amsterdam, 1978; VOOGT G., *Religious Constraint on Trial: Dirk Volckertsz Coornhert's Defense of Freedom of Conscience*, UMI, Service Dissertation, 1997; GRUPPELAAR J., VERWEY G., ed., *D.V. Coornhert (1522-1590): polemist en vredezoeker. Bijdragen tot plaatsbepaling en herwaardering*, Amsterdam University Press, 2010.

¹³⁹KOLAKOWSKI, *Dutch Seventeenth-century Anticonfessional Ideas*.

¹⁴⁰OUDAEN J., *Aanmerkingen over het Verhaal van het eerste Begin en Opkomen der Rynsburgers*, Isaak Naeranus, Boekverkoper, op 't Steyger, in den Boekbinder, 1672. p. 19.

Rieuwertsz.¹⁴¹ The recognition of the theoretical contributions of Castellio, Coornhert, and Acontius as points of reference for the Collegiant movement confirms the identification of the Collegiants with the tradition of nonconfessionalism. The texts of Coornhert, as well as those of Castellio and Aconcio, were objects of extensive interest during the whole of the 17th century. In 1630 the complete collection of his texts was published in three volumes by Jacob Aertsz, publisher, among others, of Camphuysen, Van Groot, Socinus, Ben Israel, and in 1625 of an author who hid his identity under the interesting pseudonym Nicodemus Letter-Knecht.

The name Coornhert is central to understanding the modification of the debate about religious dissimulation and the crucial importance of ceremonies and rituals as norms of belief. Dirk Volckertsz Coornhert was the son of a Dutch merchant, but he was disinherited by his family as he chose to marry a lower class woman, Neltje Simonson, 20 years older than him. The absence of the family patrimony did not prevent him achieving a successful career, at first as town secretary in Haarlem and then as secretary of the States-General. He participated actively in the revolt against the Spanish occupation, but after his criticisms in opposition to the violence of the Dutch military against the Catholics and after his opposition to the decision banning the Catholic religion in 1581¹⁴², he was obliged to flee to Germany. He remained all his life dissident and heretical but formally never separated from the Catholic Church¹⁴³. When in 1574 the synod imposed the preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism Coornhert opposed this decision, affirming absolute liberty of religion and faith. His criticism against the orthodox reform was inspiring for many radical Anabaptists¹⁴⁴, who used Coornhert's argumentation against the synod's decisions. His texts in favor of tolerance were the *Synodus Vander consciencien vryheyt* (1582) (Synod of the freedom of conscience) and *Proces vant ketterdoden ende dwang der consciencien* (1590) (Process of the killing of heretics and coercion of consciences). These two treatises revealed not only the heterodox and anticonfessional spirit of the author, but also his conviction that the true Church is only the invisible one. Coornhert does not limit his libertarian vision only to the religious sphere; he sustained absolute freedom and liberty of conscience in personal as well as in political matters¹⁴⁵.

It was during a polemic with Calvin about Nicodemism that Coornhert further elaborated the idea that the true Christian life could be conducted without the sacraments and the visible Church. It is for this reason that he can be considered, according to Kolakowski¹⁴⁶, the pathfinder of the first anticonfessionalism. Coornhert was an exponent of Erasmus's humanism and his definition of religion was strictly

¹⁴¹Rijnsburg is considered the Collegiants' book printer and bookseller. On this subject see: LICATA-PROIETTI, *Jan Rieuwertsz I, editore di Amsterdam (1644-1686)*. (forthcoming)

¹⁴²On this occasion he wrote the *Request by the Catholics of Haarlem*, defending the necessity of toleration for the Catholics.

¹⁴³Kolakowski adduces this choice to the impossibility of finding a place in the new Reformed Church, because of Coornhert's too radical critique and reformation project. Coornhert saw in the structure and organization of the new Reformed Church a repetition of the decadence of the Roman Catholic Church. See: KOLAKOWSKI, *Chrétien sans Église*. p. 73.

¹⁴⁴As, for example, the Waterlander Hand de Ries or the reformed minister in Gouda, Herman Herberts, who refused to preach the Heidelberg Catechism following Coornhert's argumentations.

¹⁴⁵G.Voogt argues that the concept of liberty of conscience in the Collegiants is largely in debt Coornhert's reflection on it. See: VOOGT, "Anyone who can Read may be a preacher."

¹⁴⁶KOLAKOWSKI, *Chrétien sans Église*. p. 73.

independent of any form of human organization¹⁴⁷. The relationship with the divinity and the true religious life was testified, for him, only by good actions and moral behavior. In the same way Coornhert rejected predestination and original sin, criticizing the Calvinists' pessimistic view of the human condition and their consequent antirational approach.

The cornerstone of Coornhert's thought was perfectionism, the idea that human beings were able to refrain from sin with their will and good actions for the whole of their life¹⁴⁸. It is for this reason that, according to Coornhert, the human will, as well as human actions, are the only true means to reach salvation. Human actions could not be identified with ceremonies or rituals, which were on the contrary a distraction from the essential action to reach redemption. Research of liberation from sin is, according to Coornhert, to be practiced with self-knowledge, an exercise that he described as similar to Socratic philosophy, and following biblical law. Fear, punishment, or hope were, as well as ceremonies, distractions from salvation, which has to be considered as full participation in the divine nature¹⁴⁹.

Coornhert's accent on human moral responsibility and the need for widespread tolerance was the main content of the polemic against Calvin. Here Coornhert explicitly defends Nicodemism as a useful practice to avoid pointless martyrdom. He shared the position taken by Sebastian Franck in his last letter, which circulated extensively in Holland and gave rise to a major debate about the justification of Nicodemism. Calvin answered Coornhert in 1562 with his *Répose á un certain Hollandois le quel sous ombre de faire les chrétiens tout spirituel, leur permet de polluer leur corps en toutes idolatries* (Answer to a certain Dutchman, who under the pretence of being a spiritual Christian, admits the idolatries). In this text Calvin had the opportunity to reaffirm his convictions about the necessity of the faith, of the ceremonies, and of full adherence to a confession.

According to Ginzburg it was on the occasion of this polemic with Coornhert that Calvin realized for the first time that the stance of the Nicodemists represented more than a simple fear of martyrdom. At the very beginning the reflections about Nicodemism were directly opposed to the crypto-Reformed in Italy, who, under the persecution of the Inquisition, preferred to conform to the exterior rituals of the Roman Catholic Church and reserved their true faith only for the spiritual dimension. The widespread diffusion of Nicodemism in the Reformed lands made it clear that this behavior exceeded the defense against the persecution and had deeper implications for understanding the Church institution. The acceptance of religious dissimulation among the Catholics in France or in Germany, for political convenience or because of their minoritarian¹⁵⁰ position, corroborates, according to Ginzburg, the thesis that Nicodemism has to be understood as a conscious religious argumentation. Significant

¹⁴⁷On the influence of Erasmian humanism in the political and economic organization of the United Provinces see: DE VRIES J., V. DER WOUDE A., *The First Modern Economy. Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815*, Cambridge University Press, 1997. p. 168, 172.

¹⁴⁸BECKER B., Coornhert, de zestiende-eeuwse apostel der volmaakbaarheid, in BONGER, B., (ed.), *Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert. Op zoek naar het hoogste goed*, Baarn, 1987.

¹⁴⁹See: VAN VEEN M.G.K. *No one Born of God Commits Sin: Coornhert's Perfectionism*, in JANSE, W., *Dutch Review of Church History*, vol. 84, Leiden/Boston, 2004. pp. 338-357.

¹⁵⁰When we use this concept we refer to Deleuze's definition of it. See: DELEUZE G., *Le devenir révolutionnaire et les créations politiques*, Entretien réalisé par Toni Negri. <http://multitudes.samizdat.net/Le-devenir-revolutionnaire-et-les>

motivations for indifferentism and Nicodemism were, then, intolerance of external rituals and ceremonies, the preacher's caste and orthodoxy. These aversions were expressed through a formal conformism. This was the position of Coornhert, formally adherent to the Catholic Church but in reality member of the widespread group of Dutch "Christians without Church"¹⁵¹."

The polemic against religious dissimulation developed in the second half of the 16th century, as has been shown, with deep spiritual implications. In 17th-century Holland, this behavior was no longer characterized by a specific religious position but involved a radical call into question of the belief itself. Atheists and libertines embodied the new polemical subject: who were against simulation. The question about the necessity of clerical power inside the Church institution became the reason for the practice of indifferentism. In the Dutch Republic, the spiritual position of Franck and the polemic about Nicodemism were already filtered by Coornhert with his anticlerical and anticonfessional motivations. Within the Collegiants, already in 1645 the position of Adam Boreel's *Ad legem*¹⁵² testified to this shift, the indifference elaborated by Schwenkfeld and Franck changes, in this text, to an explicit aversion to the visible Church¹⁵³. For Boreel all Churches exist only because of the acquiescence of God, his *oogluykinge*. The Collegiants absorbed Coornhert's position and the change in the argumentation about indifferentism and the visible Church in order to develop them on different lines: nonconformity, a strong spirituality, and unlimited and mutual tolerance.

In the text of Galenus Abrahamsz and David Spruyt, the choice to use the term conformity and nonconformity to describe the refusal of a holy, inspired Church was, therefore, not causal. The core of the question about the State and the nature of the external Church was rooted in the problem of simulation and acceptance of the formal structure of religion. Another side of the same problem was the resistance against subjugation to strict confessions of faith and identification with a single religious group or sect. The reaction of the Collegiants has to be understood as a full questioning of the clerical institutions, starting from the point of view of the legitimate. It was starting from here that led in Holland to Nicodemism assuming a peculiar formulation, no more a problem about dissimulation, but a question about the veracity of the religious institutions and the possibility of reaching the truth inside them. Before discussing fully how Abrahamsz and Spruyt defined the terms conformity and nonconformity it is necessary to recount the interesting history of the rise and spread of these terms in 17th-century Europe.

1.5. Conclusions

¹⁵¹The possibility given in the United Provinces to practice a private form of cult without officially adhering to a confession gave rise to an aconfessional behavior that was not an exception in the Dutch cities. A vast number of people, although not atheists decided to never affiliated to a Church. See: KAPLAN B.J., *Divided by Faith. Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe*, London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, London, 2007. p. 242.

¹⁵²BOREEL A., *Ad legem et ad testimonium*, 1645. (no p. no.)

¹⁵³See: SPRUIT L., ed., *Professione della fede universale e cristiana contenuta in una lettera a N.N.*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2004. p. XXVII.

This brief history of the first expansion of the Collegiant movement in the United Provinces can answer the question that we ask above. How did the Collegiants oppose the pyramidal model of the Church institution? How did they come to form an alternative organization and how did they respond to the implicit elements and tendencies of institutionalization that each organization brings with itself?

Since Collegiants first appeared on the Dutch religious scene, free prophecy and free speech were suddenly seen as problems for structured religious confessions. The former practices, based on the example of the German Anabaptists and on the theoretical and theological elaboration of Camphuysens, were an effective instrument for the Collegiants' anticlerical critiques. It was principally due to the previous practices and theories that for the Collegiants it was relatively simple to transform the absence of the preacher, due to the persecution of the Synod of Dordrecht, into an anticonfessional and anticlerical criticism. The *vrijspreken* and the equality between members were two of the constituent principles of a religious community.

We have analyzed in this chapter the problem of Collegiants' organization only from a practical and historical point of view. Their opposition to preachers' authority, the demand for equality based on a radical reinterpretation of the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, called into question the authorian practice and the way to live in a religious community. These effects were felt in almost all congregations that entered into contact with the Collegiants. These Contacts had important consequences in Amsterdam's Flemish congregation, posing problems generally reproduced in all large Dutch cities where the Collegiants were particularly influential.

The relationships and the penetration of Collegiant principles into other congregations had as a consequence, as we saw, a transformation of these religious structures in two senses. One kind of reaction, as we observed in Amsterdam's Flemish congregation but also in Rotterdam's Waterlander, was the stiffening of the religious community, expressed in the production of articles of faith and in the compilation of rules determining exclusion or inclusion inside the Community. This reaction had as its fundamental aim that of aggregating the believers on clear principle and finding a line of separation between them and the "others." On the other side we note a progressive indifference regarding the sacraments and the external signs that sanctioned the membership to a confession. This behavior had as a consequence a more open and tolerant attitude regarding the discussion, a behavior that many members, especially in the Waterland community, saw as in continuity with their principles of faith.

In addition to the influence and the effects of the Collegiants' doctrine inside other stable and already formed groups, the same specular problem about structure and authority was present inside the Rijnsburger movement. This discussion is more difficult to define due to the differentiation of the internal positions and the external pressure of the institutional Church, which tried to label the movement. On one side the Collegiants fought to keep an informal structure, with a network organized on the basis of territorial assemblies; on the other the collision with other religious groups involved them in a process of self-identification and definition. The proliferation of the personal name labels like Socinian, Erasmian, Spinozist, Cartesian, Galenist, Borleist, is indicative of the disorientation that dominates within the Collegiants' enemies, who understand them as a puzzle of personal position not ascribable to one profession of faith. This multiplicity and confusion of standpoint possessed the group from the inside; for this reason, not surprisingly, there were some attempts to construct

a precise line in order to self-define. All these attempts never gave rise to a strict structure or to rules of identification; the Collegiants always identified themselves around the principles of nonexclusive tolerance and the practice of free prophecy. These can be seen as the most radical signs of the Collegiant movement.

In this context the proposal of some historians to distinguish between two different *collegia*, one as a tendency inside the major Church institution and the other as a network with reference to Rijnsburg, can be understandable. We can see, from the history of the *collegia*, that this kind of classification is fallacious. The cornerstones of the Collegiants were tolerance and open participation in all confessions; it was for this reason that most of the Rijnsburger were both active participants in the *collegia*, and members of an institutional Church. For these free spirits, the *collegia* were seen as moments to freely discuss the Bible and religion in general without confessional worries. Some of them were orphans of persecuted congregations, most of them had another vision of religion: they believed in religion as a moral behavior and for this reason they could not find a place in the classical congregations. Nevertheless, the Collegiants were not identifiable with the libertines; they were believers and had a sincere religious interest in redemption.

We can describe the Collegiant movement as a antiauthoritarian religious trend that found a particular way to organize itself in order to spread the principle of *vrijspreken* (free speech) against that of *allenspreken* (alone speaking). The challenge that they had to meet was not to bring these criticisms inside the institutional Church but to understand how the principle of free prophecy could be a vehicle for truth and peace within the different congregations. The Collegiants had an ambivalent position regarding the possibility of further Reformation of Christianity or the unification of different congregations. Even if they were for tolerance and pacification most of them shared Abrahamsz' s positions about the absence of the Holy Spirit in the world and the consequent impossibility of founding a Holy Church. For most of them it was, then, useless and illogical to support the irenic vision or try to reform the Church. That difficulty expresses itself in a clear way when the Collegiants had to rethink the religious relationship with God, dividing themselves between a mystical and a rationalist approach.

On this theme the words of Kolakowski still provide the best description of the Collegiant movement:

[...] le mouvement des collédiants se définit lui-même négativement par sa protestation contre tous les moyens servant à créer des unités dogmatiques exclusives de religion positive (Confessions, formulaires, pretrise). Si la communauté de Galenus, mennonite au départ, évolue vers l'idéal collégiant, nous ne possédons donc pas, en raison de l'inexistence d'un pouvoir central autoritaire, de nets critères qui nous permettraient d'estimer qu'elle appartient "encore" au mouvement mennonite ou de la considérer "déjà" comme une sorte de collège. Réforme intérieure ou communauté de scissionniste? Cette question, facilement soluble sur le terrain de catholicisme et également du calvinisme, est sans objet quand il s'agit des mennonites¹⁵⁴.

In the next chapter we will analyze the *XIX Artikelen* of Galenus Abrahamsz a text that, on the basis of a religious community understood only in a human sense, interprets and problematizes the religious life in the absence of Holy Gifts.

¹⁵⁴ KOLAKOWSKI, *Chrétiens sans Église*. pp. 207-208.

Chapter 2.

The question of nonconformity and the Collegiants' model of anticonfessionalism

- 2.1. English nonconformity and its European dimension
- 2.2. The *XIX Artikelen*: the nonconformity and the Church without God
- 2.3. Free-prophecy and the specificity of the Collegiants' reading of the Bible
- 2.4. Conclusions

2.1. English nonconformity and its European dimension

The word nonconformity is commonly used to define the English religious groups that refused to “conform” to the Act of Uniformity of 1662. If we turn from this official definition, however, analyzing the sources of the period, we can see that the term nonconformity already existed before 1662, therefore not in strict reference to the Restoration or to the Act of Uniformity. The description of what was called nonconformity in the 17th century can then be tracked in the moral and external Reform of the religious institutions in England that some dissident and radical religious groups tried to conduct. The term was already used in the 16th century as a reflection on the problem of religious simulation and the possibility of following the external rules of a Church, which were no more considered legitimate. The orientation of the discourse of conformity and nonconformity with the external ceremonies was, therefore, asked as a question about Nicodemism.

At the beginning of the 17th century it is possible to notice two lines in the development of the English debate around nonconformity. The continuous superimposition of the political sphere with the religious one, due to the specific characterization of the English Church, called particular attention to the questions of punishment and loyalty. Because the figure of the king was, in England, strictly bound with the religious institution, of which he was the higher agent, calling into question the legitimacy of the Church was equivalent to being disloyal to the king himself. Long before the Act of Uniformity it is possible to notice a climax in the production of pamphlets on the subject of nonconformity, which attests not only to the great interest

in the topic, but also that the term nonconformity had made its entrance in the common vocabulary to describe dissident religious groups. Excluding some apologetic texts and writers who accused nonconformists, all 17th-century texts on this subject reproduced the same reflection on the juridical structure and obedience to the law. Nonconformity was principally seen as a cause of schism and division in the English Church and a danger for civil society. A large part of these accusations were developed due to the impossibility of being loyal to the king while refusing, explicitly, to obey the rules of the English Church. The peculiarity of the nonconformist was, indeed, that of overstepping the juridical power because he or she did not recognize the norm and did not act according to it. Bluntly, the nonconformist did not “believe” in the norm¹⁵⁵. The nonconformist represented a menace both for the institution of the Church and for the whole political structure of England. The question of nonconformity was, therefore, treated as a juridical matter.

A pamphlet of 1635 entitled *The looking-glasse of schisme* describes the nonconformists as dissident religious groups, which can be considered an example of this overlapping of the religious and juridical provinces. This pamphlet makes explicit the mutual penetration of the religious and juridical spheres, describing a case of nonconformity merged and identified with a murder (i.e. legal) case. The protagonist of this pamphlet was a Puritan uncultivated man named Enoch. He was arrested and accused of having murdered his brother and his mother. The motivation for the murders was some discrepancy in the way to pray and in the Church ceremonies. The first part of the pamphlet consists of a report of a conversation that the author, Studley, a preacher in the English Church, had with Enoch. Studley used his pastoral power to persuade Enoch not only to repent, but also to embrace the true faith of the Church of England. At the very beginning of the dialog the priest tried without success to find some other causes that could replace the religious motivations of the crime; by the end Studley was obliged to recognize that “he freely confessed to all men, that upon difference in opinions between him and his brother touching the Gesture in the Communion, his wrath conceived against him, turned into rage; and incensed his heart to the murder of him¹⁵⁶.” In the subsequent pages Enoch was clearer about the differences between him and his family, “touching the gesture at the Communion, they would kneele, and I would sit and bow my body¹⁵⁷.” He added something important: “the true and the only cause which instigated me to these facts, was my zeale to the word of God¹⁵⁸.” This last assertion made explicit that Enoch could not feel guilty because he acted in conformity to the Word of God, and he knows the will of God by directly reading his Word¹⁵⁹.

The second part of the pamphlet is dedicated, with the author’s intention, to showing how the nonconformists are dangerous not only for religious unity, but also for social peace and respect for the law. The practice of refusing to conform to the ceremonies

¹⁵⁵PATTARO E., *Per una teoria della produzione normativa*, available at http://www.cirfid.unibo.it/didattica/print.php?id_categoria=42

¹⁵⁶STUDLEY P., *The looking-glasse of schisme wherein by a briefe and true narration of the execrable murders, done by Enoch ap Evan, a downe-right non-conformist, on the bodies of his mother and brother, with the cause moving him thereunto, the disobedience of that sect, against Royall Majesty, and lawes of our church is plainly set forth*, Printed by R.B. For thomas Alchorn, London, 1635. p. 61.

¹⁵⁷Ibid. p. 75.

¹⁵⁸Ibid. p. 65.

¹⁵⁹Ibid. p. 78.

and ritual of the English Church means challenging the law and the authority of the king. Studley affirms how pernicious and detestable are the influx of nonconformists on the brain of the uncultivated man, on the “*mobile vulgus*”¹⁶⁰. According to the author, doubt and thought about the validity of the external rituals of the Church have to be left to the scholars, to the preachers, and not to simple people.

If we consider this text attentively, the different levels on which it is possible to define nonconformity clearly emerge. Studley seems to ignore nonconformity in its strict religious and historical meaning, in order to give it the status of juridical concept. Enoch was a nonconformist twice over, because he opposed and challenged the religious norm, and because he was a murderer, he broke the rules of civil society. The pamphlet tries to show in polemical style how religious nonconformity’s attitude leads to juridical deviance. The results definitely show, according to the author of this pamphlet, that these two different levels were not separated, but unified: that refusing to obey the English Church also means disobedience to the power of the king¹⁶¹. The law of God and the law of man are represented here on a unified plan. The consequence is that the nonconformist cannot be tolerated because the challenge to pastoral power means a direct danger for civil society.

In the later years of the 17th century the polemic about nonconformity had all developed on the level of tolerance and on the possibility of determining loyalty to the king without religious conformity. In pamphlet production after 1660 the question of nonconformity and its definition did not evolve in a significant way compared with earlier publications; meanwhile, there were new elements in thinking about nonconformity. From 1664 it is possible to find pamphlets like *The loyal non-conformist*, or, *The religious subject, yielding to God his due, and to Caesar his right being a discourse from the pulpit touching true gospel worship and due subjection to magistrates*.¹⁶² In such texts the question of nonconformity was viewed as a problem of division between the secular power and the religious power. This text’s distribution testifies to an attempt by the nonconformists to discharge themselves from the previous accusations, trying to separate loyalty to the king from obedience to a religious norm. It promotes the idea of the loyal nonconformist, somebody who tries to reject the nonconformist/antimonarchical combination.

Another important subject of discussion was the possibility of placing in the hands of the public authority the punishment of moral crimes, to avoid leaving it to disparate religious moral legislation. Confusion between the Mosaic law, the moral teaching of the Gospel, and the civil laws: these discrepancies were a common concern among conformist and nonconformist authors because of the creation of a multiple norm effect in the application of penalties. The Jews considered it legitimate to follow the Mosaic law, while the Christians considered most of the Old Testament’s precepts no longer valid in conforming to Christ’s teaching. The nonconformist writer, Scholler Cartwright, suggests, in his *Helpes for discovery of the Truth in Point of Toleration* (1648), a possible resolution to this problem, stressing the importance of placing under the civil magistrate control of the moral sphere. The confusion created by the various religious priorities and the consequently different demands of the moral law was

¹⁶⁰Ibid. p. 203.

¹⁶¹Ibid. pp. 195, 243, 248.

¹⁶²T.P., P.N.C., *The loyal non-conformist, or, The religious subject, yielding to God his due, and to Caesar his right being a discourse from the pulpit touching true gospel worship and due subjection to magistrates*, London, 1664.

caused, according to Cartwright, by the minor punishments for moral crime. The magistrates, according to the author, have to act freely but also consider the blasphemous and the idolatrous as “enemies of Common-wealths, and of all both civil and godly honestie of life¹⁶³.”

The discussion about conformity and nonconformity can certainly not be represented only by these examples. Each author, depending on his perspective and his intention, describes in a different way the subject of nonconformity. In a later text of 1672, the *Two points of great moment, the obligation of Humane Laws, and The authority of the Magistrate about Religion Discussed together, with the Case which gave Occasion to the first Point*¹⁶⁴, the central problem was to determine if the transgression of secular law also meant a religious sin. The author, Humfrey, stresses new importance on the conscience, affirming that it is impossible to “be obliged, and ought to be still kept free¹⁶⁵.” The question seems here to change subtly; the argumentation is not more than deciding if a good Christian is also a good subject but if the conscience can be tied to the law. For the author the answer can only be negative: the conscience answers only to God's laws, civil rights become matters of religion only when the magistrate acts, commanded by God's will¹⁶⁶. The definition of nonconformity bound with the question of conscience encourages reflection about pastoral and political power. The coercion of the laws cannot force the subject to internalize the norm, Humfrey observes: “Civil power, which is the ground of subjection, does not lye in might, strength or force, but in right. Potestas (say political writers) is jus imperandi¹⁶⁷.” Nonconformity is, indeed, a choice led by the desire of an ethical life, which includes refusal to accept the norms; it is for this reason that the open and public practice of nonconformity represents a broad challenge to authority.

Despite these nuances and continuous changes in how to understand the concept of nonconformity, it is possible to identify a permanent feature in the debate about this subject. The core of the discussion about nonconformity remained, for the whole 17th century, the legitimacy of religious dissent in the English political context. Nonconformity was again thought of as in relationship with power and a courageous act of *parresia*, a practice that tried openly to break religious convention and habit. Contrary to indifferentism regarding the rituals, which spread in the Netherlands as evolution of Nicodemist behavior, in England the core of nonconformity remained the exterior norm. The action of the nonconformists was focused on pure, external behavior because living the rituals and ceremonies was essential to reach salvation. Since belief itself was in the posture of prayer and in the ritual practices, the English nonconformists characterized themselves by performing actions, especially in a public and exterior manner. This behavior involved an internal refusal of the norm, but it was necessary that the dissent from the norm assumed a form of material and visible act.

English nonconformity can be depicted as a challenge to the norm, a means of ethical and moral reformation but also an instrument in the hands of the English Church to

¹⁶³CARTWRIGHT T., *Helpes for Discovery of the Truth in Point of Toleration*, Printed by Thomas Banks, London, 1648. p. 14.

¹⁶⁴HUMFREY J., *Two points of great moment, the obligation of Humane Laws, and The authority of the Magistrate about Religion Discussed together, with the Case which gave Occasion to the first Point*, 1672. p. 7.

¹⁶⁵Ibid. p. 11.

¹⁶⁶Ibid. p. 9.

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

investigate preachers suspected of being nonconformists. However, in the apparently cohesive definition of nonconformity, a term comprehensive of both juridical and religious dissidence, it is possible to find an element of rupture in the second half of the 17th century. The redefinition of nonconformity as an issue bound with freedom of conscience was an attempt to defend the nonconformists, describing their adherence to the Gospel. One figure involved in English nonconformity's change of emphasis was Richard Baxter (1615-1691). He was a Puritan preacher who took a particular interest in the question of nonconformity and supported Cromwell during the English Civil War. After the Restoration he was several times tried and imprisoned because of his dissident views. Baxter was a multifaceted author and among his theological and polemical texts various were dedicated to the concept of nonconformity. In the second half of the 17th century he wrote different pamphlets on these themes: *The Nonconformists Advocate* (1653), *The Judgment of Nonconformists about the difference between Grace and Morality* (1676), *The Judgment of Mr. Baxter, concerning Ceremonies and conformity in the Points in Difference betwixt the Church of England and the Dissenters* (1689), and *The English nonconformity as under king Charles II and king James II, truly started and argued* (1690).

All references to the question of loyalty to the king and in general to all direct juridical issues were expunged from Baxter's works. With the aim of defending the nonconformists, he avoided describing them as disobedient or subversive. There is, however, another reason to justify Baxter's choice of subject-matter: he tried to move the debate on nonconformity from the juridical sphere to the domain of conscience and true-telling. For Baxter it is not possible to resolve the issue of conformity or, as it is expressed in the Book of Common Prayer, to assent and consent to a prescription, without reason. For the author formal conformity is the result of an act of hypocrisy because the conscience is forced to act against what it believes¹⁶⁸. Baxter's thoughts are directed not to a formal defense of nonconformist behavior but to show the uselessness of conformity's strategies. Conformity acts, according to Baxter, only through declarations of unity and uniformity¹⁶⁹, following just the plans of external conformation and of superficial acting. With this kind of strategy not only are the conformists unable to see the true nonconformity, that of the conscience, but they are necessarily forced to punish only on the exterior and formal level. The more the argumentation of the conformists is developed around duties and ceremonies, the more the persecution of dissidence is concentrated on formal and exterior matters¹⁷⁰. The aim of Baxter is, naturally, not to exhort the Church of England to hold an expanded and comprehensive examination of the conscience, but to capture the reader's attention by simple evidence: faith consists of both *credenda* and *agenda*¹⁷¹, and it is in this relationship that it is possible to discern a criterion of truth. The request for exterior acts of conformity to the rules of the Book of Common Prayer would generate only

¹⁶⁸See: BAXTER R., *The Nonconformists Advocate*, Printed for Thomas Simmons, London, MDCLXXX (1680). "For though I cannot prove such and such things to be absolutely contrary to, or against Gods Word, yet I cannot therefore presently affirm them to be according to Gods Word, either as expressly revealed, or positively commanded by the Sacred Canon; which yet I must be able to do, before I can declare *my unfeigned assent and consent* to the said particulars; else I should strangely violate my Conscience, and blindly rush forward at all adventure, without all reason or judgement." p. 8,

¹⁶⁹Ibid. p. 9.

¹⁷⁰Ibid. p. 14.

¹⁷¹Ibid. p. 20.

Nicodemism, and a formal conformism. This new argumentation opposing religious dissimulation sheds more light on the possible evolution of the Nicodemism approach; for Baxter and the other nonconformists like him, it is no more a matter of indifferentism, because the core of nonconformity is to act openly in affinity with one's own conscience¹⁷².

I am clearly of another Opinion, I must determine, in all points, whether the things be *right and good*, yea or not, before I can *assent and consent* unto them; I must be well ascertained what I affirm for a truth, to be a truth indeed, also I may be guilty of some degree of lying in speaking the very truth. It is not contrary to *humility* but the just and due *exercise of reason*, to search into the goodness and expediency of whatsoever I am called to *assent and consent unto*. [...] Every man is bound to see with his own eyes, and to judge from his own understanding, if he will act like a rational Creature; it is not the part of *Gospel-humility*, but of *Scheepsy stupidity* to follow our Leaders, not at all considering or judging of the way, but by a blind Implicit Faith and submission, yielding to be turned into every path, merely because it is their pleasure and appointment.¹⁷³

The best defense against the accusation of nonconformity is, for Baxter, to declare openly the truth of the conscience. This determination to tell the truth about oneself is a parresiasitic act, with which it is possible to conform one's own actions with one's own belief. The performative word of truth immediately gives rise to a form of emancipation that leads to absolute liberation. Acting as nonconformists is, for Baxter, the only possible way to tell the truth. The consequences of such elaboration of what can be understood as a critique against religious dissimulation were manifold. The argumentation of Baxter altered traditional Protestant behavior regarding the possibility of dissimulation: no more the "fly or dye"¹⁷⁴ of the 16th-century Marian persecuted, Baxter is not claiming the necessity of martyrs or exile but a concrete possibility of emancipation. The Bible is consequently understood, as a general rule, to proceed only in accordance with the circumstances¹⁷⁵.

In the courageous act of telling the truth, however, it was impossible to see a radical criticism of religious institutions or open dissidence. Baxter clearly affirms that the intention of the nonconformists is not to create scandal or disobey the rules, nor to comprehensively criticize the doctrine of the Church of England. Neither is it their intention to practice unlimited tolerance¹⁷⁶. What he is asking is the freedom openly to refuse some norms of the Church of England, "avoiding the greater hurt"¹⁷⁷.

Parallel to Baxter's attempt to raise the discussion about nonconformity into another level, it is significant that in 1670 the cousin of Richard Baxter, Benjamin Baxter, with the same aim, published *Non-conformity without controversie* (1670). In this text the pastor comments on Paul's Epistle to the Romans (12.2), justified nonconformity as a

¹⁷²Ibid. pp. 22-23.

¹⁷³Ibid. p. 38.

¹⁷⁴On the Marian persecuted and how they represented their exile, see the paper presented by SKORIES M., *Nonconformity as Identity – How Marian Exiles Explained their Exile*, in "Religious Non-Conformism and Cultural Dynamics", International Conference of the Research Training Group, University of Leipzig, 1-3 February 2013; *Challenging Consensus: New Perspectives on Religious Non-Conformism*, <http://www.observatoire-religion.com/2012/11/challenging-consensus-new-perspectives-on-religious-non-conformism/>

¹⁷⁵BAXTER R., *The English nonconformity as under king Charles II and king James II, truly started and argued*, London, 1689. p. 13.

¹⁷⁶Ibid. p. 15.

¹⁷⁷Ibid. p. 14.

behavior prescribed by the Gospel. Not all conformity is, for the author, to condemn, not that to the “lawful Commands of lawful Governors, in things Civil or Ecclesiastical; but only against a Conformity to the Vices of the World¹⁷⁸.” Here the critique is directed against the inconsistency of secular vices and morality; the author proposes a sort of asceticism in the secular world in order to live a life in conformity only to the most perfect world, the Heaven. Christ is called the most perfect example of a nonconformist because his example gives people the possibility of living for eternity.

Understanding the evolution of the term nonconformity in English history is essential to grasp the difference from the development of this concept in the Netherlands. The importance of the English debate about nonconformity in the 17th century was enhanced by the use of the word in the rest of Europe. Over the whole of the continent, in French, German, and Italian texts, the concept of nonconformity was used to refer to the specific situation in England. This word was employed, abstracted from the complexity of argumentation, to label a general dissident attitude to the norm and the rituals of the Church of England. The only exception to this trend seems to have been the United Provinces, where the Collegiants, in the use of and reflection about the word nonconformity, were a European anomaly. In which parallel fashion the concept of nonconformity developed within Holland's Collegiants is an interesting question, that we try to answer in the following paragraph.

2.2. The XIX Artikelen: nonconformity and the Church without God

In 1657 Galenus Abrahamsz wrote the first version of the *XIX Artikelen*. At that time, he was engaged with accusations of Socinianism and of bringing other religious congregations inside the Flemish community. Abrahamsz was already in contact with the first Quaker mission in Holland, and his heterodox visions were poorly tolerated within the Flemish grouping. It was due to these charges that Galenus Abrahamsz, with another member of the community, David Spruyt, distributed a short text, organized in 19 articles, in which they listed their opinions on the organization of religious congregations. This was the *Bedenkingen over den Toestand der Sichtbare Kercke Christi op Aerden, Kortelijck in XIX Artikelen Voor-Ghestelt: en aen mededienaren, op den 11 Januarij 1657, Schriftelijck overghelevert* (Reflection on the Condition of the Visible Church of Christ on the Earth, Briefly described in XIX Articles: and spread in writing among the followers the 11 January 1657). The authors, starting from the divisions in the *Doopsgezinde* community, wrote a general examination of the way in which religion was experienced in the 17th century.

The history of this text, as in many other cases, is very complex. At the very beginning the authors had circulated the 19 articles with the intention of stimulating internal discussion and thought about the meaning of the visible Church. This reflection was led with the aim of supporting tolerance and open-mindedness concerning the relationship with other religious groups or confessions. The authors wanted to emphasize the positive effects of tolerance and the enrichment that the discussion with external participants could bring into the community. The reaction of

¹⁷⁸BAXTER B., *Non-conformity without controversie, from Rom. Chap. 12. Ver 2*, Printed by A.M. For Tho. Parkhurk, London, 1670, (no p. no.)

the orthodox members of the Flemish community was, nevertheless, hostile. They did not accept the possibility of opening their *Gemeente* to Socinians or Quakers and reacted with an official publication and refutation of the *Bedenkingen*. In a later publication of the *XIX Artikelen*¹⁷⁹, Abrahamsz and Spruyt dedicated some pages to explaining the issue that led to the publication of the *Bedenkingen*. The text, say the authors, circulated extensively in the community and a member of the Flemish clergy, Laurens Hendricksz chose, without the consent of the two authors, to publish the *Bedenkingen*, together with the refutation, in a book entitled *Antwoorde by forme van aenmerckingen, vragen ende redenen* (Answer in form of Comments, Questions and Reasoning). This text seems to have disappeared from the list of 17th-century publications and the same can be said about its author, of whom it is not possible to find further publications. It was following their experience with Hendricksz that Abrahamsz and Spruyt decided to publish the *Nader verklaringe van de XIX. Artikelen* (Further explanation of the XIX Articles). This further clarification of the 19 articles was intended to supply the first list of articles with Biblical references, and add a refutation of Hendricksz's text. The lack of Biblical quotations in the initial wording of the *XIX Artikelen* was one of Hendricksz's main accusations. In the introduction Abrahamsz and Spruyt expressed their disappointment with the unexpected publication of the 19 articles. The intention of the authors, with free circulation and discussion of the text, was internal debate and not the development of fruitless polemics. They described, indeed, Hendricksz's text as "pasquillen en smaet-schriften"¹⁸⁰.

The *Nader verklaringe* provides us with some information about how the Collegiants discussed such important subjects. The authors underline that publishing the response to Hendricksz was a collective decision¹⁸¹. Even the individual positions of the two authors seemed to lose their importance in a context in which the collective discussion and the new idea of *Christelijcken Godtsdiensts* appeared more important than personal defense or revenge:

Dat de eygentlijke occasie, ofte gheleghentheydt, van 't instellen der 19. Artikelen geweest is seker voorval van een mondelinge t' Samenspareck: Die wy, op 't versoeck van eenighe onser Mede-dienaren, met hear ghehouden hebben over den Toestand der hedendaeghse Kercke. Daer wy twee achtereenvolgende dagen mede besigh waren¹⁸²

The reasons pressuring the authors to publish the *Nader verklaringe* were manifold: the necessity to clarify the articles, the utility of summarizing the thought of the authors and their followers, but above all explaining the situation of their contemporary Church and its differences from the first apostolic Church.

Abrahamsz and Spruyt's reflection on the state of their coeval Church starts with the assumption that the true community of God no longer exists. For the authors, the *verval* of the apostolic Church overlapped with the time of the emperor Constantine, when the secular power burst on the religious scene and upset its characteristic order

¹⁷⁹ ABRAHAMSZ G., SPRUYT D., *Nader verklaringe van de XIX. Artikelen*, Jan Rieuwertsz, 1659.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. See *Aenspaeck aen den Leser*, (no p. no.)

¹⁸¹ The importance and value of the community in Collegiant practice and the criticism of the individualistic and private point of view is amply demonstrated by Kolakowski in his Dutch Seventeenth-century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion: The Mennonite, Collegiant and Spinozan Connections, in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, no. 3/4 (Jul/Oct) 1990. p. 273.

¹⁸² See *Aenspaeck aen den Leser*, (no p. no.)

of truth. The secularization of the first apostolic Church coincided, for the Collegiants, with the triumph of the avidity of power, a progressive decline in freedom of speech, and the decadence of the religion itself¹⁸³. The main accusation that arose from this position, was Abrahamsz and Spruyt's supposed intention to abolish all religions. The Collegiants' opponents emphasized that the affirmation of the *verval* had as its main consequence the destruction of divine and clerical authority in the community. The authors of the *Nader verklaringe* answered these accusations as follows:

Wy antwoorden: dat onse beooginge niet en is, de oeffeninge des publijcken Godts-diensts uyt de Gemeente wech te nemen; of tot verachtginge, van 't gene onse Voor-ouders ondernomen hebben, yets te stellen; als slechts de misbruycken gheweert, en de sake selfs in haren behoorlijcken graed mach aenghemerckt worden. Want al is het soo: dat tot een ware en wetterlijcke herstellinge van den Godts-dienst des Nieuwen Testaments noodtsakelijck (na ons insicht) een Goddelijck recht, Goddelijcke authriteyt, last ofte commissie, vereyscht wordt, t'samen met alle onderhoorige gaven, en bequaemheden, des Heyligen Geests¹⁸⁴.

In this answer it is clear that, for the Collegiants, the external ceremonies and rituals were not necessary to achieve the knowledge of God or salvation. This indifference never included the necessity of abolishing ceremonies, at least when they did not involve an exclusivity factor¹⁸⁵. The Collegiants' main problem was not proposing a reformation of the external and visible structure of the Church but discussing the foundations of the Christian community. The core of their anticonfessionalism was not the religion itself but the claim of each confession to the exclusivity of the divine message.

It was corresponding to the description of the Church's decadence that Abrahamsz and Spruyt used the concept of conformity. The absence of *gaven*, *commissie*, *authoriteyt*, and *expresse sendinghe* (gifts, ordination, authority, and clear dispositions) of the Holy Spirit expressed the impossibility of conforming to the first apostolic Church. For the authors, comparing God's inspiration of the first apostles with the ordinary Church after Constantine is impossible, which means that all the authority and power that the Church claims to have is founded on human arrogance and not on divine authority. The authors underline that this kind of arrogance is a human instrument to “Belijdenissen te onderwerpen¹⁸⁶”, behavior that the apostles, inspired by God to talk with the people, never displayed. It is for this reason that a widespread tolerance (*verdraagzaamheid*), freedom of assembly, and freedom of speech were the foundations of the first *Gemeente*. The unfeasibility of forming a Church in the image of the first one indicates the impossibility of being outside the condition of nonconformity. The only chance of redemption, in the expectation of new divine inspiration, was to practice the freedom and tolerance that characterized the first apostolic Church.

Collegiants' reflections about the condition of the Church were therefore rooted in the central question about conformity or nonconformity to the first Apostolic Church. The pamphlet opens with the citation from John's Gospel (3.27) where it is affirmed “Een mensche en kan geen dingh aennemen, soo het hem uyt den Hemel niet gegeven

¹⁸³ ABRAHAMSZ, SPRUYT, *Nader verklaringe*. See *Aenspaeck aen den Leser*, (no p. no.)

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, (no p. no.)

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* “Wy en spreken heir niet tegen 't recht ghebruyck der *Ceremonien*: Omsichtelijck gepleeght zijnde, sy zijn nuttelijck, en een aenleydinge tot hooger betrachtungen.”

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.* (to subjugate the confession).

en zy¹⁸⁷.” The sense of the word conformity in the *Nader Verklaringe* starts from this quotation, which has the function of supporting the authors’ main thesis: no Church can state it is the true one without the gifts or the authority of the Holy Spirit.

Abrahamsz and Spruyt chose for the word conformity two different roots, one created from the Latin-based conform and the other expressed in Dutch, *Gelijkvormig*; both were written using italics. This choice testified to a specific semantic reference: in the Latin language the verb *conformo* has other meanings in addition to conform, that of model or form or make. This second definition involves an image or a model as a term of comparison. In addition, the Dutch translation of this Latin term, *Gelijkvormig*, seems to evoke this meaning. The authors of the *Nader Verklaringe* preferred, however, to use *niet conform*, rather than the Dutch word *Gelijkvormig*. This choice seems to concern the relationship between the contemporary Church and the idealized image of the first apostolic Church. The status of nonconformity is thought of in to the context of the ecclesiastical model of the first apostolic Church. The reference is explicitly provided in article 12:

Dat mede dese soo op-gerechte en ingestelde Kercken, en onder dese oock die Gemmente, daer wy teghenwoordigh nu noch onder sorteren (soo ten opsichte van haer op-rechtinge, en insetellinght, als ten aensien van haer teghenwoordigen stant en staet?) heel niet conform zijn, de op-rechtinge instellinge en standt van die eerste en eenige Kerck: wien alleen en geen ander de naem van een Gemeente Godts, Bruydt, Huys-vrouw, en 't lichaem Christi, in de Schriften des Nieuwen Testaments ghegeven wordt. [Niet conform zijn. Om dit wel te onderscheyden (anghesien daer seer veel aenghelegen is) dienen alle qualiteyten, en onstandighede, der eerste Kerke, tegen den standt deser tegenwoordiger Kercken, en die van onse Gemeente, neerstelijck, en in de vreesse des Heeren, overwogen zijn.]¹⁸⁸

The issue about the “Church Unholy”¹⁸⁹ is presented, therefore, in reference to an original model, which is the only truthful yardstick with which to confront the coeval status of the Church. The argumentation of the authors is, however, complicated because, at the same moment the original Church model is proposed, it seems to disappear. The first apostolic Church is a model that is irremediably lost and the exclusion of whatever possibility to be near the model of the first Church has to be considered a renunciation of any Reformation. This position was opposed to the Voetian project of *Nadere Reformatie*. Voëtius, on the basis of Puritan piety and Aristotelian scholasticism, thought that the new orthodoxy must coincide with a reorganization of the Church, thus achieving a Reformation project on that ethical level that was left unaccomplished by the early Protestant Reformation. If it was impossible to recover God's inspiration, the state of nonconformity becomes a structural element in the early modern Church. Further, the apostolic model was often named, but never proposed as an objective for the foundation of a possible Reformation. The prospect of constructing a new norm, on the model of the primitive Church, was explicitly rejected. This escape from a normative model can be understood as the Collegiants' answer to the violence of normativity. Abrahamsz and

¹⁸⁷“John answered and said, a man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven.” (All the English translations from the Bible are from the King James Bible (Authorized Version): <http://www.kingjamesbibletrust.org>

¹⁸⁸ABRAHAMSZ G., SPRUYT D., *Bedenckingen over den toestant der Sichtbare Kercke Christi op aerden, kortlijck in 19 Artikelen vvor-ghestelt: en aen onse Mede-dienaren, op den 11 Januari 1657, schriftelijck over-ghelevert*, in *Nader verklaringe*, (no p. no.)

¹⁸⁹See: FIX A., *Prophecy and Reason. The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1991.

Spruyt's proposal of an unattainable model appears, indeed, to be an attempt to take refuge from all normative temptations. This can also explain the motivations that led the authors to propose the first Church as a general model for the practice of freedom and tolerance and it can also explain the criticism of the Reformation by the authors. An attempt to “ontbloot van *Kerckelijcke order*, gevolghelijck terstondt daer op ondernomen hebben de *Vervallen Kercke te herstellen*¹⁹⁰,” a mistake that led to the establishment of a new human authority.

't Zy nochtans verre van ons, dat wy faren uytgangh uyt het *Pausdom* soudē oordeelen. Wy konnen wel sien, dat hare *conscientien* onder een ondragelijcken last van menschelijcke *insettingen*, en *Traditien*, gepranght wierden [...] Aengsien hier door niet alleen seer veele *misbruicken*, *wan-orders*, *verwettingen*, en andere ongemacken, omtrent de oeffeninghe des *Gods-dienst* soudē konnen wech ghenomen worde: maer dat sulx, wel bevat zijnde groote *nutigheden* veroorsaken soude, en veel aenstoots en ergernisse uit den wech nemen.¹⁹¹

It is in the failure of the Reformation, in its creation of divisions and disputes, and in its foundation of a new authority, that are tangible clues of the absence of God's gifts¹⁹².

This admission of the state of nonconformity was obviously unacceptable for all institutional Churches or congregations because it meant, implicitly, the loss of all secular power based on the exclusivity of interpreting the Scriptures, of being the true Church, or of claiming themselves as the only Reformed Church. This form of authority was described by the Collegiants as the capacity to bind the human conscience to a particular doctrine¹⁹³. The consequence of this kind of challenge to power was the renunciation of any authority, and the acceptance of a common and indefinite space to practice religion. The Collegiants' nonconformity rejected any norm and could be read on a double level: one the critic of Church authority and clericalism; the other the impossibility of thinking of religion as a finite and autoconclusive object. Their belief was, then, multifaceted and would never find its realization in a closed structure.

The status of nonconformity was, then, not understood in relation to the violation of a norm (the law, a religious confession, or an original model). Dutch nonconformity seemed to draw its semantic sense not from the juridical sphere (which is predominant in the English case) but was defined as a form of separation from the secular world, starting with the critique of the religious community, especially of its authoritarian expression:

*Hoewel heeft tot hier toe de droevighe uytkomstē de waerheydt deser prophetie bevestigt! [...] Soo is den lieflijcken en weerlosen aerdt van het Lammeken verdweenen; ende in plaets van dien heeft sich den Wolfs aerdt alomme gheopenbaert in die gene, die (conform de voorsegginge Pauli) ghelijck als sware Wolven naderhandt zijn ingekomen, die de kudde niet ghespaert en hebben [Act. 20 v.29]. Doenmen de onnoosele en vrome harten met menschelijcke *insettingen*, en *Kerckelijcke*, en *Synodale besluuten*, heeft beginnē te beswaren, en te pressen; en die dan sulcks met haet gemoedts halve niet en durfden toestemmen, te oordeelen, uyt te slooten, en verbannen; en onder voorwendtsel van*

¹⁹⁰ ABRAHAMSZ, SPRUYT., *Nader verklaringe*; See *Aenspaeck aen den Leser*, (no p. no.)

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² ABRAHAMSZ G., SPRUYT D., *Wederlegginge van 't Geschrift genaemt: Antwoorde by forme van aenmerckingen, vragen ende redenen &c. Aen Lauren Hendricksz ende die gene onder de Dienaren, uyt welcker naem het gheschrift is overghegeven*, in *Nader verklaringe*. pp. 5-6, 17, 26-27, 30.

¹⁹³ ABRAHAMSZ, SPRUYT., *Nader verklaringe*. See *Aenspaeck aen den Leser*, (no p.no.)

heyligheydt, en yver voor de waerheydt in ghevanckenissen en banden over te leveren¹⁹⁴.

The evangelical message here assumes a central function¹⁹⁵ and represents the only possibility of fighting human ordination in the Church (significantly represented as a wolf in a flock). The absence of God, in the world of the Collegiants, can be substituted by following the good teaching of the Gospel, such as freedom of speech and tolerance. In the same way, salvation is not removed from the religious life. The question of redemption and salvation remains, indeed, a central theme in the religious life of Collegiants. Abrahamsz and Spruyt had heterodox ideas about the ordination and constitution of a religious community, but they did not forget to speak about the possibility of salvation even in the condition of nonconformity.

It is for this reason that in a text added to the *Nader verklaringe*, the *Wederlegginge van 't Geschrift, genaemd: Antwoorde by forme van aenmerckingen, vragen ande redenen* (Refutation of the Text named: Answer in form of Comments, Questions and Reasoning), they dedicate some space to this question. In the direct polemic against Hendricksz the authors admit that in the *XIX Artikelen* their intention was to speak only about the external condition of the Church. With the word *verval* they refer to the decadence of the gifts that God gave to the first *Sichtbare Gemeente* (visible Church) and not to God's inspiration, which still dwells in the pious. It is with this rhetorical argumentation that the possibility of redemption for true believers is "saved." The thinking of the authors is strongly influenced here by the concepts of the "Spiritual Reformation" and Coornhert's perfectibility. The distinction between the visible Church and the invisible one allow the authors to speak about *verval* without necessarily entailing a state of damnation for humanity tout court. The personal *licht* that enlightens all the pious individuals permits salvation, even with the visible Church in a condition of decadence. It is not the irresistible grace that is represented here by the term *licht*, but a state of conformity with the Gospel's teaching. The possibility of redemption is granted to all singular individuals, but depends uniquely on their moral behavior and faith. Salvation cannot be achieved mechanically, with ceremonies and rituals, but via a fundamental inward character: intentions and conscience. The reference to singular redemption seems the only means to reproduce, in an embryonic form, the state of grace of the first apostolic community and to create a non normative Christian ethic without exclusivism or fanaticism. Abrahamsz and Spruyt stated that following the Gospel's teaching, living an ethical life independent of religious disputes and external form of cult can be a possible way to obtain restitution of divine grace. The community of which the authors speak has to be understood as the sum of all the singularities that constitute the invisible Church, the only possible dimension in which the redemption of the singular can represent the possibility of redemption for the whole community¹⁹⁶.

For all the previously mentioned reasons *XIX Artikelen* offers an exceptional point of view in the debate concerning anticonfessionalism and the statuses of the visible and invisible Churches. The choice to develop the model of a new religious life from a narrative about the first apostolic Church as a pure and ideal archetype should not be understood as an attempt to establish the concept of nonconformity in a normative sense but only as an argumentation strategy. For this reason it is possible to state that

¹⁹⁴Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ABRAHAMSZ, SPRUYT, *Wederlegginge van 't Geschrift genaemt*, in *Nader verklaringe*, p. 30.

¹⁹⁶Ibid. p. 27.

Dutch nonconformity did not function in the juridical framework in which English nonconformity was born, but in a specific refusal of the norm. When Galenus Abrahamsz wrote his *XIX Artikelen*, in 1659, the English polemic about nonconformity and resistance against the Act of Uniformity had not yet become the battlefield for identification of English dissenters. Abrahamsz and Spruyt's thoughts about the Church without holy inspiration were inherited, as has been shown, from the anticlerical and anticonfessional Spiritual Reformation movement and from the particular inclination that, at the end of the 16th century, took the Nicodemism in Holland. The choice of the authors to use, as central concepts, the state of the Church Unholy, conformity and nonconformity was, afterwards, not strictly identified with the English discussion. Nonconformity in the context of religious dissidents in Holland can then be considered as independent from the English situation. The nonconformity debate featured reflections on freedom of conscience and the necessity of free speech within a religious congregation. Collegiants' anticonfessionalism seems, therefore, to have led the discussion about conformity and nonconformity, addressing the same problems later discussed by Baxter.

2.3. Freeprophecy and the specificity of the Collegiants' reading of the Bible

As we saw, Collegiants referred to their proposal of a different kind of religious community with the term nonconformity, a choice that involved criticism of both authority and normativity. They were reluctant to embark on a new Reformation of the Church and never expressed a desire for a comprehensive scheme. Collegiants put into practice their vision of the Church in the community's everyday life, practicing with rigor a few essential rules that, for them, were essential for the Christian life: freedom of speech and widespread tolerance, together with a constant and egalitarian debate about the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. Collegiant assemblies were, indeed, often characterized by interminable discussions, rooted in the principle of free prophecy. According to Abrahamsz and Spruyt, the true Christian community must possess certain important characteristics, as described in one of Paul's Epistles:

In 't kort: de Sichtbare Kercke ofte Gemeente Christi is, een bersameling van gheloovighe menschen, yegelijck in hum order (soo als terstondt geseht is) behoerlijck bestaende, die t'samen door eenen geest tot een lichaem gedoopt zijn [1 Corinthians 12. 13]197.

The criticism of the authority of the Church and the consequential loss of its charismatic role gave rise in the Collegiant movement to a process that from the start was called free prophecy.

As suggested by Voogt, this idea, a form of opposition to the ecclesiastical institutions and an initial sign of the first apostolic communities, originated in reading Jacopus Acontius, especially by Collegiants from Leiden and in the works of Klinkhamer¹⁹⁸. As already stated in the first chapter, Collegiants' calling themselves prophets had

¹⁹⁷Tbid.

¹⁹⁸VOOGT G., "Anyone who can Read may be a Preacher": Sixteenth-century Roots of the Collegiants, in *Dutch Review of Church History / Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, vol. 85, issue 1, 2005.

nothing to do with claiming to possess particular charismatic gifts, nor with ability to predict the future. The Collegiants understood freeprophecy as an equivalent of free speech¹⁹⁹, the freedom to comment and intervene in the assemblies because someone “felt” moved to. At the very beginning, as described by De Fijne²⁰⁰, it seems that this feeling was very close to a form of Holy Spirit inspiration. It is never described in Collegiant writings, however, with visionary or ecstatic elements, which appears to be confirmed in the description that Borch, in his journal of 1661, made of Collegiants' assemblies.

Post sacra ordinaria, ad vesperam in de Heeren gracht sub insigni cygni in conventu Collegiato audivi primo reitantum Serraium cap: 24 Lucae et interpretantem, hinc concionantem quendam Normand de causas cur Christus its seorsum se manifestasset discipulis et non evidentiori statim argumneto omnibus, huc redibant ejus rationes, hristum voluisse 1. aliqualem cognitionem discipulis communicare, hinc 2. judicium illorum explorare 3. liberum arbitrium illis non adimere, 4. in vero firmare²⁰¹.

This practice is evidently closer to a free exegesis than to an ecstatic experience. The first use of the concept of free prophecy inside the *collegia* was, as stated by Klinkhamer²⁰², a consequence of Van der Kodde's inspiration from reading Coornhert, who posed the condition of free speech as the cornerstone of a widespread tolerance. “The first impassioned plea for peace and concord, and the laying aside of petty differences, appeared in the “Peace Tract or Teachings for Solidarity, Peace and Love which are supremely necessary in these times” - Vre-Reden of Onderwijs tot Eendracht, Vrede ende Liefde, in desen tijden hoognoodigh²⁰³.”

As has been shown, the concept of free prophecy had been known in the *collegia prophetica* since the very beginning of Collegiant history. From the description by De Fijne it emerges that Van der Kodde and his followers believed in the prophecy as direct divine inspiration, understood as a form of widespread gift or *charismata*. It is in contrast to this first interpretation that, according to Fix, after the publication of the work of Abrahamsz and Spruyt the influence of the spiritual aspects of the Collegiant movement lost its intensity. According to Fix, in the second half of the 17th century the Collegiants experienced progressive rationalization of the terms in which they understood free prophecy, which he identifies with a secularization of the conscience. However, this radical and rational interpretation, which proposed a reflection about the absence of Holy Gifts and opened the way to a rational interpretation of Bible exegesis and free prophecy, seemed to characterize only a few texts, as for example those of Meijer or Jelles.

¹⁹⁹FIX, *Prophecy and Reason*. pp. 39-40.

²⁰⁰DE FIJNE P., *Kort, Waerachtigh, en Getrouw Verhael van het eerste Begin en Opkomen van de nieuwe Seckte der Propheten ofte Rynsburgers in het Dorp van Warmont, Anno 1619, en 1620, Tot War-Stadt 1671*.

²⁰¹BORCH O., *Olai Borrichii itinerarium 1660-1665*, vol. II, Brill and C.A. Reitzels Forlag Copenhagen, London, 1983. p. 98. vol

²⁰²“De offeningh van de Vrvheyd van Spreken, voor alle Christen Mannen, in dit Werck herdedight [...] door de slofheyd der Menschen geheel in onbruyck onder veel Seckten der genaamde Christen geraakt is in Hollandt weer aanhevangen ten tijden van de Vervolginghder Remonstranten, door eenige uyt haar in 't Jaar 1619 en 1620, namelijk Jan, Adriaan en Gijsbert Jacobsz van der Kodde, Gebroeders en eenige enderen.” KLINKHAMER L., *Kort verhal van de herstelling van t gebruyk van deeze Vryheit*, 1655. p. 302.

²⁰³VOOGT G., *Religious Constraint on Trial: Dirk Volckertsz Coornhert's Defense of Freedom of Conscience*, UMI, Service Dissertation, 1997. p. 210.

In 1666 Meijer²⁰⁴ wrote the *Philosophia Sacrae Scripture Interpretes*²⁰⁵, developing in a radical manner the theological discussion about the Bible's exegesis and the role that the human intellect plays in interpreting obscure passages from the Scriptures. Arminians and Socinians based their exegesis from the holy Text, the former to justify the distinction between necessary and unnecessary dogmas via the clarity or obscurity of the text and the latter to support direct intervention by human reason where the text was not clear enough. Meijer turned this approach upside down, starting with a “clear idea” as the basis for interpreting the Bible. When the correspondence between a Bible passage and the “clear idea” failed, according to Meijer, the text was to be considered uncertain.

Meijer applied Cartesian methodology to the Scriptures in a rigorous way, which meant, for him, rejecting all sources of doubt and all unclear knowledge; only in this way was it possible to extract from the Bible, the *verbum Dei*, the message's core of truth. As suggested by the title of this work, it is clear that for Meijer the right methodology to apply to the reading of the Bible was philosophy. Only with the Cartesian philosophical method was it possible to read through the obscure language of the Bible and reach clear and distinct knowledge.

Influenced by Meijer and the popularization of the Cartesian and Spinozist philosophy, Jarig Jelles, a rich merchant who decided in 1656 to abandon his commercial activities to dedicate the rest of his life to the “research of the truth”, undertook to demonstrate the perfect compatibility between philosophy and the Christian religion. In 1673 he finished writing his *Belydenisse des algemeenen en christelyken geloofs* (Confession of a general and Christian faith)²⁰⁶ and in the same year he sent a letter to Spinoza asking for comments and approval. This work was officially written to defend the philosophy of Descartes from the accusation of paganism, with a simple style that could be understood by everyone. Though Jelles' aim was irenic, i.e. to bring Christians together and not divide them, he proposed an argumentation that had already shown its limits. Following Aconcio, Jelles proposed to isolate a few certain dogmas confirmed by Scripture. Further, he chose to call his book, a collection of Bible quotations from the *Statenvertaling* (the Dutch Bible of 1637), and Protestant *loci classici*, *Belydenisse*, i.e., confession in a period when confessions were highly contested.

Using Spinozist language, Jelles developed the orthodox thesis that sees in the Bible a rational message, comprehensible with human knowledge. He shared with the Galenist Pieter van Locren the idea of a human Christ who has the function of testifying to the truth of the divine message. Jelles added more rational elements describing Christ as the embodiment of the infinite wisdom i.e. the knowledge that

²⁰⁴BORDOLI R., *Ragione e Scrittura tra Descartes e Spinoza. Saggio sulla Philosophia S. Scripturae interpretes di Lodewijk Meyer e sulla sua recezione*, Franco Angeli, Milan 1997. See also: BORDOLI R., *Etica, arte, scienza tra Descartes e Spinoza. Lodewijk Meyer (1629-1681) e l'associazione Nil Volentibus Arduum*, Franco Angeli, Milan, 2001; MOREAU P.F., *Luis Meyer et l'Interpres*, in *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, LXXVI, 1992.

²⁰⁵MEIJER L., *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres: exercitatio paradoxa in qua veram philosophiam infallibilem S. Literas interpretandi normam esse apodictice demonstratur et discrepantes ab hac sententiae expendentur ac refelluntur*, Eleutheropoli [= Amsterdam], 1666.

²⁰⁶JELLES J., *Belydenisse des algemeenen en christelyken geloofs, vervatten in een Brief aan N.N.* By Jan Rieuwertsz, 't Amsterdam, 1684. See also: SPRUIT L., ed., *Professione della fede universale e cristiana contenuta in una lettera a N.N.*, Quodlibet, Macerata, 2004.

God has of himself²⁰⁷. He also shared with other Collegiants like Pieter Balling and Meijer the belief that the Bible's hermeneutics is achievable with clear and distinct knowledge of the Scriptures, i.e. not attached to the single words but to their semantics.

For Jelles, it was possible to reach the Bible's hermeneutics without a special gift but with natural human reason. The aim of the author here is to criticize the authoritarian Catholic approach to the Scriptures but also the Protestant principle of the *sola scriptura*, which remained for Jelles a vague claim without the explicit involvement of human knowledge. As well as for the other Collegiants, the practical dimension of the religious life remain central in Jelles' *Belydenisse*, more than simple faith or belief in Christ's Resurrection. Good works and comprehension of the rational message of the Bible are the only way to reach redemption.

The large majority of Collegiants, however, opposed the rationalist tendencies, as in the *Philosoperenden Boer* published by Stol in 1676. This text is a dialog between a Cartesian philosopher, a peasant, and a Quaker. The peasant opposes the Cartesian philosopher's vision of religion, denying that it is possible to understand the nature of God with human reason, or innate notions, or use philosophy as a key to understanding the Scriptures. He adds: "De Philosophen verwerren veel van die dingen die God geopenbaart heeft, met het geen ons de bloote reden leert, en willen door subtijle consequentien toonen dat de reden die leert; maar dar in is 't datse het wit niet treffen [...] Dat de reden ons leert, dar men het goede en billike moet volgen²⁰⁸." The proof of the existence of God is here a consequence of the revelation and not of philosophical or mathematical speculation. Prophecy is considered a consequence of holy inspiration; in the last part of the text, indeed, the peasant declares himself nostalgic for the Collegiants' first *vergadering*, where the inspiration of the *herten* dominated²⁰⁹. Opposition to Cartesianism and its rational tendencies in matters of religion created in some passages of this text a materialistic and immanent vision. The peasant, for example, declares the impossibility of demonstrating the immortality of the soul because he found no trace of it in the Holy Scripture; he confirms the equality between cause and effect, denying that God could be the proximal cause of man's creation. He also denies one of the most popular consequences of the scientific revolution, the existence of an intelligent design. He supports, further, the absolute cultural and human character of moral injunctions, opposing the idea that human nature possesses innate rationality or morality.

This position testifies to rejection of both Cartesian natural religion and the Quakers' extreme spirituality; the perspective of the peasant philosopher mirrored Collegiants' reasonableness in their approach to the religion, based on empirical common sense. Regarding prophecy, rationality, and holy inspiration the majority of Collegiants remained in a transitional position that admitted both divine inspiration as a form of individual gift and the absence of extraordinary gifts in the Church community. Examples of this position were the works of Klinkhamer: *Vrijheijt van spreekken in de gemeynte der geloovigen, bewesen met geboden, exempelen, redenen, weerlegging van tegenwepingen* (1655) (Freedom of speech in the community of believers), the

²⁰⁷Ibid. pp. XLVI-XLVII.

²⁰⁸STOL I.B., *Den Philosophierenden Boer, Hadelende van de Dwalingen der hedendaagse Christenen, Philosophen, Cartesianen en Quaakers. In versheyden overmeynde zaaken Begrepen in een samen spraak tusschen een Boer, Filosooph en Quaker*, Gedrukt voor de Cartesianen en Quakers om de oogen te openen, 1676. p. 12.

²⁰⁹Ibid. p. 30.

*Oud Gebruyk van de Vryheydt van Spreeken in de Gemeente der Doops-gesinden. Vertoont in de verantwoording der zelfder aan de geene welke vreaegen waroom zy niet meede in de Kerken gaen?*²¹⁰ (1665) (The ancient use of the freedom of speech in the Doops-gesinde community, with the answer of the same to whom asks why they do not take part in the Church activities) and Langedoult's *De apostolice outheyt van de vrijheijt van spreecken in de vergaderingen der Christenen* (1672) (The apostolic antiquity of the freedom of speech in the assembly of the Christians).

In the second half of the 17th century, the debate within the Collegiants was characterized by the progressive influence of Cartesian and Spinoza's philosophy and by Abrahamsz's reflections on the unholy Church, though the full and explicit secularization of the movement was contained by the strong influence of mystical and chiliastic tendencies. Eschatological expectation found fertile soil in the Collegiants, who were composed of believers highly sensitive to millenarian and mystical argumentation. An example of this penetration was the visionary theology of Antoinette Bourignon, a mystic and chiliastic interpreter who found a place in the Collegiants thanks to the direct involvement of Pieter Serrarius. The Danish philosopher Ole Borch describes in his journal Serrarius's mysticism:

Fui apud D. Johannem Olavium Bergensem, item apud Dn. Serarium [...] qui inter alia ad introversionem animi ad se ipsum, requisivit, ut l. abstineretur à peccatis, et post pure mente inspicretur anima quieta cogitatione; in Helmotio illud caput maxime commendandum de venatione scientiarum, et verba illa, quae Eremita ibi loquitur, Helmontium de introversione animi ben loqui, Schwenkfeldium et Weigelianos nimium extendere illan introversionam, se quondam non alienum fuisse ab illorum sententia, sed jam Deum misertum sui²¹¹.

As stated by Kolakowski, the millenarian tendencies in the 17th-century Dutch Republic could not be represented as a consequence of the rational wave, but in the domain of criticism of the Church and anticonfessionalism it constituted a radical trend. Chiliasm was particularly opposed by the orthodox theologians, especially the Voetians. It was not only the implicit materialistic vision of the millenarians (they preached the destruction of the Church and the advent of Christ's kingdom on earth) that was sanctioned by the orthodox but also, more pragmatically, the common anti-Calvinism and the Anabaptist tradition which dominated such movements²¹².

Pieter Serrarius²¹³, a cultivated man who was born in London of Walloon parents, can be considered the representative of both the mystical and the chiliast currents inside the Collegiant movement. He studied medicine in Oxford and was admitted to the Walloon college in Leiden. Due to his international academic experience, he was in contact with the Royal Society, the Hatlib's circle, and most of the key figures in the scientific as well as the religious panorama of the Dutch Republic, and with Antoinette Bourignon, Jean de Labadie, Henry Oldenburg, Robert Boyle, Jan Amos Comenius,

²¹⁰This was a translation of a work by the successor of Zwingli, Johann Heinrich BULLINGER (1504-1575), *Der Widertaudern Ursprung, Furgang, Sekten*. In the Dutch edition and translation Rieuwertsz added to this polemical text against the Anabaptists a defense of the Mennonite community.

²¹¹BORCH O., *Olai Borrichii itinerarium 1660-1665*, vol. I, Brill and C.A. Reitzels Forlag Copenhagen, London, 1983. p. 187.

²¹²KOLAKOWSKI L., *Chrétiens sans Église. La conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVIIIe siècle*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1987. p. 742.

²¹³See: VAN DER WAAL E., *De mystieke chiliast Petrus Serrarius (1600-1669) en zijn wereld*, Leiden, 1987.

John Dury, Adam Boreel, and Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel. Serrarius corresponded with Spinoza, as an intermediary between the latter and the secretary of the Royal Society, Henry Oldenburg. During his studies Serrarius was soon in opposition to the Walloon doctrine, strictly Calvinist, because of his mystical and chiliast interests.

Serrarius combined his mysticism with belief in the end of the world and the second coming of Christ, a possibility predicted by a passage in Daniel 12.4. Awaiting the Apocalypse was interpreted as the chance to reunify all Christian currents, plus the Jews, and to convert the Turks. In 1657 Serrarius wrote the *Assertion Du Règne De Mille Ans*²¹⁴, the first work in which he combined his mystical and chiliast vision. This expectation of the advent of Christ's new kingdom on earth, even if opposed by most of the official theologians, was not exceptional in Serrarius's time. The fervent eschatological activity in the Dutch Republic was exemplified by the numerous astrological practitioners and in particular by the millenarianism spread by the Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam²¹⁵.

Serrarius wrote, in 1662, the *Brevis dissertatio de fatali et admiranda illa ominum planetarium in uno eodque signo*²¹⁶ (A brief dissertation concerning that fatal and to be admired conjunction of all the planets in one and the same sign), where he used astrology as a form of interpretation for future events and apocalyptic signs. His works were very influential within the Collegiants, particularly affecting Oudaen, who read the Book of Revelation as a pre-exposition of all historical religious events²¹⁷. His prophesying was assumed, in this context, to be an extraordinary capacity to foresee the future and to interpret, as an art, particular events as signs of the Apocalypse. These tendencies could be considered a substantial element in Collegiants' anticonfessionalism. The idea of the Church in decay and of emancipation into the corrupt condition of the premillenarian world is always expressed through Collegiants' nonconformist behavior towards the institutional Churches. According to Serrarius, the expectation of Christ's second coming provided the Collegiants the opportunity to declare their nonconformity, in a Paulinian way²¹⁸.

The *XIX Artikelen* represent, certainly, a hypertext full of referents to the concept of anticonfessionalism, which seemed, however, relatively untouched by chiliast and mystical influences, which manifested themselves in Holland in various forms. In Abrahamsz and Spruyt's text, the element of expectation is mentioned only a few times, as a period in which the first extraordinary God's gifts could be received by the Christian community. They never mentioned the possibility, however, of foreknowing the arrival of this time or of finding in the Scriptures signs of t Christianity's history. Despite these differences, in 1659 Serrarius wrote *De vertredinge des heyligen stadts* (Defence of the Holy City) in defense of the Collegiants. This text was an expression of Serrarius's irenism, the necessity of reunification not only within the

²¹⁴SERRARIUS P., *Assertion Du Règne De Mille Ans, ou de la Prosperité De L'Eglise De Christ en la Terre: Pour servir de Responce au Traitté de Monsieur Moyse Amyraut sur ce même sujet. Descouverant Le triste Prejugé qui possede aujourd'huy la plupart des Eglises contre le Regne du Seigneur de toute la Terre*, Luyken, Amsterdam, 1657.

²¹⁵Ibid. pp. 155-184.

²¹⁶SERRARIUS P., *Brevis dissertatio de fatali et admiranda illa omnium planetarium in uno eodemque signo, igneae triplicitatis ultimo, conjunctione, die 1/11 dec. anno 1662 futura*, 1662.

²¹⁷OUAAN J.F., *Bedenklijke toepassing op eenige stukken in de Openbaringe: ten proeve voorgesteld*, By Barent Bos, te Rotterdam, 1689.

²¹⁸See: AGAMBEN G., *Il tempo che resta. Un commento alla lettera ai Romani*, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 2000.

Doopsgezinden but also for all Christianity. The author shared Abrahamsz and Spruyt's definition of the Church and found the claim to be the only inspired Church as the source of all schisms and disputes²¹⁹, though he accepted this definition only in the context of his chiliastic and spiritual visions²²⁰.

It was not, however, for the eschatological component but for its forceful anticonfessionalism that the *Nader Verklaringe* achieved impressive resonance in the Dutch *Doopsgezinde* community: it can be seen as a key text for understanding the evolution of anticonfessional and spiritual thought in the 17th century. Abrahamsz and Spruyt's publication had a major impact not only on the Flemish community in Amsterdam, for whom it was the cause of the previously mentioned *Lammerenkrijg*, but also on the Collegiant movement²²¹.

In Leiden, Rotterdam, Haarlem and Amsterdam, the adherents to Collegiant ideals utilized Abrahamsz and Spruyt's concepts of *verval* and *nonconformity* extensively to support and elaborate their anticonfessional and antiauthoritarian vision. The defense of freedom of speech was developed to support the necessity of a communitarian Bible exegesis (Laurens Klinkhamer), to remove all charismatic contamination from the concept of prophecy (Pieter Smout), or to promote the idea of the prophecy as a natural ability, part of the human being (Pieter Langedoult). This approach to the communitarian religious life could only in certain aspects be described as rational. For the Collegiants, indeed, the choice to keep the religious experience free from constriction or normativity did not mean that each religious decision must be guided by reason. Other options that might be considered reasonable approaches to the religious life included the antipedobaptism in the Anabaptist tradition, while free prophecy as free exegesis and the distinction between necessary and unnecessary dogmas regarding salvation (*adiaphora*) were, for the Collegiants, instruments with which to fight religious exclusivism and to separate the religious experience from the constraints of the secular institution that was the visible Church.

In 1655 Laurens Klinkhamer, on the wave of the first debate arising from the circulation of the *XIX Artikelen*, wrote *De vryheid van spreken* (Liberty of speaking)²²², a text in which he defended Collegiants' choice of *vrij vergadering*, holding assemblies without a pastor, opposed by the orthodoxy of the Flemish community and Remonstrant preachers:

Wy en werpen ons-zelven tot geen hooge-Priesters op als of wy eenige voor-rechten hadden, boven anderen, zoo dat wy zouden vermogen eenige Heylige Diensten te doen, waer van andere behooren uytgesloten te worden. Christus die onze Hooge-Priester is, en ons van onze zonden gewassen heeft, in zijnen bloede, heeft ons gemaect tot Koningen, en Priesters, Goede ende zijnen Vader²²³

The attention of Klinkhamer, in these pages, is focused on the importance of keeping the conscience free in order to maintain the truth of the Christian religion, especially

²¹⁹SERRARIUS P., *De Vertredinge De Heyligen Stadts ofte een klaer bewijs van 't Verval der Eerste Apostolische Gemeente, geselet tott Antwoort op de drie Vregan diesaegaende aen Dr: Galenus en David Spruyt uytgegeven*. By Broersz Joost, Amsterdam, 1659. pp.13-15.

²²⁰According to Van der Waal Serrarius's spirituality has to be understood as the legacy of the Anabaptists, such as Entfelder, Denck, and Haug.

²²¹See: HUMFREY J., *Two points of great momen.t* pp. 126-146.

²²²KLINKHAMER L., *Vrijheijt van spreekken inde gemeynte der geloovigen, bewesen met geboden, exempelen, redenen, weerlegging van tegenwepingen*, By Ritske Jacobs Mossel, 1655.

²²³*Ibid.* pp. 234-235.

in reading and commenting on the Bible. This freedom is, indeed, the necessary core of the Gospel's teaching²²⁴, which is in contrast to the beliefs of all the office-holders in the Church, created with only the function to bind and subject the conscience. To express this concept Klinkhamer used, significantly, the expression non-conform, in this case to all the useless questions regarding predestination and child baptism, which were the “kanker in de Godts-dienst daer mee zou de heele Religie 't onderste boven raecken want het is niet conform onze Catechismus (Geloofs-onderwijs).”²²⁵

Klinkhamer's defense of free prophecy had the aim of disjoining the divine gifts from the office of priesthood and consequently their claim to be the only people capable of leading the preaching and interpreting the Scriptures. The value of free prophecy was clear because it acted to promote emancipation and mutual support among the members of a religious community.

Alle gehouden zijn daer na te arbeyden datze bequaemheyt en gaven mochten verkrijgen om zulcks te kunnen doen, waer toe ons de schrpe bestraffing heb 5:12/13/14 oock krachtelijck verbindt [...] zoo word daer door de Manschen in 't gemeen alle lust en genegentheyt on haer gaven op te wekken of oock geoffende zinnen te bekomen²²⁶.

As already expressed in Abrahamsz and Spruyt's text, Klinkhamer did not believe that in the coeval Churches it was possible to find extraordinary gifts. He stated, however, that with the right teaching²²⁷ and good works it was possible for all believers to achieve the necessary wisdom to speak in religious assemblies and to interpret the Bible. Klinkhamer expressed this possibility using the words *Bequaam* or *Bequaamheyd*, which indicated a qualification or an ability to do something; in the specific case of his text it is used to express the ability of prophesying. This approach to establishing a religious community was necessary, according to Klinkhamer, for the triumph of peace, to prevent every instance of useless dispute and litigation regarding a norm, or to avoid the necessity of following a person who has assumed the charismatic role in assemblies.

Klinkhamer's idea of *Bequaamheyd* was in turn shared by Langedoult, a Collegiant from Leiden and his close friend. In 1670, as has already been described in the first chapter, Langedoult was engaged in a bitter polemical battle with Van Dale, who represented the thought of the conservative members of the Flemish community. Van Dale, with his *De oudheid van alleen spreken* (The Antiquity of Alone-Speaking)²²⁸, edited by Rieuwertsz and presented as a collection of letters between Van Dale, Smout, and Langedoult, intended to deconstruct the concept of free prophecy, especially in its claim to be founded on the Gospel and on the example of the first apostolic Church. Further, he stated in a later text of 1674, the *Historie van't Predik-ampt* (History of the Preacher's Office)²²⁹, the absolute originality of the institution of priesthood and its conformity to the tradition. Some years before this dispute between Langedoult and Van Dale there was published, anonymously, another text opposing free prophecy, *De verdwynende on-apostolische vrysprecker* (Disappearing of apostolic free-

²²⁴Ibid. pp. 331-332, 358

²²⁵Ibid. p. 240.

²²⁶Ibid. pp. 369, 371.

²²⁷Ibid. p. 69.

²²⁸VAN DALE A., *De oudheid van 't alleen spreken. In de Gemmente verdedigd*, Jan Rieuwertsz, 't Amsterdam, 1670.

²²⁹VAN DALE A., *Historie van 't Predik-ampt*, by Jan Gerritsz Geldorp, te Haarlem, 1674.

speaking)²³⁰.

The polemic between Collegiants from Leiden and the orthodox section of the *Doopsgezinden* continued in 1679 with Pieter Smout, a significant Collegiant figure in Leiden, who wrote the *Het helder Licht der Vryheyt* (The Clear Light of Liberty)²³¹. This text, like Klinkhamer and Langedoult's, was inspired by the principle of freedom of speech in religious assemblies described in Abrahamsz and Spruyt in the *XIX Artikelen*. Starting with the assumption that the *verval* of the first apostolic Church has meant the establishment of tyranny and absence of liberty, the author describes the *vryheydt van spreken*, as an archetypal and natural right inside the religious community.

rechte redelijke en gans goddelijke Vryheydt van spreken, voor een bequaem Christen in de christelijke Vergaedingen [...] met een wordt, alles wat een recht verstandigh Godsdienstigh Christen Mensch, om Godt en sijn naesten te dienen, van nooden heeft: want dese vryheydt leert en stelt na den aert en natuer van de rechte reden en gronden van de ware christelijke Godsdienst, dat wy alle even hoog en tot Broeders in Christo ghesteldt!²³²

For Smout, freedom of speech had egalitarian implications because all the believers are brothers and occupy the same position inside the community. This is, for the author, the only possible rational and natural way to organize the religious life. Moreover, the right of liberty inside the religious community also involved the possibility of freely discussing God and his nature²³³.

Smout based his views on two passages from the Bible, Romans 14.7-13²³⁴ and 2 Corinthians 5.10²³⁵. The Bible texts that Smout quoted were commonly used within the Collegiant movement: of Paul's writings, the Epistles to the Romans and Corinthians were the most important sources for the movements of the second Reformation. The Collegiants, including Smout, stressed the importance of the New Testament, in contrast to the Old Testament, as a source for the community model. For the Collegiants the only source of inspiration for the contemporary community was, therefore, the first apostolic Church organization described in the Gospel. With such sources Smout wanted to demonstrate that the offices in the first apostolic Church were equally distributed and that the *leeraers* (teachers) had the function only of encouraging the participants in this first Christian community. With a quotation from 1 Thessalonians 5.11²³⁶ the author had the intention of underlining again the absolute necessity of freedom of speech, “de groote nuttigheyd van de vryheydt, e seer groote

²³⁰ ANONYMOUS, *De verdwynende on-apostolische vryspreecker*, 1669.

²³¹ SMOUT P., *Het helder Licht der Vryheyt. Behouster der Waerheyd, Vyandinne, van alle Meesterschap, en Dooling. Over het Godlijk Vrij-Propheteren in de Gemeynde Jesu Christi*. By Pieter Terwout, Rotterdam, 1679.

²³² Ibid. See: *Voorreeden* (no p. no.) and pp.73-80.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living. But why dost thou judge thy brother? Or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.”

²³⁵ “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad,”

²³⁶ “Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.”

schadelijkheid van het alleen spreken”²³⁷; this freedom Smout called *Vrij-propheteren*. The freedom of prophecy, as an equal right to speak and interpret the Word of God, was a natural right and largely practiced in the first apostolic Church. This idea of freedom of prophecy was well expressed, for all the Collegiant movement, in a particular passage of the Gospel, 1 Corinthians 14:23, where it was possible to demonstrate that free prophecy does not have to be considered a consequence of extraordinary gifts (*extraordinaire geestelijke gaven*) but as a principle valid for everybody. The same applied to the apostles, who, apart from the gifts of language and the faculties to explain (*Uitlegginge van talen gesondmakinge*), had no other miraculous gifts²³⁹. The community of Corinth became a perfect model for Smout's coeval Church, because, with the reciprocal education and the mutual support, even in a Church Unholy it was possible to follow the example of the first Christians.

With these Gospel passages Smout tried to separate the freedoms of prophecy and of speaking inside the community from the possession of particular gifts, “de geemene Boreders, sonder speciael last, in de Gemeijnte mogen leeren²⁴⁰.” He attempted, that is, to remove the charismatic function from the institution of the priesthood, which was the final step in order to totally secularize the functions of priesthood and authority in the Church.

The concept of nonconformity, as well as the antiauthoritarian approach, represented different tesserae in the mosaic of Collegiants' vision of the religious life. This view of the structure of the congregations and Churches had as a consequence a different approach to the reading and exegesis of the Bible: it can be defined, in multiple aspects, as increasingly secularized. The Holy Scriptures, therefore, came to be considered “less holy” and interpreted as a text written by persons particularly inspired. In 1670 Spinoza, with his philological theory about the authorship of the Pentateuch and his hypothesis about the nature of the Old Testament, which he regarded as a profane narrative of the Jewish people and their relationship with God, created a major scandal within the Dutch religious confessions²⁴¹. This attitude to the Bible, even if not expressed in the outrageous terms of unholiness, was, in the Dutch Republic, already an element in the Reformed dissidents' universe; the Collegiants, as has been shown, insisted on the primacy of the Gospel, in opposition to the Old Testament, because they found it the most useful instrument for interpreting God's

²³⁷SMOUT P., *Het helder Licht der Vryheyt. Behouster der Waerheyd, Vyandinne, van alle Meesterschap, en Dooling. Over het Godlijk Vrij-Propheteren in de Gemeynde Jesu Christi*. By Pieter Terwout, Rotterdam, 1679. p. 10.

²³⁸“But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, to one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all.”

²³⁹*Ibid.* pp. 102-103. “Daer den Apostel seydt, ik danke mijnen God, dat ik vremde talen spreek, als gy alle, maer ik, seyde hy, wil liever in de Gemeynthe vijf woorden spreken met mijn verstand, op dat ik ook andere mach stichten, dan tien duysent woorden in een cremde tael”

²⁴⁰*Ibid.*

²⁴¹It must, however, be considered that most of Spinoza's TTP refutations were written after 1693, i.e. after the TTP Dutch translations. At the very beginning another text related to the TTP was regarded as the shock work of the 17th century, MEIJER L., *Philosophia S. Scripture interpretes*. Some other traces of Spinoza's refutation of the TTP were found by Van der Wall in 1687, “Spanheim devoted some attention to the TTP in a treatise ranking Spinoza together with Vanini, La Peyrère, Herber of Cherbury, Hobbes, Lodewijk Meyer, and Richard Simon, among the anti scripturarii.” See: VAN DER WALL E., *The Tractatus Theologico-Politicus and Dutch Calvinism, 1670-1700*, in *Studia Spinozana*, vol. 11, 1995.

word. The interpretation method for the holy text was, at least for a part of the movement, removed from it mysticism and exceptional senses; the exegesis became closer to an internal and personal procedure with which the believers, with the support of their community, were able to freely assume a Christian ethic.

Prophecy and free prophecy became, indeed, in the second half of the 17th century a central concept in the official theological debate of the Dutch Republic. The criticism of Hobbes's *Leviathan* and Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (both forbidden by the Court of Holland in 1674), which were against prophecies as well as miracles because associated with superstition, created a theoretical background to undermine the major instruments of Church authority. In the same period, in the theological university of Leiden, under the leadership of the Coeccians, the prophetic commentaries of the Bible became an official topic of teaching. The way in which the concept of prophecy was developed at the end of the 17th century, in the principal university in the Dutch Republic, was in direct contrast with the Collegiants' free prophecy. As demonstrated by the modern scholar Van der Wall, the intentions of the orthodox, like Bekker, were to founder on prophecy, the naturalness of Church authority, and preacher domination.

The immense popularity of the *theologia prophetica* in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is, as I have said, largely to be explained by the attack on Christianity launched by Spinoza and other Bible critics²⁴².

With the *theologia prophetica* the orthodox Calvinists intended to prove the holy inspiration of the Scriptures through a rational argumentation: through the occurrence of the prophecies in history. The study of history and philology became, indeed, the rational proof and demonstration of the accomplishment of the divine design. Prophecy was here understood as the consequence of an extraordinary gift that included the capacity to predict the future and, therefore, to read God's project in advance. At the same time, opposite tendencies criticized the prophecies and the miracles, as well as the use of science to support eschatology in a rational way, an argumentation that anticipated one of the most prominent themes of the Enlightenment. An example was the *De oraculis ethnicorum veterum dissertationes duae*²⁴³ (Two dissertation on the oracles of ancient pagans), published in 1683 by the previously mentioned Antonius van Dale. This text made a large fortune and was translated into English and French, was summarized and reworked by Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, who turned it into a manifesto against Rosicrucianism, millenarianism, and popular superstition (the interpretation of astrological phenomena to predict the future).

Rationality and mysticism seemed to be two constants in the debate about prophecy and Bible exegesis; it is interesting to observe how, starting from the same cultural and scientific background, it was possible to obtain two opposite viewpoints in the definition of prophecy. It is also intriguing to notice that rational argumentation did not define a rational behavior tout court and was often used to justify religious belief. It appears, after these considerations, even more important to underline that the

²⁴²Ibid. p. 215.

²⁴³VAN DALE A., *De oraculis ethnicorum veterum dissertationes duae, quarum prior de ipsorum duratione ac defectu, posterior de eorundem auctoribus*, Apud Henricum & Viduam Theodori Boom, Amsterdam, 1683.

rational tendencies in Collegiant practice were related to their practical and material consequences in terms of Church organization. Prophecy understood as collective and free Bible exegesis, even with its strong mystical and spiritual character remained in practice a rational approach to the religious life. As shown, this form of desacralization of the relationship with the divinity represented only a trend inside the Collegiants, which, far from being dominant, shared its destiny with a strong mystical sentiment constituted by visions, ecstasy and, direct contact with God that had little in common with a rational approach.

2.4. 2.4. Conclusions

To conclude this chapter it may be interesting to ask both English and Dutch sources if it is possible to establish a common line along the 17th century, in the development of the concept of nonconformity. Collegiants and English dissenters had extensive contact in the period before and after the Restoration. Galenus Abrahamsz and Adam Boreel's contact with the Hartilb circle, the publication of Pieter Plockhoy's English work by the Levellers' printer, and the frequent communication and contact that, between 1659 and 1663, the Collegiants had with Quakers and other English nonconformists testify to a continuous exchange between the two countries. It can be stated, indeed, that the Collegiants were directly aware of the English dissidents' debate. This exchange, however, according to the sources, never developed into a joint elaboration of the term nonconformity. The Dutch anomaly in the semantic development of the term, as well as the common nature of the Dutch and English debates on the question of freedom of conscience, can represent a possible basis on which to compare these two kinds of nonconformity.

The individuation of this semantic shift means the coexistence of two different nonconformist behaviors, a direct challenge to government and an invitation to renounce any religious authority. The two behaviors had two different consequences. On the English side we have the recognition, and the fortification of a religious identity. On the Dutch side, we have an anticonfessional movement developed from the germs of religious indifference, which represented one of the main sources for open criticism of Church authority and the process of secularization of religious institutions. As stated by Kolakowski, Collegiants' noncharismatic position "attempted somehow to laicize religious organization, and to accept it as a part of the human world in this laicized form. [...] We may assume that, in spite of the undoubted intentions of Abrahamsz, his successes represented victories of secular life over religion²⁴⁴." English and Dutch nonconformity form two different tendencies regarding condemnation of the secular element. As we saw, in the English tradition, especially in Baxter's reading of Paul's sections of the Gospel, nonconformity meant total condemnation of the secular world, which included a criticism of the institutional Churches, understood as part of it. This position implicitly involved the consideration of nonconformity as the only pure and original Christian behavior, in opposition to the mainstream Church, contaminated by worldly secularism. The Collegiants' position, on the contrary, can be described as a statement of the irruption of the "world" into the

²⁴⁴KOLAKOWSKI L., *Dutch Seventeenth-century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion*. p. 290.

ecclesiastical institutions, which, after Constantine, developed a secular character. However, these two kinds of nonconformity were both conscious of social and religious behavior. In the English case it is possible to see a movement of protest that fought for its recognition; in the Dutch case, this concept was used not in response to direct persecution but as an attempt to stem the religious intolerance and disputes that arose from demands to be the only veritable Church.

The second half of the 17th century represents a radical change in the argumentation about nonconformity; in the English as well as in the Dutch case it is possible to see it develop as a claim for freedom of conscience. This argumentation was led with the intention of reducing belief to a rigid and external normativity. This kind of internal freedom that claims to be expressed with external and material acts did not involve a necessary rationalization of the divine experience. It can be stated, therefore, that the process of rationalizing consciences acted as an implicit and unconscious reflection within the Collegiant movement. The dominant and open reflection of this grouping was rooted in their position about the institution of the Church. Indeed, Collegiants' discourse stated the necessity of full freedom and development of the conscience, a process that could not remain in the private sphere but had to have the possibility of being expressed in open discussion. What the Collegiants claimed was a collective space where they could practice with no problems the free reflection of their conscience or their mind. It is possible to individuate the same trend in the English debate, where the nonconformists started to claim open recognition of their position, the free possibility of thinking the Church's normativity. The difference between the two cases was in the claim of a new religious identity, while the Collegiants operated fully in the necessity of deconfessionalization. These two behaviors, as we have tried to show, were the unexpected outcomes of the debate about Nicodemism. The change in indifferentism was seen in the will to express, in accordance with one's conscience, true opinions about Church structure and the sense of religion. It is in this tension between internal conscience and the external act that is manifested the necessity of an open antagonism.

In this European context it is possible to understand the importance of the publication of the *XIX Artikelen* for discussion about the form and organization of Church and congregation in 17th-century Holland. The questioning of the priesthood's authority and the progressive deconstruction of pastoral power inside the religious *Gemeende* had as a consequence a strong impulse in the direction of the individualization and privatization of belief. The declaration of the absence of the Holy Gifts and the absence *tout court* of God in material and everyday life produced in some Collegiant texts a research into a "natural" foundation of the human capacity to understand and interpret the divine Word. A large role in this research was played by the scientific revolution and the humanist current, as well as the presence of religious groups, such as the Socinians, who represented the most important European trend in the direction of rationalization of Bible reading. This behavior and the Collegiants' propensity to be a sponge for all these trends do not reduce their value and their place in the development of 17th century Europe's cultural dynamics; on the contrary, it makes their minoritarian position an open expression of challenging the norm.

Chapter 3.

The communitarian projects and the utopian question in the works of Ploekhoy van Zierikzee (1659-1663)

3.1 Introduction

3.2 The political value of Ploekhoy's works

3.3 Ploekhoy's English period

3.3.1 A question of attribution

3.3.2 The English works

3.4 Ploekhoy's Dutch works

3.5 The communitarian projects and the utopian question

3.1. Introduction

As we saw in the previous chapter, Collegiants' renunciation of holy inspiration in a religious institution or community led to an inevitable secularization of the religious life. It is possible to argue, indeed, that this Collegiant idea opens up the possibility of thinking a religious organization as a form of militantism rather than a simple membership of an authoritarian structure. Abrahamsz and Spruyt's reflections, however, undermined not only the concept of the religious life as understood in 17th-century Amsterdam, but also the usual approach to power relations, which stressed the necessity of an authoritarian structure. This way of thinking was prominent in the medieval attitude to power and remained unchallenged until the early modern age with the advent of natural law theory. The use of classical reasoning – the distinction between the state of nature and human society – turns, especially in Hobbes' theory, into a complete removal of the spiritual and divine elements, supporting power's legitimation of the sovereign.

How did the Collegiants, who held a radical position opposing Church authority, react to political power? Unfortunately Collegiants' comments on social and political systems are few, sporadic reflections on specific events. The subject of discussion was the foundation event of the United Provinces, the resistance against Spain. Contrary to the Calvinist Church, the Collegiants placed more emphasis on the necessity of

pacifism and peacemaking, viewing the aggressive policy of the House of Orange as a danger to the population. This interpretation of Dutch history was partly inherited from Mennonite pacifism, which included refusal to take up arms. We find the same stance in Langedoult's writing on het rampjaar (year of disaster, 1672): he basically criticized the Calvinist decision to arm the citizens so they could fight back against the French army. Their choice to resist invasion by a foreign Catholic power was the cause of the extensive growth and success of the Calvinist party.

Contrary to what one might think, however, not all the Collegiants supported the Dutch Republic: most of them declared themselves loyal subjects of the Orange-Nassau family. It is possible to state, therefore, that in political matters Collegiants never expressed an open and clear opinion, and challenging religious authority did not always correspond to a parallel political position. This noncommittal political stance features has, however, a significant exception in the work of the Collegiant Pieter Cornelizoon Plockhoy, who, stimulated by the exceptional situation of the English Commonwealth's last year, prepared different community projects that, as will be shown, reflected the Collegiants' religious beliefs.

3.2. The political value of Plockhoy's works

Pieter Cornelizoon Plockhoy van Zierikzee is an emblematic figure of the Collegiant movement, and it is necessary to dedicate some space to him in our dissertation because his works encapsulate all the objectives of a Collegiant political and social renovation project. Far from defining the position of Plockhoy as the general approach of the whole Collegiant movement, we try here to understand in what regard Collegiant religious practice articulated in a possible reformation of secular power and how these two situations proceeded in parallel. It is interesting to note that Collegiant political activity or criticism is almost absent in the Dutch context, but emerged insistently outside the United Provinces.

The signature of Pieter Corneliszoon Plockhoy van Zierikzee, is the only trace of him providing a reliable reference to his origins. He always signed his letters, by the surname, with his birthplace, Zierikzee, a little village near Middelburg. Plockhoy's signature appears for the first time in England in 1659²⁴⁵. Then we find it again in 1662 in Holland, in an agreement with the city of Amsterdam for a colonization project in southern Delaware.

Due to the scanty information on Plockhoy's biography, a question arises that is also valid for other Collegiant figures: how can we know that Plockhoy belonged to the Collegiant movement? He shared his native village, Zierikzee, with two of the most prominent founders/promoters of the Collegiant Amsterdam community: Adam Boreel and Galenus Abrahamsz. This Mennonite background, and most of the ideas that Plockhoy expresses in his works, suggest his membership of the Collegiants. Despite these indications, however, we must admit that most of the evidence about Plockhoy's participation in the Collegiant movement comes from negative or critical works about them, aimed in particular against Galenus Abrahamsz. These texts mentioned Plockhoy in bitter polemic against polygamy as, for example, in *Recommandatie van 't Oogh-water voor de Vlaemsche Gemeynthe* (Advice of the

²⁴⁵QUACK H.P.G., *Plockhoy's Sociale Plannen*, Johannes Muller, Amsterdam, 1892. p. 17.

Collyrium for the Falmish Community)²⁴⁶, 1664, and *Lammrenkrijgh: Ander Mennonisten kercken- Twist* (Lamb war or Mennonites Churches Controversy), 1663:

Pieter Plokhoy, D. Galenus Landtsman met de Schrifture konnt beweeren datmen soo veel Vrouwen mach hebben als men kan voedenende dat ten laatsten een ander alles knot im twijffel trekken 't geenmen door natuurlijke reden niet kan bevatten: selfs de reden boven de H. Schrifture stellende: Wie sat dan ontrent dit werk van de soogennamde Alegemyne stichtige het hoer houden!²⁴⁷.

Plokhoy would have said or written that the Holy Scriptures and in particular the Old Testament teach that sleeping with several women cannot be a source of sin. In this context it is evident how polygamy was used as a moral charge against the Collegiant movement. On the other hand, the accusation of polygamy was one of the most commonly made, to stigmatize the whole of the Anabaptist or Mennonite movement. The polemic against polygamy is here to expose the errors that may result from the practice of free prophecy; these, according to the author of *Lammerenkrijgh*, characterize all the “currents” inside “Galenus's Church²⁴⁸.”

Only a year later, in 1664, in another anonymous text, the *Recommandatie van 't Oogh-water voor de Vlaemsche Gemeynthe*, Plokhoy's name is associated with the justification of betrayal and prostitution: “dien Overspelige Pieter Plokhoy, welke in de daet selve van Overspel was bevonden”²⁴⁹. The name of Plokhoy seems bound, from 1663 onwards, to the criticism and condemnation of polygamy, a controversial subject since Plokhoy, in May of 1663, setsail for the New World with his wife²⁵⁰. These allegations do not find any verification in the writings of Plokhoy: it is much more probable that they stemmed from his unorthodox ideas about the sacrament of marriage. According to Looijesteijn²⁵¹, Plokhoy was ejected from the Mennonite congregation of Middelburg, where from 1649 to 1652 he was Minister (without salary), because of his unorthodox views, including in matrimonial matters.

As considered before, these accusations are interesting because of the discussion that they caused in Amsterdam's cultural circles. After the publication of *Lammerenkrijgh*, in 1671, Jan Zoet – a poet and writer well known for his anti-Orangist position and an active member of “Parnassus aan 't Y” (Parnassus on the Y) – challenges all poets in Amsterdam with a question formulated in the same terms as Plokhoy's polygamy dispute: can a married man have several women? The best answer would have earned

²⁴⁶ ANONYMOUS, *Recommandatie van 't Oogh-water voor de Vlaemsche Gemeynthe, ofte Antwoordt op de Lasteringhen*, Johannes van Someren, t' Amsterdam, 1664. p. 8.

In this text is reported Plokhoy's juridical trouble caused by his polygamy. This accusation had the principal aim of discrediting Jacob Otto van Halmael and Michiel Comans, two members of Boreel's *collegium*, because they had contact with Plokhoy.

²⁴⁷ *Lammerenkrijgh*, 1663, no p. no.

²⁴⁸ In the text these currents are: “Halmalisten, Cuyperisten, Comanisten, Boreelisten, Plokhoysten, R. &c.”

²⁴⁹ ANONYMOUS, *Recommandatie van 't Oogh-water voor de Vlaemsche Gemeynthe ofte Antwoordt op de Lasteringhen*

²⁵⁰ Plokhoy left the Netherlands on the *St. Jacob* on 5 May 1663. The ship reached New Amstel on 28 July 1663 with 41 passengers. (Source: New York colonial documents, quoted in: HERDER, Plokhoy and his Settlement at Zwaanendael, 1663, in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, vol. XXIII, no. 3, 1949.)

²⁵¹ LOOIJESTEIJN H., *Between Sin and Salvation: The Seventeenth-Century Dutch Artisan Pieter Plokhoy and his Ethics of Work*, in *International Review of Social History*, Special Issue, vol. 56, 2011. pp. 69-88.

“een lauwerkrans vlechten²⁵².” The poets Zoet and Verloove, with a particular interpretation of the Old Testament, seem to justify polygamy or, at least, the possibility of having extramarital relations. Another poet, Jacob Steendam, on the contrary, concludes his poem by comparing Plockhoy to Münster’s Jan van Leyden.

The names of the poets Jacob Steendam, Karel Verloove, and Jan Zoet are useful clues to reconstructing Plockhoy’s cultural and political relationships at that time. The names of Verloove and Steendam appeared some years before in *Kort en Klaer Ontwerp* (Short and Clear Design) (*KK*), printed in 1662 to advertise a religious community project in New Netherland and containing a contract between Plockhoy and the burgomaster of Amsterdam. Verloove writes a poem as a friend and supporter of Plockhoy’s project, “Aan de Lief-Hebbers van de onderlinge Compagnie ofte Volck-plantingh, in Nieuw-Nederland, op de reegel, Eendragt, maackt magt²⁵³.” The same book included another poem by Jacob Steendam Noch Vaster, who intervenes not only as an accomplished poet of New Netherland but also as a supporter of the enterprise: “Prickel-Vaersen, Aan de Lief-hebbers van de Volck planting en broederschap, op te Rechten, by Zuyd-revier van Nieuw-nederland, door Pieter Cornelisz. Plockhoy van Zuruck-zee”²⁵⁴. Unfortunately we do not know what drove Steendam, some years after writing those lines, to attack Plockhoy so vehemently that in May 1663 he was about to sail for New Netherland.

Even if these polemics do not illuminate the obscure points about Plockhoy’s life, they paint a picture of the cultural scene in Amsterdam and the interest shown in certain arguments started by Collegiants. The different and changing positions of the poets of “Parnassus on the Y” also clarify the variable nature of the supporters and participants of the Collegiant movement, always under pressure to confront themselves with limits to the concept of moral and religious life. Through the polemics, we are able, if only in a negative sense, to understand the scandalous nature of Collegiants’ anticonfessionalism and their questioning of the validity of cults and sacraments.

3.3. *Plockhoy's English period*

Even if we do not know precisely what motivated Plockhoy to move to England, we have more information about his relationships there. Plockhoy did not arrive in his new country without important contacts that would permit him, some years later, to address the English Parliament in order to propose his religious and social reforms.

In 1654²⁵⁵ England was living its first years under the leadership of Cromwell. At this time, Adam Boreel, with Spinoza’s teacher, the rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, went to the Whitehall Conference in London, to discuss the readmission of the Jews to England²⁵⁶. It is possible that Plockhoy came to England in the same year. It is because of this Dutch background that Plockhoy was associated with Samuel Hartlib’s

²⁵²HYLKEMA C.B., *Reformateurs, geschiedkundige Studien over de Godsdienstige Bewegingen uit de Nadagen onzer Gouden Eeuw. eerste Stuk*, H.D. Tjeenk Willink, 6 Zoon, Haarlem, 1900. p. 103.

See also ZOET J., *Uitsteekenste digt-kunstige werkken*, 1675.

²⁵³PLOCKHUY C., *KK*, Otto Barentsz. Smient, 1662, (no p. no.)

²⁵⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵⁵We do not actually know Plockhoy’s exact departure date. This is one of the possible hypotheses.

²⁵⁶See: <http://users.telenet.be/fvde/index.htm?Home1>. Also VAN DER WALL E.G.E., *Adam Boreel and the Mishnah Project*, in *Lias*, no. 16, 1989.

entourage and some radical religious groups²⁵⁷. It is equally important to note that Hartlib was in contact with Boorel and Galenus Abrahamsz regarding an alchemical project²⁵⁸.

His affinity with Hartlib's circle presented an opportunity for Plockhoy to promote his ideas on reform and related community projects, since that same group produced a whole series of utopian-reformist treatises²⁵⁹, including: *Macaria* by Hartlib (1641), *Poor Man's Advocate* by Chamberlen (1649), and *Oceana* by James Harrington (1656). The works of Plockhoy can certainly be included in this cultural ferment of reform but, if it is important to consider his participation in the Hartlib circle, the considerable difference between *Macaria* and *A way propounded* highlights Plockhoy's theoretical independence from the ideal and utopian character of Hartlib's *Macaria*. As demonstrated by Jean Seguy²⁶⁰, Plockhoy's projects are characterized by a deep religious tension that has its roots in the Anabaptist-Collegiant movement²⁶¹. *Macaria* appears as a large-scale undertaking aiming at the complete reformation of the economic and political structures, with explicit references to the *Utopia* of Thomas More. Hartlib's project involves the articulation and management of resources, trade, colonies, all highly centralized in the hands of institutional power, which strongly resembles the English Parliament. J.C. Davis²⁶² defines *Macaria* as:

a call for administrative and legislative reorganisation and redirection, as a means of achieving radical economic expansion. [...] *Macaria* remains an essay in aspiration rather than a comprehensive programme of social and economic reform or a contribution to political and social ideas [...] Moreover, *Macaria* was conceived as a national, state-run economy. After its failure to produce any reaction from Parliament in the 1640s, others in pursuit of the full-employment ideal moved away from the state to smaller and more voluntaristic associations and institutions²⁶³.

Plockhoy's reformist project is definitely more communitarian: rather than propose general views or describe ideal states, he pays attention to practical implications instead of theoretical speculation. It seems that this difference cannot be regarded as

²⁵⁷In England Plockhoy published *A way propounded* via a publishing house that supported the Levellers, i.e. Giles Calvet. See also: SEGUY J., *Utopie coopérative et oecuménisme; Pieter Cornelisz Plockhoy Van Zurik-Zee: 1620-1700*, Mouton La Haye, 1968. pp. 94-95.

²⁵⁸See: LAMBOUR R., *De alchemische wereld van Galenus Abrahamsz (1622-1706)*, in *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*, no. 31, 2005. pp. 93-168.

²⁵⁹“The group around Hartlib certainly saw themselves as engaged in a collaborative effort. In their writings they commented on, advertised, and amplified each other's work. For many of them, the group and its common objectives were more important than individual recognition. [...] The ramifications of these activities are immense, tunding across many of both the well-known and the esoteric currents of scientific, religious, educational and political thought of the early modern protestant world.” DAVIS J.C., *Utopia and the Ideal Society. A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516-1700*, Cambridge University Press, 1981. p. 313.

²⁶⁰SEGUY, *Utopie coop ératve et oecuménisme*. pp. 96-111.

²⁶¹This aspect is also evidenced in the work of Harder: “Three principles of the Collegiants were dominant in his reform. First was the idea that an absolute tolerance for diverse opinions and view must be maintained, rather than insistence upon uniformity in matters of belief and practice. Second was the belief in freedom of thought, interpretation and expression in all aspects of life rather than bondage to creeds or confessions of faith. And third was the substitution of reason for the complacent acceptance of tradition viewpoints or of those in authority.” HARDER L., *Plockhoy from Zurick-Zee; the Study of a Dutch Reformer in Puritan England and Colonial America*, Board of Education and Publication, Newton, Kansas, 1952. p. 19.

²⁶²DAVIS, *Utopia and the Ideal Society*. p. 324.

²⁶³*Ibid.*

marginal, so we can question the idea, shared by many scholars, of Plockhoy as a classic utopian author. To better consider this and other problems it seems necessary to analyze Plockhoy's writings.

3.3.1. 3.3.1. A question of attribution

Isolating the complete corpus of Plockhoy's English works is a relatively simple task. *The way to the peace and settlement, A way propounded*, and *An invitation*, all bear his name, the date, the place of publication, and the publisher. The research becomes more complicated if we look at his Dutch output. In 1662, Plockhoy published an advertising pamphlet in Holland, *KK*, which included an agreement with the Burgermaaster of Amsterdam and two poems by Steendam and Verloove, about whom we spoke earlier.

In 1800 another text, *Kort Verhael* (Brief History) 264, a pamphlet, written 10 October 1662 on the question of colonization, was discovered by Frederik Muller. The project described coincides in many respects with that proposed by Plockhoy, but the anonymity of the author has given rise to many problems of attribution. *Kort Verhael* appeared in 1662, the text is composed of a long, initial descriptive section on the geophysical characteristics of New Netherland, then moves on more specifically to the political project of populating New Amstel (Zuyt River). The book includes seven letters from an anonymous writer (HVZM) and the burgomaaster of Amsterdam.

In 1968, J. Seguy, focusing on the influence that Steendam²⁶⁵ would have had on Plockhoy's decision to move to New Netherland, attributes this text to a member of the poets' group "Parnassus on the Y". Herder and Seguy²⁶⁶ are sure about the complete coincidence of the two projects, recognizing that both publications describe the same project for populating New Netherland. The last attribution, to *Kort Verhael*, is by Wim Klaver²⁶⁷, who demonstrates that this text comes from the hand of Van den Enden²⁶⁸. As noted by these authors, the *Kort Verhael* project appears in several places to be far more radical than that in *KK*. The letters included in *Kort Verhael* show some resistance to the Amsterdam authorities; the demands made in text distance themselves significantly, in fact, from the control of the city.

²⁶⁴ ANONYMOUS, *Kort Verhael*, no publisher, 10 October 1662. Printed only a few months after Plockhoy's *KK*.

²⁶⁵ Steendam is indeed universally recognized as the poet of the New World. He participated in the poets' group "Parnassus on the Y."

²⁶⁶ SEGUY, *Utopie coopérative et oecuménisme.*; HERDER, *Plockhoy and his Settlement at Zwaanendael*, 1663, in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. XXIII, No. 3, 1949.

²⁶⁷ See: BEDJAI M., *Metaphysique, éthique et politique dans l'œuvre de docteur Franciscus van den Enden (1602-1674). Contribution à l'étude des sources des écrits de B. de Spinoza*, in *Studia Spinozana*, vol. 6, 1990. pp. 291-313. BEDJAI M., La découverte de l'édition du *Philedonius* (1657) à la BNF, in *Revue de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, vol. 49, Aut 1993. pp. 32-52.

KLEVER W., *Proto-Spinoza Franciscus van den Enden*, in *Studia Spinozana*, vol. 6, 1990. pp. 281-288.

KLEVER W., *A New Source of Spinozism: Franciscus Van den Enden*, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1991. pp. 613-631.

²⁶⁸ Van den Enden attributed to himself the authorship of this text under interrogation at the Bastille by the lieutenant-general of police, the marquis d'Argenson. It seems that Van den Enden aspired to settle in Normandy, a free commonwealth like what he had described in his political writings. See: ISRAEL IJ., *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670-1752*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008.

3.3.2. 3.3.2. The English works

Plockhoy's English works can be considered the most important of his writings, fundamentally because they provide us with a more systematic view of the author's thought. And, no less important, in these works it seems that the author can approach some political, economic, and religious questions more freely than in his Dutch output.

*The way to the peace and settlement*²⁶⁹ is Plockhoy's first work published in England, in 1659. This is also the formal date from which his English period started. Plockhoy addressed himself to the English authorities to propose his reform plan. The book consists of two letters sent to Oliver Cromwell, in a second, 1660 edition, a third letter, to Richard Cromwell, was added. Plockhoy's reform project is introduced by a description of the threat that the various religious groups may represent for good state organization, especially when they assume too much power, or they achieve the highest authorities²⁷⁰. These are all those confessions and sects that Plockhoy called the "little Antichrists", who posed for the English Parliament a danger even greater than the "great Antichrist", the Roman Catholic Church²⁷¹. In his second letter to Oliver Cromwell, Plockhoy suggests some means to fight against those endangering freedom and peace:

[...] against these little Antichrists, who under the name of giving liberty, would bind the people to their opinions the Magistrates (being taught by experience) should as well counter-work, as against the great, that they may come to the very root, bringing the holy Scripture (which was formerly prohibited to be read) with great Triumph into the generall Assembly or meeting-place, and set it on high, to the end that the sound or report of this, to wit, that Christ alone must rule (by his word) in the hearts of men, among all Nations [...] may be heard, giving liberty to every one, after the reading of the Scripture (contrary to the little Antichrists, who will have it understood only according to their own Forms and Expositions) to set forth his own apprehension, without being bound to any ones opinion: That spirituall matters being applied to spiritual, Antichrist may be stormed with two Armies, viz. The Truth against Error, and the material sword against oppressors, who by their arrogating disposition and exclusion of others, do seek to restrain the liberty of speaking²⁷².

Starting from these observations, Plockhoy proposes a clear separation between the state administration and human forms of religion, that is, all sects and religious confessions. The law, "the sword," says Plockhoy, "may return into its right place, for which God hath ordained it²⁷³": in the hand of the magistrates, the only ones who, not influenced by any sect or confession, can decide what is the good and the liberty of the subjects: "the Magistrates to whom (and not to the Teacher) the sword is given, for the protection of the good²⁷⁴." This separation was necessary, according to Plockhoy, to avoid all the bloodshed and suffering caused by religious intolerance, for this reason: "[it] belongs only to God and Christ to have dominion over Consciences, and to Magistrates to prevent any form of exercising Lordship over the Consciences

²⁶⁹PLOCKHOY C., *The way to the peace and settlement of these nations*, Daniel White, 1659.

²⁷⁰This was maybe a worry stemming from the situation in Holland, where the Calvinists tried to occupy most of the political positions in order to influence the government.

²⁷¹"[...] besides the great Antichrist, there are many little Antichrists, that endeavour to rise up [...]" PLOCKHOY, *The way to the peace and settlement*. p. 7.

²⁷²PLOCKHOY, *The way to the peace and settlement*. pp. 21-22.

²⁷³Ibid. p. 18.

²⁷⁴Ibid. p. 18.

of others²⁷⁵.” The magistrates must be so far from favoring any religious denomination that they can judge religious disputes just like civil affairs as if “all people that do slander you, as to have no Religion²⁷⁶.”

Here Plockhoy solves the problems of intolerance and religious persecution only in a juridical way. The task of the magistrates is, therefore, not to repress religious consciences, but to act as impartial arbiters to ensure the right to express oneself freely by excluding any form of religious leadership. Plockhoy suggests a solution assuming some positions already taken by the Protestant Reformation. He accepted the concept of the individual split into two: the interior and spiritual aspect, free and not subject to any coercion; and the external aspect subjected to the temporal power. It is from this concept that the radical Reformation took the idea of an invisible Church. In this rigorous division there is no more space for the public and political function of the institutional Church. In the long medieval discussion about the separation between secular and spiritual power the 17th-century solution seems to be definitive along the route of secularization, but the problem that prevents all self-constitution of the secular order is God’s emanation to all political sovereignty. This position was particularly evident in Dutch Calvinism: natural law remained a theological concept since it must be integrated with the divine revelation, and the believers, without any mediate representation as is the case in the Roman Church, are in direct contact with the divinity from whom they received the doctrine, according to the model of Mosaic society.

The missed lesson of Hobbes' *Leviathan*²⁷⁷ can be found here, and the unfinished secularization of civic institutions appears clearly in the following opinions from *A way to the peace and settlement*. The aim of Plockhoy is not an exhortation to Parliament to abandon all religions and to devote itself to a secular task; on the contrary, religion has a place at the heart of political institutions, but in its universal and tolerant version, without orthodox orders or strict confessions, and adopted as a simple moral law. This is a process of religious assimilation that remains ambivalent. In his secularized version the religious survive in the institutions, but the transcendental process of formation of the political order remains intact. The magistrates have to accomplish their task “not to follow the traditions of men, but to examine and reform the Laws now in force, and to disannull such as are destructive and without mercy; contrary to the Law of Nature, and the revealed will of God²⁷⁸.” Here is the Law of Nature and the will of God, which are involved as two elements organized into a hierarchy. The magistracy, therefore, has not only the task of judging impartially, but also to “maintain the Christian Religion²⁷⁹.” It is in this situation that the importance of religion resurfaces, not in its “human” form, that is, in historical incarnations in different churches and sects, but in its essential elements: follow the “example Christ (to reconcile all into one)²⁸⁰.”

But what is the “Christian Religion” for Plockhoy? Or, in other words, what are, for

²⁷⁵Ibid. p. 8.

²⁷⁶Ibid. p. 14.

²⁷⁷Hobbes was the first to change the rules of the old medieval controversy about the separation of spiritual and secular power, a dispute that reached its highest stress point in the Reformation. He changed the start of this discussion: the transcendental nature of political authority. Bluntly, he no longer claimed that political power was founded on divine will.

²⁷⁸PLOCKHOY, *The way to the peace and settlement*. p. 4.

²⁷⁹Ibid. p. 14.

²⁸⁰Ibid. p. 7.

him, the true forms of religion? There is one way for Plockhoy to reform the true Christian community and unmask the numerous Antichrists: give to the people “the opportunity to come into the general Assemblies”²⁸¹ and “put the holy Scriptures into the common people hands²⁸².” It is the participation in these community meetings, which alone can struggle with all forms of belief and reliance on those teachers who incite to hate and exclusion. Even if this solution has no space for a secular aim, it is nevertheless an attempt to renovate the concept of religion via democratic and irenic commitment. The praxis of these general meetings is, not too surprisingly, very close to that of the *collegia*, which were held in Holland from 1619. In some passages Plockhoy seems to refer to a general *vergadering* of this type:

Some more understanding men perceiving the various differences of the form and wayes, and the mischief and wicked disturbance, which this strife and variance, in writings of disputations and controversie hath produced, have justly rejected all names and rules, besides the name and rule of Jesu Christ, living among them, as men full of love and forbearance; whose understandings and life, clash not against the holy Scriptures and found reason: although they differ among themselves in apprehensions upon some places of the Scripture, but do continue in brotherly love and unity: by which forbearance they do not only set others in the right way (so farre as they are in the truth) but are also by others brought out of the way, wherein they themselves did erre: a thing which ought to bear sway with all men, according to the words of Christ.²⁸³

This step is extremely important because in it are listed all the pivotal principles of the Collegiant movement: the nonexclusive attitude towards other religions, extreme tolerance, anticlericalism, and absolute free speech. According to Plockhoy the members behave rationally or reasonably in a world of division and religious disputes.

Plockhoy's answer to our previous questions rooted itself in the opportunity to found a Christian community on principles able to guarantee a constant multiplicity of standpoints. Finding the reason in the Holy Scriptures is possible only through continuous questioning. Following the rule of *sola scriptura* means that a religious class which excludes believers from free access to the knowledge in the Bible is no longer legitimate²⁸⁴. This freedom has to be guaranteed by the magistracy. The freedom and tolerance in the general assemblies will serve as an example to all religious groups, so that they can understand the sterility of sectarian disputes. Plockhoy's purpose is to make the Bible an instrument of ethical edification²⁸⁵ and not of domination, so the general assemblies therefore

²⁸¹Ibid. p. 18.

²⁸²Ibid. p. 21.

²⁸³Ibid. pp. 10-11.

²⁸⁴“[...] one general Christian assembling or meeting-place, in such a form, that all people may see one another rund-about by the help of seats, rising by steps, having before them convenient leaning-places to read and write upon; also one desk aloft on one side or end, to hear the holy Scriptures read at a set time, giving freedome after that reading, to alla people, orderly to confer together, concerning the Doctrine and Instruction of their Lord and Master Christ.” PLOCKHOY, *The way to the peace and settlement*. pp. 12-13.

²⁸⁵“That so every one being at liberty and unhindered, may bring forth that which is most conducing to the Common welfare, according to the words of Paul in I Corinthians 14.16. All of them sitting still, so long after the reading of the Scripture (as being swift to hear and slow to speak) till anyone think in sit (in his judicious and humble mind) to propose somewhat for mutuall edification; [...] contrary to the custome of the common Teachers, who only, or solely speaking, do lengthen out their diseiurse, to the wearnesse of their Auditory.” PLOCKHOY, *A way propounded*. pp. 22-23.

will be a Council and Synod, standing always open, to all rational people, without imposing any mans conclusions [...] well knowing, that if they gave them the liberty of speaking, they would not be long worshipped as Idols, or sacrificed to, as Bell at Babell²⁸⁶.

To achieve such a level of awareness and participation in the religious process, it is essential for Plockhoy to separate the spheres of religion and politics²⁸⁷, which “were ordained for several ends; the one to defend the good men against the evil, and the other to make the evil good²⁸⁸.” The necessity of this strict division is once again used to deprive the “Teachers” of all secular power. The religious can no longer use strength and power, but only the weapon of Christ and the first Christians: the truth²⁸⁹.

If, therefore, the transcendental matrix of political power continues to be recognized (see pp. 18 and 24) – and for this reason it has the obligation to defend the true Christian religion – the sects, the different Churches and confessions (those Plockhoy calls the “little Antichrists”) are bound to the domain of pure consciousness without any opportunity to act within the secular power. This position leads to a splitting or decoupling of religious meaning. On the one hand, reserving to religion only the sphere of conscience denies to it any divine right, and therefore transcendental right, to intervene normatively in humanity’s actions. On the other hand, religion resumes its transcendental space in secular institutions. We may question if this double movement is a more powerful factor in secularization than any immanent thrust. Plockhoy's effort to maintain the transcendental dimension seems possible only through the repossession of the secularized movement.

The texts of Plockhoy, due to their unsystematic nature, do not give us the opportunity to probe more deeply into this question: he limits himself to stressing magistracy’s “ordinance of God”²⁹⁰ but seems to consider the institutional form of religion (Church or sects) as only a human construction. This position is unusual but seems to reflect some different tendencies of Plockhoy's contemporary religious movements: on one side we find the rational demands that express themselves in the winding Cartesianism in the Dutch Republic, or the secularized aspects of all religious institutions, promulgated for example by the Collegiant movement²⁹¹. On the other side the need for religion, expressed through mysticism as the only pure way to reach the divine, or through the practice of the original Christian community, a space in which to rediscover a collective religious identity without charismatic aims. These manifold tendencies, far from opposing each other, were influences that entwined and sometimes drew lifeblood from one another. The translation of this debate to the political-governmental field reveals exactly the same tension, split between the need for a creed, and for a well-ordered government independent from all religious connections.

Plockhoy’s suggestion²⁹² seems to seek a solution not only for the English

²⁸⁶PLOCKHOY, *The way to the peace and settlement*. p. 23.

²⁸⁷“For Magistrates (if they would remain without usurping the Office of Christ) may not make Laws in matters of Religion, but against evill deeds, to protect the good”. PLOCKHOY, *The way to the peace and settlement*. p. 24.

²⁸⁸PLOCKHOY, *The way to the peace and settlement*. p. 25.

²⁸⁹Ibid. pp. 25-26.

²⁹⁰Ibid. p. 24.

²⁹¹ Galenus Abrahamsz’s *XIX Artikelen* represents the synthesis of these tendencies.

²⁹²An “expedient,” as PLOCKHOY calls it, in *The way to the peace and settlement*, p. 16.

Parliament but also for the United Provinces, where an increasing number of exponents of Calvinism were trying to fill governmental positions to influence or direct Dutch policy. For Plockhoy, the stakes were

to preserve England from that great dishonour which hath befallen other Nations, by setting up instead of the form, and doctrine of Christ, the forms and factions of men [...] not that I am come unto *England* to be your instructor, but to bring to your Honnours remembrance those very things, which have been upon your own hearts, in order to the establishing of such a generall liberty, as hath been for many years of late pretended unto²⁹³.

The letters that Plockhoy wrote to Cromwell and the English Parliament included the assumption underpinning his later community project, which finds its most complete expression in the second of Plockhoy's English books, *A way propounded to make the poor in these and other Nations happy*²⁹⁴. This book also contains an additional text, *An invitation to the aforementioned Society or little Common-wealth*.

Plockhoy introduces his community model, once again beginning from observation and criticism of reality. The intention is very clear, starting from the header of this book:

By bringing together a fit suitable and well qualified people unto one Houshold-government, or little-Common-wealth, Wherein every one may keep his propriety, and be employed in some work or other, as he shall be fit, without being oppressed. Being the way not to rid those and other Nations from idle, evil and disorder persons, but also from all such that have sought and found out many inventions to live upon the labour of others.

This declaration of intent is supported by a biblical quotation:

Psalms 41:1 Blessed is he that considereth the poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord shall preserve him, and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the Earth²⁹⁵.

The contents of the book live up to the expectations of the header. Plockhoy considers scandalous the existence of slavery and work-related oppression²⁹⁶. Among all human activities, thought the most useless and detrimental for the community are those of merchants that “oppress their workmen, with heavy labour, and small wages”²⁹⁷ and of “Clergy-man who perswade people [...] to believe that they take care of their soules (as if they could love the soul which they cannot see, and have no compassion on the body which they see)”²⁹⁸. These are the greatest dangers to avoid in a community that claims to be based on a model of care for its members and that wants to create a true Commonwealth. The members of the community will therefore have everything they need without being attracted by the opulence and surplus of the

²⁹³Ibid. pp. 1-5.

²⁹⁴The complete title of this book is: *A way propounded to make the poor in these and other Nations happy. By bringing together fit suitable and well qualified people unto one Houshold-government, or little-Common-Wealth, Wherein every one may keep his propriety, and be employed in some work or other, as he shall be fit, withouth being oppressed.* Printed for G.C., London, 1659.

²⁹⁵Ibid. , header.

²⁹⁶“He (Plockhoy) believed that the power to defend the good against the evil was ordained of God according to St. Paul's admonition (Romans 13).” HERDER, *Plockhoy from Zurick-Zee*. pp. 26-27.

²⁹⁷PLOCKHOY. *A way propounded*. p. 12.

²⁹⁸ Ibid. p. 4.

new capitalist society²⁹⁹. The sick, the weak, the poor, as well as widows and orphans, will not be left alone, but financially supported by the entire society. Therefore, people will appreciate the advantages of living in a common house where everyone will do his job by getting rid of unnecessary things³⁰⁰. All are invited to participate in the welfare and administration of the community, working six hours a day and agreeing, if governing the community, it should be for no more than a year³⁰¹. The text illuminates powerfully the necessity of leaving a world forged with rules and conventions, existing with the sole purpose of limiting human freedom³⁰².

The most surprising part of the text is certainly that dedicated to the position of women and children within the community. The women in Plockhoy's settlement enjoy significant freedom: they are above all an active part of the community. Around 1600 great damage was done to society, according to Plockhoy, by the education of young women, who were trained to have no other responsibility than that of the house, so were unable to be independent once widowed. This was cause of great poverty and suffering for women and their children. In Plockhoy's community only a proportion of the women will be devoted to domestic matters and administration of the common house³⁰³; the others will be encouraged to learn manual or other useful work that they can perform with the men³⁰⁴. Moreover, the women will not be forced to marry members of the community, a point that Plockhoy finds particularly important, as significant social suffering stems from this practice of arranged marriages, forcing two people into matrimony "contrary to their natures," only for financial reasons or expediency³⁰⁵.

Plockhoy gives substantial importance in his project to the education of children³⁰⁶. It is in fact obligatory for children to attend school, for at least half the day, where they learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, in conjunction with other sciences. They will not be exposed to "humane forms of Religion", but they will be taught to read and interpret the scriptures so that they will "not depend upon mens wordes, but upon the power (or wonderfull workes) of God³⁰⁷." The education in such schools will be so advantageous that Plockhoy believes that it can be open to the children of the rich, who, understanding the importance and benefits of such teaching, will choose the same for future generations. The aim of this type of education seems undoubtedly to avoid any sectarian indoctrination, but also to provide to all young people in the society schooling that can make them reasonable, able to manage the common good, and to understand the importance of sharing and mutual support³⁰⁸. Necessary requirements for a rational administration include the removal of all religious rituals and sectarian disputes, causes of divisions. Also in *A way propounded*, as in *The way to the peace and settlement*, a large proportion is dedicated to the religious question. Once more

²⁹⁹Ibid. p. 5.

³⁰⁰Ibid. pp. 8-9.

³⁰¹Ibid. p. 9.

³⁰²Ibid. p. 11.

³⁰³It can be noted that, despite his open-mindedness, Plockhoy allocates the housework only to the women, without mentioning the possibility of an equal distribution of such work with the men.

³⁰⁴PLOCKHOY, *A way propounded*. p. 10.

³⁰⁵Ibid. p. 15.

³⁰⁶In 1641-42 Comenius, at the invitation of Hartlib, visited England. His pedagogic reform and plan were the subjects of a substantial exchange of letters between the two men.

³⁰⁷*A way propounded*. p. 16.

³⁰⁸Ibid. p. 15 and *KK* (no p. no.).

Plockhoy demonstrates a profound Collegiant influence, quoting³⁰⁹ the Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, a biblical justification for freedom to comment on the scriptures after a collective reading. The description of the general assemblies remains a key issue³¹⁰, which presents a vision of an extremely anticonfessional and antidogmatic religious community. In the Plockhoy project, similarly to *The way to the peace and settlement*, a general meeting held every Saturday will be the only form of official religion. Other “human”³¹¹ forms of religion, which must be practices in private and never imposed on others, will not be banned for this reason, however. Similarly, no member of the community will be forcibly baptized. The reading and discussion of scripture without the guidance of a preacher is the prerequisite for the ethical development of the whole community: a collective exegesis renewed weekly calls the people in the community to feel like active members and enjoy a rational consciousness free from any form of superstition³¹².

Throughout the description of this community project is perceived an effort of emancipation from every dynamic of exclusion or exclusivity, one of the greatest risks that the birth of a new community carries with it. For this reason Plockhoy devotes ample space to the need for commercial business with the outside world, to the possibility of leaving the community at any time with the financial support of the collective. This continued striving for openness is the inherent aim of Plockhoy's community: only in this way is it able to demonstrate its attractiveness and become the engine of change for the whole society.

A way propounded is accompanied by another text, *An invitation to the aforementioned Society or little Common-wealth*. Jean Seguy discovered that this was based on a translation of the *Invitatio fraternitatis Christi*³¹³ by Johann Andreae. It is not surprising that Plockhoy chose this text in the context of his communitarian project, the participation in Hartlib's circle was, indeed, an important factor in the understanding of Plockhoy's English works. He was deeply influenced by the literary and pedagogic reform activities of this group, for example the project to translate all Andreae's texts. The call for religious reform and acceptance of science and investigation as welcome in Christian communities are some points shared with Hartlib's circle. Above all, utopian-reformist text like Andreae's *Republicae Christianopolitanae*³¹⁴ was certainly one of the most influential for Plockhoy. The appeal for abolition of a strict hierarchy and the importance of sharing learning inside

³⁰⁹1 Corinthians 14.26. The quotation is in both *The way to the peace and settlement*, p. 22, and in *A way propounded*, p. 17.

³¹⁰This quotation from the Bible was very frequent in Collegiant texts. It was used to justify the practice of free prophecy, which had as consequences strong antidogmatism and anticlericalism. This can also be seen as a further sign of Plockhoy's affinity with the Collegiant movement. As briefly described by the author, free prophecy consisted of the freedom to comment on the Bible in the assemblies in an open and participative way; these remarks were always made without pastors or preachers. At the time when Plockhoy wrote his *KK* the Collegiant community was engaged in a debate, not without polemics, on the way to understand the participative comments on the Bible (the *Bredenburgse twisten*). The description of Plockhoy's general meeting is not detailed enough to derive information on this debate, nor to grasp the position of the author concerning it.

³¹¹As Plockhoy calls the Church and religious confessions throughout his text.

³¹²PLOCKHOY, *A way propounded*. p. 17.

• ³¹³ANDREAE J. V., *Invitatio Fraternitatis Christi Ad sacri Amoris Candidatos*, Zetzner und Scher, Straßburg 1617.

³¹⁴ANDREAE J. V., *Republicae Christianopolitanae Descriptio*, Zetzner, Straßburg 1619.

the community are clearly significant components of Plockhoy's project. The utility of such a program is reiterated at the end of *An invitation*:

[...] we Judge it to be, not onely a true opposition to all evill, but also a meanes to rid the world, of all unprofitable, and hurtfull handy Crafts, being the cause of sin and slavery³¹⁵.

3.4. *Plockhoy's Dutch works*

Plockhoy certainly returned to the Netherlands before 1661. In 1660 the Cromwellian era came to an end and in Britain the monarchy was restored. With the persecution of enemies of the Crown, Plockhoy, together with other radicals, was no longer safe. Even Boreel returned to Holland in 1660, his name appearing in a series of polemical writings against the Quakers, the result of a dispute on inner light spiritualism that involved the whole Collegiant community and became more acute in the years 1660-61³¹⁶.

In June 1662 they was published in Amsterdam by Otto Barentsz Smient the *KK*. This was essentially a project agreement with the administration of Amsterdam to found a community in the region of Zwaanendael or HoreKill on the Zuid River (New Amstel). As far as we learn via a letter from Hartlib, Plockhoy, already during his stay in England, wanted to use the colonies in the New World as a proving ground for his community. The precipitant events of the time and the restoration of the British monarchy would have stopped any plans, both in England and in the New World. Plockhoy therefore proposed including a toned-down version of *A way propounded* in his Dutch publication, *KK*. In the *KK* edition, however, all communitarian tone and criticism of mercantilism disappeared. The pursuit of profit at any cost was replaced with an opportunity for private ownership, with the possibility of acquiring personal goods. The common house was replaced with the possibility of a private house separate from the rest of the community. For those who did not wish to emigrate to Delaware there was an opportunity to invest financially in the enterprise and take profit from the community³¹⁷. The introduction to *A way propounded*, where Plockhoy described the poverty and other troubles of 17th-century society is replaced in *KK* with an invitation to the city of Amsterdam to take care and nurture the success of the settlement on the Zuid River. The rest of the prospectus is a detailed description of the administration of the community, the economic resources, and the possible external investment and trade with the motherland. The laws that govern the acceptance or exclusion from this society were defined with more precision. In contrast to the English plan, *KK* pays special attention to the punishment of deviant behavior as well as the application of economic sanctions for those who decide to leave the community before paying their debt to the city of Amsterdam.

Despite these changes, however, the most important points listed in *A way propounded* are maintained. The position of women and the education of children indeed remain untouched. The community government retains its status of direct democracy; all in the community have the right and duty to administrate the society but to vacate positions of power after one year. In religious matters Plockhoy's position

³¹⁵PLOCKHOY C., *An invitation to the aforementioned Society or little Common-wealth*, p. 34.

³¹⁶see Ch. 5 of this Dissertation.

³¹⁷*KK*, no p. no..

remains the same: the general assemblies constitute the only recognized and official form of religion, with other religious practices remaining in private space.

To fully understand Plockhoy's project it is necessary to remember that the publication of *KK* was part of a broader effort to colonize New Netherland by both the West India Company and the city of Amsterdam, a process designed to provide an answer to difficulties in the exploitation and administration of the colonies. The promulgation of many agreements, such as that of Freedoms and Exemptions (1628), which aimed to encourage the agricultural development of the colonies after the Twelve Years' Truce between the Republic and Spain, did not achieve the expected results. From 1649 there appeared in Holland several texts critical of the policies of the Dutch West and East India Companies, which concentrated only on the exploitation of raw materials, a policy that was a failure, especially in New Netherland³¹⁸. Dutch delay in introducing population and the lack of investment in colonial agriculture was indeed one of the causes of the English success and the disappearance of the Dutch settlements in North America.

On the institutional side, therefore, a loan to support and finance the project is understandable, while there were justifiable reasons that drove Plockhoy to try to please Amsterdam authorities and to show the validity of the project with the minute description of all rules applicable to the community³¹⁹. The author's purpose was primarily to demonstrate the capacity of the community to repay the debt contracted with the city of Amsterdam and then to obtain the necessary protection of the local authorities to foster growth. *KK* has to be included in this general colonization effort but, although the project broadly shared Amsterdam's institutional standpoint, we have to recognize its attempt at autonomy.

Arousing attention in the text, even if merely mentioned, a theme totally absent in the English counterpart is that of slavery. Plockhoy rejects slavery peremptorily, so far as to ban the use of the words *Knecht or Dienst-maeght* (servant, slave) within the community.

Den naem van Knecht of Dienst-maeght heeft onder ons (maer elch hoeft voor hoeft zijn gedeelte van 't profijt verwacht) geen plaetse³²⁰.

Independently of the type of work they do, therefore, each member of the community is considered equal to another. Here Plockhoy seems to refer only to the members of the society, without mentioning the external situation in New Netherland. The only reference to Native Americans is negative: he calls them the "Wilden³²¹". We can see that if slavery is mentioned in the *KK*, it is at the same time avoided as a very embarrassing problem. The only slavery that is recognized is that of the Dutch citizens, whose working conditions are regarded as scandalous treatment contrary to the

³¹⁸As, for example:

MELYN C., *Breeden-Raedt aende Vereenichde Nederlansche Provintien* [...], Francoys van Duynen [false impressum], Antwerp, 1649;
or VANDER DONCK A., *Vertoogh van Nieu-Neder-land, weghens de Gheleghentheydt, Vruchtbaerheydt, en Soberen Staet desselfs*, Michiel Stael,'s Graven-Hage, 1650.

³¹⁹From reading *KK*, it is possible to share the opinion of many scholars who assert that Plockhoy was not the direct author of this text. It is not unlikely that the agreement was drawn up by a lawyer who supported the project.

³²⁰*KK*, no p. no.

³²¹*Ibid.*, "Savages".

Republicans' principles of equality and free labor. The "others," whose inclusion in the Republican sphere is not recognized, are represented only as a menace³²².

At several points the concern of the project was only to harmonize the antiviolenent pacifism of the Mennonites with defense against possible attack. This defense was essentially entrusted to the Dutch authorities, so community members could exempt themselves from carrying weapons by paying a fee:

Iemand van Conscientie-wege geen Oorlooghs-wapenen durvende gebruptken sal on van Tocht en Macht vry te zijn) een sekere Tar of Contributie aen vat deel van de Societeyt (welche haer veschermen) jaerlijcr voor die vrijheyd (in diense sulcr begeeren) moeten betalen/ wiens werck het eygentlijk is (de wijlesy den defenciven oorloogh voor goet houden) niet alleen afficeren en ordere in die gelegentheyd te stellen maer oock (benefens dagelijckse exercitie of Wapenoeffeninge) haer van amonitie en alles wat daer toe van nooded is te voortsien.³²³

If, therefore, Plockhoy's community represented a positive example in a quite violent time, the project does not contain any direct reference to, or criticism of, the unscrupulous colonial policy of the Dutch West India Company. This attitude is partly justified by the institutional context in which *KK* was written, and partly from the history of the settlement in the Zuid River, the colony of Zwaanendael (Valley of the Swans), which in 1628, during its initial period, was destroyed by hostile Indians³²⁴. The only information from the short lifetime of the Delaware community seemed to confirm earlier difficulties in cohabiting with the natives. A letter to the city of Amsterdam found in New York colonial documents states that the natives of Horekill "had declared they never sold the Dutch any land to inhabit³²⁵." In this light it was also understandable to try to arrange some protection from outside; the attempt failed, however, since the greatest danger would come not from the natives but from the British, who, only a year after Plockhoy's settlement, occupied all the territories belonging to the Dutch West India Company.

3.5. Plockhoy's community projects and the utopian question

Most of the interest aroused by Plockhoy's works is focused on his communitarian vision. Bernstein³²⁶ acclaimed him as the father of the cooperative movement. Quack nominates him as one of the main sources to have inspired the work of John Bellers: *Proposal for raising a colledge of Industry of all usefull Trades and Husbandry of 1696*³²⁷. Lindeboom, following this interpretation, understood Plockhoy's projects as "Geseaeulariseerd, humanistisch-rationalitsch socialisme³²⁸." Mennonite authors,

³²²Radically different is the KVVNN, where the author expresses an explicit criticism against colonial politics and the deportation of slavers, in the form of a real accusation against the Dutch West India Company.

³²³*KK*, no p. no.

³²⁴See: <http://users.telenet.be/fvde/index.htm?Home1>.

³²⁵See: HERDER, Plockhoy and his Settlement at Zwaanendael, 1663, in: *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, vol. XXIII, no. 3, 1949. pp. 196-197.

³²⁶See: BERNSTEIN E., *Sozialismus und Demokratie in der grossen englischen Revolution*, Verlag J.H.W. Dietz Nachf. GmbH, Hannover, 1922.

³²⁷See: QUACK H.P.G., *De Socialisten. Personen en stelsel*, vol. 4, Baarn: Het Wereldvenster, Amsterdam, 1977. p. 399. See also HERDER., *Plockhoy from Zurick-Zee*. p.72.

³²⁸LINDEBOOM J., *Stiefkinderen van het Christendom*, 'S-Gravenhage Martinus Nijhoff, 1929. pp. 378-381.

such as Herder³²⁹, put the emphasis on the democratic side and the intent of social reformation in Plockhoy's theses. Almost all the aforementioned authors³³⁰ share the conviction that Plockhoy's projects can be defined as utopian forms of a nonmillenarian Utopia³³¹. Is it possible to find a rift in this monolithic interpretation? Can we identify the whole of Plockhoy's corpus with a utopian project and what exactly does More's *Utopia* mean for Plockhoy?

It was chiefly Seguy who constructed and supported this interpretation of Plockhoy as a utopian dreamer. In 1968 Seguy wrote the last and most complete monograph about the role and personality of Plockhoy. The author emphasizes the influence that Anabaptist and English dissenters had on Plockhoy's work; on the other hand he describes Plockhoy as a naive utopian-reformist. "Plockhoy est un utopiste généreux, aux sentiments humains, capable de tous les sacrifices."³³² Is it legitimate to extend this vision to all Plockhoy's work?

Direct examination of the texts evokes a different and more complex reality. First of all, Plockhoy never makes explicit and direct reference to utopian projects, neither does he refer to More's *Utopia*³³³ (as did other English authors in Hartlib's circle)³³⁴. The importance of defining the utopian question is that it is essentially political: how does Plockhoy position himself regarding the society of his time, and under what terms did he intend to criticize it or break with it? As noted by Rizzo³³⁵, the works of Plockhoy are directly influenced by English reformism but, more than reflecting an image of technocratic perfection, they were founded on an ideal of social justice and abatement of poverty. The theme of ecumenism is the fundamental component in Plockhoy's social projects that reflects the internal debate of the Cambridge Platonists and the work of the spiritual reformers.

We can detect this kind of approach to the utopian question as a characteristic of the whole 17th century. As suggested by Keith Thomas³³⁶, at this time the utopian question was perceived without practical implications. Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Hartlib's

³²⁹"Behind the utopian is the belief that society is capable of improvement and can be reformed in accordance with a rational ideal. A social reformer is an individual who possesses a conception of social improvement embodied in definite agencies of social change and who attempts to subject those agencies to immediate practical utility." HERDER, *Plockhoy from Zurick-Zee*. pp. 4-5.

³³⁰Herder seems the only one to reject this interpretation: cf. *ibid.* pp. 100-101.

³³¹See: BOUWE P., Plockhoy's *A Way Propounded: Mennonite Utopia or Millennium?*, in BAKER-SMITH D., BARFOOT C.C. (ed.), *Between Dream and Nature: Essays on Utopia and Dystopia*, Rodopi, Amsterdam, 1987.

³³²SEGUY J., *Utopie coopérative et oecuménisme* p.36

³³³For the religious and political implication of More's *Utopia* see: SKINNER Q., *Sir Thomas More's Utopia and the Language of Renaissance Humanism*, Cambridge University Press, 2002. pp. 152-156.

³³⁴As, for example, in Hartlib's *Macaria*: "The choice of the name 'Macaria' was a gesture of identification with an early modern utopian tradition and the use of the term by such authors as Thomas More in his *Utopia*, and Kaspar Atublin in his *De Eudaemoniensi republica*. But 'Macaria' was also a kind of code word used by Hartlib and his circle in reference to their dreams of social and intellectual reform, and it persistently cropped up in Hartlib's correspondence over a period of twenty years. Like many other works in the utopian literary genre, *Macaria* took the form of a dialogue, this time between a traveller and a scholar." DAVIS, *Utopia and the Ideal Society*. pp. 319-320.

³³⁵HARTLIB S. (RIZZO G., ed., trans.), *Macaria, la città dei filosofi. Anatomia di un regno*, Mimesis, Milano, 2008. p. 91.

³³⁶KEITH T., The Utopian Impulse in Seventeenth-century England, in *Between Dream and Nature*. pp. 20-46.

Macaria, and Andreae's *Christianopolis* were all attempts at reformation based on scientific, economic, or religious elements. Working out an ideal scheme during the Commonwealth meant, in the Hartlib era, trying to resolve religious dissidence and economic inequality, or proposing educational reform. Radicalizing this attitude, Plockhoy's projects limit themselves to a reformist tension, avoiding calling into question the structure of society. If the critics of society were never direct, this emerged from the practice of the communitarian project.

To better understand these nuances it could be useful to discern – like Frederic Jameson in his *Archeology of the Future* – between utopian program and utopian impulse:

We would therefore do better to posit two distinct lines of descendency from More's inaugural text: the one intent on the realization of the Utopian program, the other an obscure yet omnipresent Utopian impulse finding its way to the surface in a variety of covert expressions and practices. The first of these lines will be systemic, and will include revolutionary political practice, when it aims at founding a whole new society, alongside written exercises in the literary genre. Systemic will also be those self-conscious Utopian secessions from the social order which are the so-called intentional communities; but also the attempts to project new spatial totalities, in the aesthetic of the city itself. The other line of descent is more obscure and more various, as befits a protean investment in a host of suspicious and equivocal matters: liberal reforms and commercial pipedreams, the deceptive yet tempting swindles of the here and now, where Utopia serves as the mere lure and bait for ideology. [...] Still, perhaps a few of the more obvious forms can be identified: political and social theory, for example, even when – especially when – it aims at realism and at the eschewal of everything Utopian; piecemeal social democratic and “liberal” reforms as well³³⁷.

Placing Plockhoy's little-Commonwealth in the second line can help us understand how a utopian deal can activate quivers of liberation and demand for reform. In our example we see how the critical function of Utopia is as a catalyzing agent for instances of reform. Even if essentially fantastic and fictional, Utopia reveals a discontent that can activate social change.

This cultural ferment of reform is the background to Plockhoy's works, but an essential difference exists between these two utopian approaches. Rather than propose a utopian plan reflecting an image of technocratic perfection, a static project that describes and systematizes the life of its citizens in all its aspects, Plockhoy keeps open some questions that allow him to avoid any general or structural definition of society. The communitarian life also avoids strict regulation and control, especially regarding the definition of authority and concerning punishment. We can affirm that this kind of communitarian project was trying to soften the authoritarian nature of the Commonwealth and in religious matters to counter intolerance and state oppression.

This reforming will, closely connected with reality, excludes Plockhoy's works from the long tradition of utopian projects that describe a political-social structure situated elsewhere, perhaps in another time and/or space³³⁸. Here Plockhoy seems to be closer to the Digger and Quaker demands for reform, based on a small model of the Commonwealth. The possibility of founding a virtuous example of community would be sufficient to encourage a change in society.

We can explain in these terms Plockhoy's refusal to use the concept of Utopia. The

³³⁷JAMESON F., *Archeologies of the Future*, Verso, London, New York, 2005. p. 3.

³³⁸This spatial-temporal difference is essential in Foucault's definition of *utopies* and *hétérotopies*. See: FOUCAULT M., *Le corps utopique suivi de Les hétérotopies*, Nouvelles Editions Lignes, Fécamp, 2009.

only occurrence of this word, in all of Plockhoy's works, is in his last book published in Holland, *KK*. And it is employed here in a negative sense: a verse from the poet Jacob Steendam's "Noch Vaster" – "this is not a *Utopia*", "T geen *Utopia*³³⁹," closed the invitation to establish a community in New Netherlands. This is not a Utopia, says the poet, but a community founded on the solid rules of freedom, where everybody is interested in the common welfare³⁴⁰. Here Plockhoy rejects the idea of Utopia as both unreal and impossible. It is the static representation of perfection that he criticized as an unsuccessful approach.

Even if the works of Plockhoy are obviously not true political treatises, and they do not purport to be, we can see in his projects a certain unease regarding the contemporary societal system. The indigence, the slavery, the rampant individualism concerned only with personal interest, together with the doctrinaire disputations, the religious intolerance, and the aversion to freedom of speech, created, altogether, the discomfort that we can detect in Plockhoy's publications. His solution to the problems created by the capitalist primitive accumulation in the 17th century is really interesting because it avoids any form of separatism or exclusivity.

The communitarian life remains the center of Plockhoy's reform project, so we can rightly categorize his works in that group of discordant voices that, in England as well as in Netherlands, caution of the lack of freedom and participation in political choices. They warn that the riches that flow through the Netherlands' banks and the exploitation of the colonies have not changed the widespread poverty in England nor in the Netherlands. It is for this reason that one of the most ethical aims of Plockhoy was to create a Commonwealth system, which promoted parity between workers but was also able to nurture the citizen in difficulty. From this viewpoint there is a meaningful passage in *A way propounded*, where is expressed clearly the importance to take away from rich people the function of charity, used as an instrument to propagate their power.

The women in our Society having lost their Husbands, they and their children are cared for, whereas else dwelling by themselves, they are aften times forced (together with their little ones) to pass their lives in poverty and grief, sometimes receiving relief of the rich with reproch full languages, to the increase of this grief, some being in the prime of their years are disregarded, but in our Society children (where they few or many) are no hinderance³⁴¹.

If the nurturing component is useful only when active through collective solidarity, the theme of work remains the key factor in the social system. The question of work ethic represents an important element in Plockhoy's text, as noted by Looijesteijn³⁴², but it seems impossible to describe, as Looijesteijn does, the employment issue as merely a factor in religious salvation³⁴³, especially if it is understood from a Calvinist

³³⁹ *KK*, no p. no.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ PLOCKHOY, *A way propounded*. p. 15.

³⁴² LOOIJESTEIJN, *Between Sin and Salvation*. pp. 69–88.

³⁴³ "Whether the Republic possessed a "Calvinist economy" in the sense proposed by Max Weber may be doubted not so much because it exhibited none of the characteristics whose origins Weber sought to uncover, but because those characteristics did not follow uniquely from a belief in Reformed theology. What cannot be doubted is the important impress left by Calvinism on the structure of the state, the cultural claims of urban elites, the productive use of real property, and the dedication to

perspective. In *KK* and in *A way propounded* seems not to bear a religious meaning, i.e. work is not directly connected with salvation. Plockhoy seems more interested in finding a solution to people's indigence. It is not from lack of work that poverty arises; the cause has to be researched, rather, in the existence of a social class that works very little and has profit as its sole purpose. Indigence is the result of the existence of this class of idle citizens, who decide to live "upon the labour of others³⁴⁴," clearly identified with merchants. In Plockhoy's division between useless and useful work, that of merchants belongs to the first category: they are devoted to useless activity because their only aim is mere profit. In Plockhoy's ethic the surplus will be the only sin that has to be avoided: the overproduction has to be redistributed and the remainder burnt:

[...] if the making and selling of things unnecessary were sin, then should quite sorborn, then must all unnecessary things (though a shop were worth 1000.l.) be burnt or destroyed, and all the Children be presently taken from those trades, that depend upon pride and vanity³⁴⁵.

The way to salvation does not seem to be based in the propensity to work and business, neither does ethical behavior seem to depend on a life dedicated at labor. Work is exalted in Plockhoy's thinking only when it is useful for the community, and following this logic all work has to be regarded as equal. Teachers, experts in Hebrew and Greek, manual laborers, craftsmen and sailors, as well as the domestic work and administration of the common house are to be considered as equally useful to the community. Therefore, neither salary distinctions, nor power distinctions within the community itself, make sense. The slavery that Plockhoy mentions is work slavery; within his community, not just children, but all men and women have equal rights to their free time. After six hours of work dedicated to the welfare of the community, everyone must have their own time, to be managed freely. It is this liberation from work understood as mere production that makes human beings free and not slaves.

If there is a utopian idea in Plockhoy's texts, it should be understood in the sense of his immanent effort to reform rather than as an ideal project. The position of Plockhoy in the utopian tradition can be viewed on the one side as a criticism of the inflexibility and totality of the utopian project but, on the other, is in debt to this tradition that provides the opportunity to reform reality. In Plockhoy's projects the idea of Utopia is more than systematic; it seems to be an impulse that demands only to be realized.

education. The Reformation removed from its hinges the door leading to a rationalized, commercial society. But, in truth, that door was already open." DE VRIES J., DER WOUDE A., *The First Modern Economy. Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997. p. 172.

³⁴⁴ PLOCKHOY. *A way propounded*, Frontispiece.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p. 9.

Chapter 4.

Collegiants' tolerance: theoretical and religious roots

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Castello and the meaning of *verdraagzaamheid* in 17th- century Holland

4.3 *Onbepaalde verdraagzaamheid* and the possibility of resolving the conflicts

4.4. The “Bredenburgse twisten” and the dichotomy of tolerance

4.1. Introduction

The Dutch Golden Age is typically presented in the historian's description as a period of a high level of tolerance and religious plurality, a context that meets the historian Huizinga's definition of an “anomaly”. How should this definition of “anomaly” be understood?

Collegiants' reflections on the state of the visible Church were led, as has been shown, by the attempt to refuse sectarian division and dogmatic controversy arising from the necessity to crystallize a confession in an institutional Church. This idea of nonconfessionalism, freedom of speech, and tolerance come from a long radical tradition inside the Reformation, which saw in the claiming of infallibility in reading and teaching the Holy Scriptures the principal reason for the multiplication of confessions. Collegiants inspired themselves by this tradition, although, with their argumentation of the Holy Spirit's absence in all religious communities, they put into practice this theoretical background, with a radical criticism of religious charisma.

Collegiants founded their vision of the “visible Church” starting from the observation of their social and religious context. As has already been shown, the Holland of the 17th century was affected by religious division and controversy, which affected not only the *Doopsgezinde* community but also the Reformed Church, Roman Catholics, and Jews. This constellation of different but equally charismatic confessions was only fictionally covered by the uniformity of what was considered the official confession, Calvinism³⁴⁶. In this context clandestine cults and tolerated confession (as with the

³⁴⁶For the unitarian and *concord* request in the Dutch Republic, see: VAN EIJNATTEN J., *Liberty and Concord in the United Provinces. Religious Toleration and the Public in the Eighteenth-Century Netherlands*, Brill, Leiden-Boston, 2003. See also: MIJNHARDT W.W., *The Construction of Silence: Religious and Political Radicalism in Dutch history*, in VAN BUNGE W. (ed.), *The Early*

Jew who could build a Portuguese synagogue in 1675) represented a religious pluralism that can be considered a specific characteristic of the 17th-century Netherlands. As suggested by Kaplan in *Divided by Faith*³⁴⁷, the extensive freedom of conscience allowed in the Dutch Republic was the basis for defining a separation between private and public that, more than juridically, was determined as cultural distinction³⁴⁸. In this context the formal conformity to the official Church was not required and the freedom of conscience, guaranteed by the article 13 of the Union, prevented inquisitorial examination concerning belief or religious convictions. Further, the high number of secret congregations and Churches (*schuilkerken*) in Amsterdam and in other Dutch cities were not a secret for the public authority, which defended the nature of private worship in order to maintain social cohesion and public religious uniformity. Behind the cultural and juridical distinction of private and public spheres, commerce and the economy played a significant role.

Hostility between different confessions could assume the form of economic sanctions, such as the exclusion from guilds or boycotting of commercial activities. However, when it happened that different religious groups specialized themselves into different economic activities (which seemed to be common in the Dutch Golden Age, partly because of family connections and partly because of particular confessional interdiction), exchange and collaboration were never limited by the confessional element. “Calvinist carpenter built a Catholic *schuilkerk* [...] Calvinist apothecary sold candles to Catholics”³⁴⁹ or, as happened in Rotterdam, a Catholic printer, Frans van Hoogstraten, published the books of Reformed authors. City autonomy, social peace, mercantile prosperity, and liberty of confession were the ingredients of Dutch tolerance, which was based on respect for private matters, understood as both personal conscience and private property³⁵⁰. To Calvinism, considered as an essential factor in cohesion, was reserved the role of public religion, occupying most of the spaces reserved for instruction, charity, pastoral care for the soldier, orphans and indigents, a monopoly that was dangerous and hard to challenge.

It is possible to state that Collegiants’ assemblies were part of this private constellation. Their practice was, indeed, very similar to the secret Catholic community, who were allowed to build churches and practice their worship in family houses. The importance of this private tolerance was central, especially during the first years of the Collegiants’ existence (before the official readmission of the Remonstrants in Holland) and can be considered a fundamental basis on which the discourse around tolerance was built in the United Provinces. Collegiants, however, seemed to add new elements to this fundamental distinction between public and private, claiming an unlimited and unrestrained tolerance that sometimes exceeded the limits of individual conscience or private property. From Collegiants’ assemblies issued a proposal of tolerance that affected not only the conscience but also the public sphere. This kind of tolerance required an open and free debate that included the radical challenge of religious authority and the open recognition of confessional differences. Collegiants understood religious plurality in a context in which all confessions had renounced their

Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic, 1650-1750, Brill, Leiden, 2003.

³⁴⁷KAPLAN B.J., *Divided by Faith. Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, London, 2007.

³⁴⁸Ibid. p. 177.

³⁴⁹Ibid. p. 253.

³⁵⁰See: MIJNHARDT, The Construction of Silence, in VAN BUNGE (ed.), *The Early Enlightenment*.

charismatic and exclusive claims. This utopian request, as will be shown, was considered dangerous for civil harmony and therefore unacceptable, especially because it could involve a form of social and institutional segregation³⁵¹. The Collegiants' solution, with its anticonfessional claim, was probably the more egalitarian and had the intention of depriving the religion of its dangerous potential but it was a project that had to involve a deep transformation of the cultural substrate. The Dutch authorities, more pragmatically, preferred a silent tolerance guaranteed by an apparent uniformity in order to avoid, with the emergence of religious difference, confessional conflicts, and disturbance of the social peace.

In order to properly understand Collegiants' anticonfessionalism and to appreciate the contribution that this small group of radical thinkers made to the intellectual metamorphosis of the concept of tolerance in the Holland of 1600, it is necessary to know what position this movement occupied inside the pluralistic universe of Golden Age. Collegiants' reflection on the "visible Church" represents the theoretical space in which they tried to imagine a religious sphere mediated by a widespread tolerance. This vision of an invisible Church was not only projected on the particular situation of the Flemish community but it can be considered, more generally, a reflection about pluralism and tolerance in the Dutch Republic. If the invisible Church represented the community where nobody had the right to stigmatize their neighbor and where the freedom of conscience and speech were the only methods for reaching the Truth, where no external symbols or rituals serve as the means to achieve salvation, it is interesting that Collegiants tried to include, in their discourse about tolerance, intolerant or charismatic confessions like the Calvinists or the Roman Catholics. The official and public request for unlimited tolerance seemed to lead Collegiants to reveal the conflict and the concurrence between the different confession, which were scarcely covered by a formal uniformity. How Collegiants handled their request for open toleration, and the inevitable consequences of this request for maintenance of the social peace, will be the central theme of this chapter.

4.2. Castellio and the definition of *verdraagzaamheid* in 17-th century Holland

John Marshall, in his book *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture*³⁵², traces the principal lines around which developed, in the 17th century, the debate about the justification for religious tolerance and intolerance. Orthodox Calvinism, using the synods as instruments to convey an ideal of pure religion and orthodoxy, represented the largest obstacle to the spread of tolerance ideas. The argumentation against tolerance was often based on the Mosaic theocracy, used to justify the punishment of heresy and idolatry. Calvinists made extensive use of

³⁵¹The necessity, for example, for each congregation to have its own school, church, hospital, orphanage. Public recognition of different confessions could, however, also lead to exclusion from public office. The consequence was the emergence of confessional diversity and consequently difficulty in governability and the failure of integration of such a polynomic system.

³⁵²MARSHALL J., *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture. Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern and 'Early Enlightenment' Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

juridical and police institutions to sanction religious difference. The multiplicity of minor confessions, on the contrary, asked for and argued, in different ways, the necessity of tolerance. The champions of religious tolerance were, according to Marshall, the formal Catholic Coornhert, Arminius and the Arminians (especially Episcopius and Limborch³⁵³), and Grotius.

Starting from Coornhert, with his polemic against Calvin and Dutch Calvinism, the argumentation for tolerance and religious pluralism in the Netherlands was strongly characterized by the necessity of freedom of conscience, opposition to the persecution of heretics and a certain indifferentism towards ceremonies involving a particular spiritual approach to the interpretation of the scriptures. In the first chapter, the importance of Coornhert's works for a later generation has already been stressed, especially through the republication of his writings during the first half of the 17th century. Some of Coornhert's argumentation flowed in the Remonstrant movement, especially from research into a few Christian fundamentals and the necessity of freedom of conscience.

In the 17th century, the United Provinces adopted a federalist solution and a regional particularism that was not common in a Europe dominated by monarchies³⁵⁴. The hegemonic projects of Spain, France, and England in this period showed all the contradiction and signs of erosion but still, at the end of the century, it was not possible to imagine an alternative to the monarchical system. In particular, the federalist choice was rich in implications for religious public life in the United Provinces. For this reason it has to be concluded that the presence of the Collegiant movement in Holland was a sign of religious plurality and tolerance, an unusual situation in the early modern Europe.

In the specific case of the United Provinces, liberty and the politics of peace were, furthermore, tightly connected with the rise of a new merchant class interested above all in the growth of Holland's economic power. This tendency was in sharp contrast to the interests of the House of Orange and of orthodox Calvinism, which, on the contrary, were more interested in the political and military independence of Holland from the foreign powers³⁵⁵. A pamphlet of 1663, *Vervoleg 't samen-spraeck tusschen en Rotterdammer en een Geldersman, Over d' Hollandsche gepretendderde Vryheyt*³⁵⁶ (Continuation of a discussion between a Rotterdammer and a business owner on the Dutch claim of freedom) was written with the aim of defending the position of the House of Orange in the Arminians-Gomarrians' dispute, states clearly how the figure of the Prince was important to bind together all the different people and religions of the United Provinces.

In the argumentation of the Remonstrants and in De Witt's pupil Pieter de la Court, it is possible to glimpse the emergence of a progressive individualization and privatization of the religious cult, as well as a progressive involvement of the public and political authorities in religious matters. De la Court's *Interest van Holland* (The

³⁵³Limborch opposed the Mosaic theocracy's arguments against tolerance in his *Theologia Christiana* of 1686.

³⁵⁴See: PRICE J.L. *Holland and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century. The Politics of Particularism*, Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, Oxford [England], New York, 1994.

³⁵⁵KOSSMANN E., *In Praise of the Dutch Republic: Some Seventeenth-century Attitudes*, H.K. Lewis & Co., London, 1963.

³⁵⁶ANONYMOUS, *Vervoleg 't samen-spraeck tusschen en Rotterdammer en een Geldersman, Over d' Hollandsche gepretendderde Vryheyt*, s'Hertogenbosch, 1663.

Interest of Holland)(1662)³⁵⁷ is the work of a Republican member of the mercantile elite where the defense of widespread religious tolerance assumed a deep political and economic meaning. In the perspective of this author the prosperity of the Dutch Republic, the social peace, and the Commonwealth were connected with the diversity and freedom defended by the public magistracy. The intolerant discourse of religious orthodoxy represented, for De la Court, the principal vehicle of sedition and ruin for the economic success of the Netherlands. After the publication of his views, De la Court was banished by the States of Holland at the request of the Synod of South Holland. The case of De la Court can be considered a prototype of tolerant and intolerant argumentation in the Netherlands, which, far from being only a theological matter, involved political, juridical, and economic processes. This trend in the justification of tolerance found its complete development in Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*, in the centrality of the Commonwealth, and the reduction of religion to a private sphere³⁵⁸.

To understand the nature of the religious plurality in the United Provinces, two well-known pamphlets of the period, *La religion des Hollandois*³⁵⁹ (The religion of Dutchmen) and *La véritable religion des Hollandois* (The true religion of Dutchmen) can help to form a picture of the debate about tolerance in Holland. The first text was published in France (Paris, 1673) and was written by an anonymous official of the French royal army. The second was written as a reply to the first by a Walloon pastor, Jean Brun, in 1675. The latter also revealed the name of the author of the first pamphlet as Giovanni Stoupe (or Stoupe). For Stoupe, the widespread religious tolerance in Holland meant only a deep religious relativism. Dutch people, for him, had as their principal concern and interest commerce and profit, showing no inclination towards religious and spiritual matters, an indifference that, for Stoupe, was obvious, especially in the absent religious conversion of their colonies³⁶⁰. The intent of Stoupe was of course polemical³⁶¹, but besides his polemic he revealed the existence of numerous sects and religious movements that reflected the specific character of religious life in Holland. In this list, Stoupe did not forget the Collegiants, who were described in these terms:

Plusieurs d'entre ces Mennonites ont embrassé la plupart des opinions des Sociniens, ou plutost celles des Arriens touchant la Divinité de Jesus-Christ. Ils presentent tous cette tolerance de toutes les Sectes que les Arminiens recommandent avec tant d'empressement. Ils croient qu'ils ne doivent rejeter de leurs assemblées aucun homme qui vive pieusement, & qui reconnoisse que la Sainte Ecriture est la

³⁵⁷DE LA COURT P., *Interest van Holland, ofte gronden van Hollands-welvaren*, Joan Cyprianus vander Gracht, t'Amsterdam, 1662.

Later expanded and republished in 1669 with the title *Aanwysing der heilsame politike gronden en maximen van de republike van Holland en West-Vrieseland*. The *Interest van Holland* was in the same year as its publication answered anonymously by *Le vray interet de la Hollande*, in which the author, a philomarchist revealed the deep connection existing between freedom of confession and the cities' interest in commerce and the collection of high taxes.

³⁵⁸See: VAN STRIEN C.D., *British Travellers in Holland during the Stuart Period*. Edward Browne and John Locke as Tourists in the United Provinces, Brill, Leiden, 1993.

³⁵⁹STOUPPE G., *La Religion des Hollandois, Représentée en plusieurs lettres écrites par un "Officier de l'armée du Roy", à un pasteur et professeur en théologie de Berne*, Marteau, Cologne, 1673.

³⁶⁰*Ibid.* pp. 141-142.

³⁶¹The polemic arose from the difficult historical situation (in April 1672 Louis XIV, with his allies England, Cologne, and Münster, invades the United Provinces, reaching Utrecht in a few months).

parole de Dieu, bein que cét homme ne s'accorde point avec les autres en plusieurs choses qui passent pour des articles de Foy. Ceux cy sont appellez *Galenistes* par les autres, prenant leur nom de *Galenus*, un Medecin d'Amsterdam qui est tres-eloquent, tres-docte, & habile homme, & on l'accuse d'etre entièrement Socinien.³⁶²

It is evident from this quotation that the leading cause of scandal, for the author, was the assumption of religion as a simple ethical rule, without placing too much importance on external signs or articles of faith. In his reply to Stoupe, Jean Brun rejected the presumption of complicity by his Church with the pernicious Mennonites, and Galenists, as well as the large number of “unorthodox” publications, including Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. In his moderate answer, the Walloon pastor underlines his opposition to brutal repression, implicitly endorsing Stoupe's “accusation” of tolerance and giving his adversary a lesson in “Realpolitik”³⁶³.

The same emphasis on religious plurality and the heresy of the Dutch Republic is expressed by Guido Bentivoglio, cardinal in Flanders during the period 1607-15, who published a very successful book, the *Historia della guerra di Fiandra* (History of the war in Flanders). This text enjoyed several editions in the Netherlands, was translated into Dutch in 1674 by Glazemaker, and published by Rieuwertsz. The perspective of the author is interesting not only because of the large number of diplomatic sources that he quotes but also because he was particularly interested to reveal the political and economic reasons forming the basis of conversions and religious quarrels. With that focus he describes the iconoclastic war and the spread of popular opposition to the Inquisition:

Il tumulto fu di gran consideratione per se stesso, ma molto più per l'esempio. Pochi l'intrapresero, molti lo desiderarono; e tutti al fine vi consentirono. Era infetto d'heresia generalmente il popolo più vile di quella Città, ch'era numerosissimo allora, perchè fioriva quivi più ch'in alcun altra parte la contrattation d'Europa. E la gente di maggior qualità, insieme con quella etinadio di maggior zelo nella Religione Cattolica abborriva tanto l'Inquisizione & il rigor de gli Editti e ne stimava si pernicioso l'effetto alla libertà della mercantia, che da questi Ordini di persone medesimamente non si cedeva mal volentieri astretto il Re a dover per necessità concedere quel che non s'era potuto ottener fino allora, e che tuttavia si siperava per suo consenso.³⁶⁴

Dutch political power and the monarchy are here described as hostages of commercial interests (*contrattation*), which was also the principal factor in the widespread heresy and anarchy. Religious deviance and multiconfessionalism was particularly pernicious in the cities, but what seemed mainly to scandalize the cardinal was the impatience of the Roman Catholics for edicts and the Inquisition seen as an obstacle to personal liberty. Tolerance and the multiplication of heresy and sects, as well as the conversion of the Prince of Orange to the Reformed religion, the cardinal said again, had led to the people's only interests being those of political and economic autonomy.

³⁶²STOUPPE, *La Religion des Hollandois*. pp. 74-75.

³⁶³To balance this image of tolerance in Holland, we have to keep in mind that, even if the religious plurality favored by the political autonomy was a reality in the United Provinces, there were episodes of repression and censorship by the authorities, as we are reminded by PRICE, *Holland and the Dutch Republic*. p. 86: “Also, the more extreme forms of Protestant dissent were generally condemned: ‘socinian’ seems to have been used as a code-word for forms of heterodoxy felt to be beyond the pale for decent Christians (probably because the socinians were regarded as denying the divinity of Christ). [...] The persecution of Adriaen Koerbagh in Amsterdam, for example, seems to have been the result of his breaking the tacitly accepted rules of the games.”

³⁶⁴BENTIVOGLIO G., *Historia di Fiandra*, Per Michiel Miloco, In Venetia, 1668. p. 38.

These sources demonstrate serious sensitivity about religious tolerance, a topic mainly used to criticize Dutch economic fluctuations and its religious plurality. To grasp the complexity of this question, however, it is important to differentiate between two approaches to tolerance, two radically distinct argumentation that led to opposite religious behavior. To properly understand this difference, it could be useful to use a distinction already made by the historian L. Kolakowski:

Se pensiamo alla tolleranza come aspetto di un sistema giuridico, essa in realtà equivale all'indifferenza; é un concetto negativo che definisce i confini entro i quali la legge non impone specifici modi di comportamento: si assume che vi siano aree in cui gli individui possono comportare come vogliono. La tolleranza come atteggiamento di individui o di gruppo può significare qualcos'altro: il desiderio attivo di comunicazione non ostile con persone che pensano diversamente da noi e la percezione che il loro modo di pensare può radicarsi nella buona volontà.³⁶⁵

The position of the aforementioned authors seems to reflect the first kind of tolerance listed by Kolakowski, a kind of negative tolerance, a religious indifference generated by an indefinite juridical space that appeared radically different from the request for tolerance as an active will of communication.

The problem of religious tolerance arose in the 17th century from a combination of humanist inheritance with some proto-Enlightenment elements. The Thirty Years' War sharpened the question of religious freedom and tolerance, transforming it into a juridical issue well summarized by the wording *cuius regio, eius religio*. This juridical definition of tolerance had as a consequence the assumption, by the State, of an attitude of indifference regarding religious questions. Religious litigation, disputes, or divisions became matters of political authority only when they disturbed economic and political life; decisions about faith and confession fell, therefore, into a private sphere. This kind of tolerance was deeply connected to new religious ideas arising from the Reformation. One of the main nonconfessional messages of the Reformation was, indeed, the separation between the individual and the collective spheres; in juridical language this difference repeats itself in the separation between private and public. This separation remains the core element of Lutheranism and Calvinism, even if it lost its critical potential (at the very beginning it was used as a weapon against the Catholic priestly caste).

Before moving on to the second definition of tolerance and detecting the possibilities of positive tolerance, it is necessary to explain what it means to consider the term "tolerance" in its strictly legal sense. In the 17th century, the use of that term in official documents never involved complete acceptance of a deviant behavior but only permission for something that was normally forbidden. In the language of the Reformation, religious tolerance was assumed to include the attitudes of *caritas*, *pax*, and *mansuetudo*³⁶⁶. Holland at this time was a paradigmatic example of the

³⁶⁵KOLAKOWSKI L., *È concepibile una tolleranza cristiana?*, in *L'intolleranza. Uguali e diversi nella storia*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1986, p. 228.

³⁶⁶“Was wir Heute als religiöse Toleranz bezeichnen, wird von den befürwortenden Autoren der Reformationszeit sehr oft noch unter viel weiter gespannten Begriffen wie “carista”, “pax” oder “mansuetudo” subsumiert [...] Viele Toleranzverteidiger des 16. Jahrhunderts waren davon überzeugt, daß es Ketzer gebe und daß man alles tun müsse, um sie auf den Weg des “wahren Glaubens” zurückzuführen. Dabei wurde dieser “wahre Glaube” allerdings sehr oft nicht dogmatisch eindeutiger Form definiert, und viele Befürworter der Duldsamkeit mußten sich daher selbst den Vorwurf der Häresie gefallen lassen.” GUGGISBERG H.R., *Wandel der Argumente für religiöse Toleranz und Glaubensfreiheit im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, in LUTZ H.,

application of this kind of tolerance, assumed to be a forward-looking political choice. Negative and juridical tolerance, however, had as a collateral effect: a request for religious exclusivism that led to monopolization of public religious life by a single confession.

In the United Provinces the Calvinists won the battle for appropriation of the public space, they became the dominant religion (especially in rural districts³⁶⁷) after the War of Independence against Spain (1581). The other confessions survived in a private form, thanks to negative tolerance. The picture of ideal religious pluralism and pacific cohabitation painted by some contemporary historians was, therefore, constantly perturbed by adversarial forces that fought for religious unification (under one confession), claiming themselves the only ones who possessed the truth. Calvinism represented an influential grouping in religious choice and became, furthermore, the direct expression of political, military, and institutional power³⁶⁸.

The co-presence of these two trends, the necessity of toleration and a constant pressure for religious unification, is anything but contradictory, but it seems to be a constant peculiarity of the 16th and 17th centuries, as has been well proven by the historian M. Truchetti³⁶⁹. Through an analysis of legislative texts during the period 1560-1685, Truchetti identifies an alternation between two attitudes of government: relative tolerance and a request for religious unification or *concord*. The “maintenance of religious unity”, during the 16th and 17th century, exit from the political agenda, but remain in the periodical request of the institutional Church which still claim it could function as *instrumentum regni*. The assumption, held by the Roman Church, as well as the Lutherans and Calvinists, was that they were the only possessing the truth of revelation.

Every powerful confessional and institutional Church rooted their survival in the refusal of diversity. This attitude is particularly evident to Truchetti in the case of the French Huguenots and generally in the foundation of Calvinism: “neither Calvin, ‘the founder’, nor Beza, ‘his apostle’, ever developed a coherent doctrine of tolerance. [...] The entire force of Calvin's message consisted in his insistence on the oneness and indivisibility of the Christian truth and faith. [...] tolerance the Huguenots were demanding in 1562. They were demanding temporary tolerance, which would allow them to gain time, to put out more propaganda, to acquire sufficient strength to accomplish the conversion of the kingdom³⁷⁰.”

Coming back to the first definition of tolerance, it can be seen that not only was legal tolerance constantly threatened by *concord* requests but also that this concept of

Zur Geschichte der Toleranz und Religionsfreiheit, Wissenschaftliches Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1977. pp. 459-460.

³⁶⁷Cf. WILSON C., *The Dutch Republic and the Civilisation of the Seventeenth Century*, World University Library, 1968.

³⁶⁸For the numerous religious minorities it was, in fact, impossible to gain access to institutional positions. Even if this rule was never strictly applied, Catholics and Mennonites (the two largest minorities in the United Provinces) found it difficult to have institutional roles.

³⁶⁹TRUCCHETTI M., *Concord and Political Tolerance in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century France*, in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1991. pp. 15-25.

The debate between religious unity and religious pluralism as a threat to national unity and peace was discussed over the entire 17th century. See: LECLER, *Ulrich Scheuner, Staatsräson und religiöse Einheit des Staates. Zur Religionspolitik in Deutschland im Zeitalter der Galubensspaltung*, in *Staatsräson*, in *Studien zur Geschichte eines politischen Begriffs*, Roman Schnur, Berlin, 1975.

³⁷⁰*Ibid.* p.19

tolerance had many negative nuances. From the institutional point of view, as said before, this tolerance meant only religious indifference. On the other hand, from the perspective of the institutional Church, the demand for toleration assumed instead exclusivity value: they accepted the temporary coexistence with other confessions only in the context of future unification under one confession.

With this framework, Collegiants' radical position about tolerance is emphasized in relation to the other religious minorities, as Kolakowski reminds us when describing the difference between exclusive and nonexclusive :

On peut évidemment estimer que si des revendications de tolérance sont présentées par des mouvements persécutés ou minoritaires, ce n'est nullement là une raison suffisante pour leur attribuer d'authentiques attitudes tolérantes, car – maint exemple nous l'apprend – ceux qui réclament pour eux la tolérance, s'ils viennent à disposer de moyens de répression, publient immédiatement les préceptes qu'ils défendaient et se prononcent pour la tolérance seulement à l'égard de la “vérité” ou du “véritable christianisme”, qui, dans leur organisation, ont trouvé leur unique terre d'élection [...] Un groupe discriminé ou minoritaire qui réclame la tolérance à son profit en tant que “véritable” Église, ne réclame pas la tolérance en général, et nous n'avons aucune raison de lui attribuer une attitude tolérante³⁷¹.

The claim of tolerance from confessions or religions considered minorities can give rise to a particular form of nonexclusive tolerance, a claim that Kolakowski, in another text, named behavioral tolerance.

The “behavioral” side of position of tolerance consists of both practical policy and the verbal formulation of ideological principles. When a group which is in the minority or is discriminated against demands tolerance for itself as the only ‘true’ church, it is not demanding tolerance at all, and we have no grounds on which to ascribe tolerance to it. If this same group demands tolerance explicitly for all opinions, or at least for many different opinions within certain bounds (e.g., for all Christians but not for atheists), then the historian will sometimes ask whether its claims are ‘authentic’ that is, dictated by a true love for tolerant systems- or ‘situational’, arising solely from the necessity of having ideological pretexts for improvising its own situation [...] Experience teaches us that when the possibility of intolerance exists it will always become a reality in the short or the long run, either intermittently or continuously, with varying degrees of intensity³⁷².

The adoption of tolerance, concludes Kolakowski, is a balance of power issue between powerful or large religious groups and weaker or smaller ones; this brings us back to the alternation between *concord* and tolerance. If we want to properly understand the difference between the juridical form of tolerance and tolerance as an active will of common action, the difference between exclusive and nonexclusive tolerance seems to be the only method of evaluation. To answer our opening question, it is necessary to estimate the qualitative difference between exclusive and nonexclusive tolerance.

Nonexclusive tolerance is deeply rooted in the acceptance of diversity and the recognition of the “other” as a part of normal religious communication. The legal conception of tolerance, as already shown, seems to be born in the removal of multiplicity, which is accepted only as a temporary solution. The Churches, as public and visible communities, claimed their recognition as possessors of religious truth. The “visibility” of the religious communities made difficult, if not impossible, the

³⁷¹KOLAKOWSKI L., *Chrétiens sans Église. La conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVIII^e siècle*, Éditions Gallimard, 1987. p. 170-171.

³⁷²KOLAKOWSKI L., *Dutch Seventeenth-century Anticonfessional Ideas*. pp. 267-270.

practice of legal tolerance and, on the other hand, the understanding of religion as a subjective and personal experience alone could not justify a positive, tolerant attitude. The maintenance of orthodoxy in the confession and the tendency to sanction the deviant members in a religious group are all signals of a high level of internal intolerance and in consequence also signs of tolerance only reclaimed but not practiced. The degree of tolerance that a group practices with its internal members is directly connected with the self-proclamation of an exclusive Church or exclusive holder of truth. As already seen, the question of tolerance includes manifold questions, involving that of mutual recognition and therefore the possibility of an egalitarian space for communication, and, not least, explains most of the position that nonconformist groups held against the institutional Church. Further, it is possible to notice that the main question implied in the debate about tolerance was the question of "truth". We will see that trying to answer this question gave rise to an epistemological debate in the Collegiants' movement which was at the same time original and radical.

Because the main Reformed Church did not support nonexclusive tolerance, the dissident and nonconformist religious movements provided the only space to practice this type of tolerance. This form of active and inclusive communication had different protagonists in the history of the Reformation; here we are interested in understanding how the Collegiants placed themselves inside this tradition. The idea of tolerance in the United Provinces had a specific theoretical reference in the word *verdraagzaamheid*. As Kolakowski³⁷³ suggests, we cannot translate the word tolerance using *verdraagzaamheid*, which had a different meaning in 17th-century Holland:

Le mot «verdraagzaamheid» ne correspond pas exactement aux intuitions courantes liées au mot «tolérance»; ce dernier terme suggère plutôt les situations où les autorités ne persécutent pas les minorités qui ont des opinions différentes. «Verdraagzaamheid», c'est expressément la «tolérance mutuelle» qui suppose l'égalité des deux parties impliquées dans le conflit et qui exige de toutes deux qu'elles renoncent à imposer leur propre point de vue par la violence³⁷⁴.

This idea of an egalitarian position for the members of a religious community was certainly common to different nonconformist religious groups such as the *Doopsgezinden* and the Remonstrants, and arose from the theoretical elaboration of Sebastian Castellio³⁷⁵.

As we mentioned earlier, Castellio's works were amply republished and translated in Holland: he appeared an illustrious predecessor to the groups reclaiming a

³⁷³KOLAKOWSKI L., *Chrétiens sans Église. La conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVII^e siècle*, Editions Gallimard, 1987.

³⁷⁴Ibid. p.131.

³⁷⁵GUGGISBERG H.R., *Sebastian Castellio im Urteil seiner Nachwelt vom Späthumanismus bis zum Aufklärung*, Basel, Stuttgart, 1956. pp. 48-68.

“In den Niederlande erlebten die Toleranzschriften Castellios schon seit den Anfänger des Freiheitskampfes, besonders aber von ca. 1580 an eine eigentliche Renaissance. Ihre Verbreitung wurde namentlich durch den Laientheologen Dirk Volkertsoon Coornhert gefördert. [...] Die europäische Aufklärung hat die Toleranzforderung des savoyischen Humanisten mehrfach rezipiert, sie hat sie aber mitunter auch kritisch betrachtet, da ihre Argumentationsweise manchen Vertretern rationalistischer Weltanschauung noch zu theologisch vorkam” GUGGISBERG H.R., *Wandel der Argumente für religiöse Toleranz und Glaubensfreiheit im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*, in LUTZ H., *Zur Geschichte der Toleranz und Religionsfreiheit*, Wissenschaftliches Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1977. p. 465.

nonexclusive tolerance. He was, further, the first to proclaim, in opposition to the position of Calvin, the possibility of allowing several religions in France³⁷⁶. The similarity with the situation of the Collegiants was evident, but the opposition to Calvinism was not the most important component of this analogy: Collegiants recognized the theoretical power of Castellio's theories and put his teachings into practice, up to the point of waiving any confessional identity³⁷⁷.

In 1612 the *Contra libellum Calvinii in quo ostendere conatur haereticos jure gladii coercendos esse* was published for the first time in Holland by Reiner Telle. It was written by Castellio in 1554 and circulated as a manuscript for more than fifty years. "*Hominem occidere, non est doctrinam tueri, sed est hominem occidere*": with this direct argumentation Castellio sides against the persecutions and the intolerant Calvinist doctrine that justifies the use of repression and death to eliminate heresy. In this book Castellio answers Calvin following a heated debate originating with the *De haereticis, an sint persequendi, et omnino quomodo sit cum eis agendum, doctum virorum tum veterum, tum recentiorum sententiae*. This was published only one year after the burning of Servet due to his antitrinitarian vision³⁷⁸. The Dutch translation of this text appeared in 1663 with the title: *Het gevoelen van verscheyden zo oude als nieuwe schrijvers aeng*³⁷⁹ (The faith of old and new writers).

De haereticis, an sint persequendi is an anthology of different texts, ordered without any specific chronological reference and having as its main theme the question of tolerance of heretics and dissidents. The list of authors who composed this unusual collection of texts is impressive and included Reformed scholars, Castellio's coeval, Christian classics, Lactantius, Augustine, Luther, Sebastian Frank, Erasmus, and even

³⁷⁶CASTELLIO S., *Conseil à la France désolée*. Here Castellio shows a direct link between religious intolerance and political instability, trying to bend the sense of religious tolerance in the direction of an irenic solution. Doing this, Castellio, unmasks the purely opportunistic intention of the tolerance desired by the Huguenots and theoretically justified in the writings of Calvin.

³⁷⁷“Sein Ziel (Castellions) war immer noch die Wiederherstellung des Konsensus, d.h. Die Hinführung der Häretiker zum “wahren Evangelium”. Wohl läßt sich Castellio in dieser Beziehung als Erasmianer bezeichnen, aber doch unter Einräumung eines wesentliche Unterschiedes. Während bei dem niederländischen Humanisten die biblische Offenbarung und die kirchliche Tradition stets die Basis theologischer Reflexion bildeten, stellte der Savoyarde sein Konzept von “liberum arbitrium” viel ausgesprochener auf das Fundament der menschlichen Vernunft. Für Castellio ist die Vernunft nicht wie für Calvin durch die Sünde korrumpiert, sonder sie bleibt allen Menschen eigen als ein Licht, mit dessen Hilf die essentielle und allgemeingültige Aussage der Schrift erkannt werden kann. So entsteht einerseits die Berechtigung und Verpflichtung, dem Bibeltext mit der im Humanismus geschulten philologischen Kritik zu begegnen [...] Wohl gibt es für Castellio in der Schrift Wahrheiten, die über der Vernunft stehen, aber es gibt keine, die ihr widersprechen.” GUGGISBERG H.R., *Wandel der Argumente*. pp. 463-464.

³⁷⁸In 1531 Michael Servet published the *De Trinitatis erroribus libri septem*, which is considered the first exposition of antitrinitarianism as a theological system. The ideas of Servet were suddenly absorbed by Laelius Socinus (1525-1562), who, after the spread of the Inquisition in Italy, moved to Basel and came into contact with Castellio. After various failed attempts to return in Italy, Socinus returned to Zurich, where he wrote his most important work *Brevis explicatio in primum Ihannis caput*, which circulated in quantity in Poland and Transylvania, creating there different antitrinitarian communities. See: KNIJFF P., VISSER S.J. (eds), *Bibliographia Sociniana. A Bibliographical Reference Tool for the Study of Dutch Socinianism and Antitrinitarianism*, Doopsgezinde Historische Kring, Amsterdam, 2004. pp. 11-12.

³⁷⁹*Het gevoelen van verscheyden zo oude als nieuwe schrijvers aeng. De ketters [...] hoe men met hun handelen zal. Een beekje in deze [...] tijden zeer nut [...], inzonderheydt voor alle vorsten en magistraten [...] Aldereerst in het lat. Te zamengebracht Mart. Bellium. Daerna overzien en met brieven vergroot door Jochem Kluten van Mekkelenburg, en nu uit het lat. Vert., doot N.B.A., t'Amsterdam by Thom. Jansz., 1663.*

Calvin³⁸⁰. The quotations regarding tolerance from authors who were explicitly favorable to persecution have not only a rhetorical value. This choice manifests an effort to find common ground for the whole Reformed experience and to create a debate starting from questioning the possibility of tolerance and plurality between similar confessions. At that time, Castellio already lived in Geneva (for nine years), where he sought refuge, after a dispute with Calvin, together with most of the European heretics (David Joris, Lelio Sozzini, Martin Borrhaus). The reasons for the disagreement with Calvin are primary for understanding the importance of Castellio's thought for the Collegiant movement. The first controversy arose in 1555 and mainly concerns Castellio's publication of the first French Bible translation. *La Bible nouvellement translattée avec la suite de l'histoire depuis le terms d'Esdras jusqu'aux Maccabées, e depuis les Maccabées jusqu'à Christ item avec des Annotacions sur les passages difficiles*. Castellio proposed in this edition of the Bible a revolutionary use of language, adapting the translation to the current use of the French language³⁸¹. Bluntly, he proposed an interpretation of the Bible, trying not to overlook its profane meaning, while, with his attention on the language, he suggested an exegesis centered on a philological issue. Castellio's aim was certainly to make the Bible accessible to the nonlearned people, but at the same time to give to the words their specific meaning in order to not corrupt the divine message. He was certainly one of the first to think that the cornerstone of the tolerance concept was found in the interpretation of the Biblical word and on philological awareness of the language. The Dutch translation of Castellio's Bible appeared in 1618 in a version limited to the New Testament³⁸², with the title *t'Nieuwe Testament, na de oversetting Sebastiani Castellionis, met derselver aanwysing en verklaaringen over eenige plaatsens der H. Schriftuere*³⁸³. (The New Testament translated by Sebastian Castellio, with the same advice and explanation on the setting of the Holy Scriptures) The publication and translation of Castellio's works between 1618 and 1663 certainly indicate a widespread interest in his theories: the Collegiants were deeply influenced by the circulation of his ideas, which they used in their elaboration of the concept of *onbepaalde verdraagzaamheid*.

Bearing in mind Castellio's teaching and the semantic difference between tolerance and *verdraagzaamheid* it is possible to understand how tolerance was practiced within some Dutch religious groups. The Collegiants used non-exclusive tolerance as an egalitarian instrument that worked mainly through the renunciation of violence. To this specific *verdraagzaamheid* the Collegiants preferred to add the adjectives *onbepaalde*, and *onderlinge*, which were terms that we can translate as unlimited or indefinite. *Onbepaalde* and *onderlinge verdraagzaamheid*, unlimited and mutual

³⁸⁰As Visentin notes, with Castellio avoid all the medieval authors to ensure him refusal to the Scholastic. See: VISENTIN S., *Sebastien Castellion. La persecuzione degli eretici*, La Rosa Editrice, Turin, 1997.

³⁸¹“Cette Bible en français populaire, faite à l'usage des gens simples – “les idiots”, comme disait Castellion – est unique en son genre. Non seulement que Castellion y interprète fort librement son texte, s'attachant bien davantage à l'esprit que à la lettre. Mais la langue en est également révolutionnaire, avec son orthographe simplifiée, ses néologismes comme *brûlage* pour *holocauste* ou *mouiller* pour *baptiser*, ses expressions populaire et ses nombreux mots empruntés au patois du village natale.” VV. AA. *Castellioniana. Quatre études sur Sébastien Castellion et l'idée de la tolérance*, Brill, Leiden, 1951.

³⁸²It was one of the main tasks of the *Doopsgezinden* to stress the importance of the New Testament in spite of the Old. See: VAN SLEE J.C., *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*, H&S, Utrecht, 1980. and VAN VEEN M.G.K., *Spiritualism in the Netherlands: From David Joris to Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert*, in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, vol. 33, 2002.

³⁸³ (Leiden, *Georg. Abrahamsz. Vander Marsce*, pour Franc Betyts, à Harlem, 1618).

tolerance, caused a scandal around 1700 and played a big role after the division within the Amsterdam Mennonite community between Zonists and Lamists, the well-known *Lammerenkrijg*³⁸⁴.

In 1700 L. Bidloo, deacon of the Zonist congregation, saw the growth of Collegiant influences on the Mennonites as a danger to the community itself. For Bidloo, as he wrote in his 1701 book *Onbepaalde verdraagzaamheid de verwoesting der Doopsgezinden*³⁸⁵ (Unlimited toleration the ruination of the Mennonites), the progressive transformation of the Gemeente in a “vrijsprekend college” meant the destruction and disappearance of the *Doopsgezinden*. This work was the first of a series of polemical pamphlets. A year later, when Cornelis van Hoek, a Collegiant from Rotterdam³⁸⁶, published *De Christliche verdraagzaamheid verdedigd tegen H. Schijn en L. Bidloo* (Christian tolerance defended against Herman Schijn and L. Bidloo), Bidloo and Schijn³⁸⁷ answered with the *Ongebonden licentie de grondslag der Rijnsburgsche Vergadering* (Unrestrained licence the basis of the Rijnsburger assembly). In this text the authors sharply criticized the groundlessness of tolerance as a Reformation concept and emphasized the importance of rules for the interpretation of the Bible. In 1703 Van Hoek answered with the *Nadere verdediging der Christelijke verdraagzaamheid* (Further defence of Christian tolerance): here the importance of conscience as the only method to attain salvation was definitively confirmed against all external rituals, confessions, or doctrines.

To summarize, we have to understand the question of tolerance in the 17th century as a problematic issue that tried to find an opportunity to resolve religious conflicts. Two different manifestations of tolerance were the symptoms of two different ways of considering the relation between State and religion and corresponded to two different Weltanschauungen regarding religious truth. The exclusivity of tolerance has to be seen as an authoritarian resolution of religious conflicts with the acceptance of religious indifference: an attempt to neutralize the use of theology in the public sphere through the sharing of some general dogmas as the common denominator for different instances of “truth”. Nonexclusive tolerance, on the contrary, was the outcome of a tradition that has its theoretical roots in Castellio's works. It was not based on

³⁸⁴See: VAN DER ZIJPP N., *Geschiedenis der Doopsgezinden in Nederland*, Drukkerij Th. Visser, Amsterdam, 1980. pp. 97-107.

³⁸⁵BIDLOO L., *Onbepaalde verdraagzaamheid de verwoesting der Doopsgezinden*, J.V. Hardenberg, Amsterdam, 1701.

³⁸⁶For more information about van Hoek see: VAN DER ZIJPP N., *Hoek, Kornelis van (d. 1722)*. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1956.

³⁸⁷“Schijn was the great leader of the conservative Mennonites (Zonists) in the Netherlands. Besides this the Dutch brotherhood is deeply indebted to him for his historiography, Schijn being one of the first Dutch scholarly historians. As a member of the Dutch Mennonite Committee of Foreign Needs (Commissie voor Buitenlandsche Nooden), he was active in behalf of the oppressed Mennonites in Switzerland and Prussia. In 1707-8 he carried on a correspondence with the Mennonites in Germantown, Pennsylvania. As a conservative leader Schijn was much disturbed when his former church of Rotterdam in 1700, then merging with the Waterlander congregation, resolved to admit to the communion services “all Christians,” not only those who were members of other Mennonite churches or other Christian denominations, but even unbaptized persons who considered themselves Christians. Against this liberal formula of *benodiging* (i.e. invitation) with its Collegiant spirit Schijn published *Aenmerkjngen op het formulier van benodiging* (Amsterdam, 1703).” VAN DER ZIJPP N., *Schijn, Herman (1662-1727)*. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 959. Web. 14 September 2012.

indifferentism but on the search for a *credo minimo* that allows all confessions to recognize each other as legitimate. This request for tolerance was carried out with a view to finding a nonviolent and nondogmatic answer to religious conflicts. In the next section we will see how Collegiants practiced and argued this position.

4.3. *Onbepaalde verdraagzaamheid and the possibility of resolving the conflicts*

It is clear how in 17th-century Holland the different arguments about tolerance were an attempt to find a solution to the conflict situation after the dogmatic and authoritarian turning point of the Synod of Dordrecht. These different positions on religious tolerance aggregated themselves into concrete political positions; it is for this reason that theological problems were able to rapidly become political ones. Theological questions about predestination or salvation corresponded to different visions of society or politics; they could therefore turn instantly into theological-political questions³⁸⁸. This is exactly what happened during the Synod of Dordrecht, where the position of the Gomarists supported a monarchical solution for the United Provinces, while Arminians tried to defend federalist autonomy and Republicanism³⁸⁹. We have already described the consequences that the creation of these two tendencies had in the 17th-century United Provinces: the proposal of the Arminians was not able to give up the dogmatism and the implicit claim to be the “true” religion; this inflexibility was adopted due to the need for the Arminians' identitarian definition. The only way to handle this situation was for the Arminians to ask the political power to act as a guarantor who has the final decision in religious matters. The project of the Arminians and of the Republicans was reflected, in fact, in the position of Grotius's natural law.³⁹⁰

A significant place in the debate about tolerance and in the development of the concept of *verdraagzaamheid* was occupied by the Collegiants in Rotterdam. The *collegium* in Rotterdam was an active element of a cultural and intellectual network was inspired by the Erasmian teaching³⁹¹. The texts of Erasmus, Coornhert, Camphuysens, and Hooft were read and discuss in *vriendenkring* (circles of friends), the discussions involving philosophical, political, and religious topics. The assemblies, which were held in private houses, always involved entire families and not just men. The cultural activity of the *vriendenkring* frequently give rise to publications or pamphlets and poems or was performed in the theaters. The places

³⁸⁸See: PAGDEN A., *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-modern Europe*, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

³⁸⁹For a view on the political and philosophical theories that influenced Republican thought, see: VISENTIN S., *Assolutismo e libertà. L'orizzonte repubblicano nel pensiero politico olandese del XVII secolo*, in *Filosofia Politica*, no. 1, 1998.

³⁹⁰Concerning Grotius and the correspondence of his thought with the economic, political, and religious situation in the Netherlands, see: SEBASTIANELLI P., *Il diritto naturale dell'appropriazione. Ugo Grozio alle origini del pubblico e del privato*, I Libri di EMIL, Bologna, 2012. For the correspondence between the jusnaturalism theory and the religious background in Holland, see: FORST R., *Toleranz im Konflikt. Geschichte, Gehalt und Gegenwart eines unstrittenen Begriffs*. Shurkamp, Frankfurt, 2003. pp. 219-222.

³⁹¹ZIJLMANS J., *Vriendenkringen in de zeventiende eeuw. Verenigingsvormen van het informele culturele leven te Rotterdam*, IJKPUNT, Utrecht, 1999. p. 149.

where friends' circles met for discussion were, as very often happened in the 17th century, not only private houses but also the bookshops. In Rotterdam the printers François van Hoogstraten³⁹², Isaac Naeranus,³⁹³ and Arnout Leers³⁹⁴ provided the milieu where the members of the *vriendenkring* met to discuss, exchange ideas, and develop their cultural project. As publisher, printer, and translator Frans van Hoogstraten not only functioned as the crux of a major intellectual network, but also the main publisher of Collegiants' texts in Rotterdam. In 1664 he published posthumous treatises by Amsterdam Collegiant Daniel de Breen, the *Compendium theologiae Erasmicae*³⁹⁵, *T'samenspraecke aengaende de waerheyt der christelicke religie* (Discussion about truth in the Christian religion) and the *Vriendelicke disputatie tegen de jode* (Friendly disputation against the Jews).

The arrival of Joachim Oudaan in Rotterdam, in 1656, coincided with the flourishing and expansion of intellectual life in these circles. Oudaan was, furthermore, the first to introduce Collegiants values to the circle, especially concerning free prophecy and freedom of speech. At that time the Rotterdam circle was composed of *Doopsgezinden*, Remonstrants, and Collegiants, while the regent of Rotterdam, Adriaan Paets (1631-1686), was its protector and patron. Other important members of Rotterdam *collegium* were Willem van Blijenberg and Jacob Ostens. With the publication, in 1651, of *Liefde-son, omstralende de hoedanigheyt der tegenwoordige genaamde christenheyt*³⁹⁶ (Filial love illuminating the quality of currently named Christianity), by Jacob Ostens, Rotterdam's *collegium* supported unlimited tolerance, describing the pacific life project undertaken by all the Christians. The *pax ecclesiarum* scheme was fully supported by Van Hoogstraten, who, even if formally Catholic, introduced into the Collegiants' milieu the objectification of the unlimited and mutual tolerance project³⁹⁷.

Joachim Oudaan was the son of the baker Frans Oudaan and Maria van der Kodde, the daughter of the founder of the first *collegium* in Rijnsburg, Jan Jacobsz Van der Kodde. He studied Latin at the university of Leiden, later becoming well known for his Dutch poems. Oudaan was a supporter of unlimited tolerance, and of chiliastic tendencies that he communicated through his text, for example in his satirical poem *Op het bouwen en breken der paapsche-kerk: tot Zyd-wind in Noord-Holland*³⁹⁸ (On the build and break of the papal Church: until the south wind in Nord Holland) about a Protestant and a Catholic who reciprocally destroyed their Churches. In his collection of poems, which Oudaan dedicated to friends or to the members of his intellectual circle, are listed different topics – defense of tolerance, humanism, and a certain chiliasm – which put him near the position of Pieter Serrarius. The inspiration of

³⁹²About Van Hoogstraten, see: THISSEN P., *Werk, Netwerk en Letterwerk van de Familie van Hoogstraten in de Zeventiende Eeuw*, APA- Holland University Press, Amsterdam, Maarssen, 1994. See also: ABBING M.R., *Van Hoogstraten: iconografie van een familie*, CIP-Gegevens Koninklijke Bibliotheek, The Hague, 1987.

³⁹³Naeranus was the publisher of the most important Remonstrant as well as Collegiant texts. Oudaan, Camphuysens, Uytenbogaert, De Fijne are just a few names.

³⁹⁴LANKHORST O.S., *Reinier Leers (1654-1714), uitgever en boekverkoper te Rotterdam (1654-1714): een Europees 'libraries' en zijn fonds*, Igitur, 1987.

³⁹⁵This book belonged to the personal library of Galenus Abrahamz.

³⁹⁶OSTENS *Liefde-son*. J. Brouwer, N. de Vries, 1651.

³⁹⁷THISSEN P., *Werk, Netwerk en Letterwerk van de Familie van Hoogstraten in de Zeventiende Eeuw*, APA-Holland University Press, Amsterdam, Maarssen, 1994. pp. 210-215. The Catholicism of Van Hoogstraten has to be identified, according to Thissen, with the Jansenist current.

³⁹⁸Published in *Bloemkrans van verscheiden gedichten*, Louwijs Spillebouts, Amsterdam, 1659.

Erasmian humanism was very important to understanding the irenic position of Rotterdam's Collegiants and literary associations. Tolerance and flexibility in teaching were the core of the action against dogmatic disputes. The Collegiants' *onderlinge verdraagzaamheid* was so widely applicable that it permitted collaboration between Oudaen, a *Doopsgezinde* who in a 1666 letter to a friend declared he had a “sterke afkeer voelde van het rooms-katholike geloof”³⁹⁹ and the Catholic Van Hoogstraten. In Rotterdam Erasmian humanism was a symbol of the city's freedom and his thought an antidogmatic instrument used by Remonstrants and *Doopsgezinden* in the battle for confessional freedom.

In this context we can see the Collegiants' radical alternative, their *onbepaalde verdraagzaamheid* (unlimited tolerance), as an exception, a proposal that upset the positions in the field and was unacceptable precisely for that reason. Organized confessions and the institutional Church could not longer represent a guarantee for the civil concord as had been possible in the Middle Age. How, exactly, did the Collegiants understand the concept of *verdraagzaamheid*? As we said before, this concept arose from a polemical discussion about the concept of tolerance, and in particular the way to understand a religious community. The position of the Collegiants during these polemics, which started around 1670 and dragged on until 1700, was sometimes hesitant, swinging between a mutual and unlimited tolerance and a limited one. This discussion involved serious questioning of the identity of the religious community. The combination of the substantives *verdraagzaamheid* and *onbepaalde* was at first used by Bredenburg to define the nature of the *onderlinge verdraagzaamheid*⁴⁰⁰ (mutual tolerance), but was also used later in a polemical sense by Lamber Bidloo, a member of the conservative Mennonites and part of the Zonist congregation⁴⁰¹. Bidloo's polemical definition was an answer to the Collegiants' extensive practice of mutual tolerance, which, as K.V. Hoek wrote in the *Brief der Rotterdamsche Collegianten* (Letter to the Collegiants in Rotterdam) was the basis of the Collegiant movement.

geen sprekende Rechter op der aarde is, die bevoogt is te bepalen, wat men moet gelooven of niet, zo volgt daar uit, by weder zijdze toestemminge, dat yder Christen sijns eygen recht is, wat belangt sijn geloove, en aan niemand op der aarde rekenschap schuldig, der beleving van het zelve [...] met een woord, de eeste, en Algemeene grondslag van de vergadering, na de vrienden haar verstand ingesteld, is een onbepaalde Vryheid, en ongebondene Licentie⁴⁰².

This unlimited freedom and unrestrained licence was, for the “*de Zon*” congregation, the basis of the Collegiants' “*Anarchia of zonderhoofdigheid*⁴⁰³.” Bidloo and Schijn

³⁹⁹ZIJLMANS, *Vriendenkrigen in de zeventiende eeuw*. p. 162.

⁴⁰⁰See: *Heylzamen Raad tot Christelyke Vrede*. p. 19.

⁴⁰¹See: VAN DER ZIJPP, *Bidloo, Lambert (1638-1724)*. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Retrieved 11 October 2012.

⁴⁰²LAGENDAAL I., VAN HOEK C., VERBURGH J.D., OUDAAN J.F., ADRIAANZ VERWER P., OUDAAN J., BREDENBURG J., *Brief van eenige Rotterdamsche Collegianten, dienende tot antwoord op de voorgaande*, April 1686. p. 6.

⁴⁰³“[...] welke op de forme der Verdraagzaamheyd, quanzuys door een Mennist opgesteld, zegt, *dat daar uyt zoude volgen een Anarchia of zonderhoofdigheid, en daar uyt een Ongebondene Licentie*, den Mennist aldus-doed antwoorden, *Dat is waar, dat en ontken ik niet: want een Anarchia NB. Moet het zijn. Waar zijn de lieden die het Hoofd zouden zijn, niemand heeft eenige Character, het moet ook een NB. Ongebondene Licentie zijn enz.*” BIDLOO, SCHIJN, *Ongebonden licentie de grondslag der Rijnsburgsche Vergadering*, T'Amsterdam, 1702. p. 42.

saw the absence of rules as a direct attack on authority, a lack of hegemony that makes it impossible to order and set limits of mutual tolerance. It is for this reason that, for Bidloo and Schijn, Collegiants' tolerance was without limits. The differences in the understanding of tolerance, as we will see, were in reality more profound because of the Collegiants' claim of making tolerance an element of salvation.

With the publication in 1671 of *Een Praetje over Tafel*⁴⁰⁴ (Table talk), Jan Bredenburg had tried, some years before this dispute, to give an answer to the question of tolerance and pacification between different religious groups. This book, written in the form of a discussion between a Collegiant, a Mennonite, and a Remonstrant, was an intervention into the debate, the so-called Vrede-Handel, which was about the possible unification between Remonstrants and *Waterlands-Doopsgezinden*. The practical objective of this publication was to demonstrate how mutual tolerance could be the only way to get over the confessional differences, but the hoped-for unification never took place, partially because of the "Collegiants' perspective" with which the book was written. Collegiants' voices in the book were often an occasion for Bredenburg to confirm accusations against the Remonstrants, in particular that of perpetuating the Catholic division between the lay believers and the clergy, and that of claiming, but not practicing, the *onderlinge verdraagsaamheid*. For the author this tolerance, with its implication of mutual acceptance, can be found only in the Rijnsburger *collegium*.

De Onderlinghe Verdraeghsaemheydt bestaet hier in dat men ineen ander soo veel inschickt, als men begeert dat een ander in ons inschicken sal: Dat is, dat men een ander toelaet soo veel macht, soo veel vrijheydt, om in Religions saken, die ter zaligheydt niet noodtsakelijck zijn te gelooven, en dat Geloof te beleven, 't zij buyten ofte binnen de Vergaderingen der Christenen, als men dat van een ander wil toegelaten zijn, ruftende op dien Grondtregel, Al wat ghy wildt dat u de Menschen doen, doet haer desgelijcks: en Al wat ghy wildt dat u de Menschen niet doen, doet haer ook het selve niet⁴⁰⁵.

This was the only acceptable formulation of *verdraagzaamheid*, that is, an indifference toward all religious questions that do not directly involve the problem of salvation.

This book was published following a discussion about necessary and unnecessary dogmas; this distinction was common in the contemporary debate about tolerance and, as revealed to us by the author's writings, he got his inspiration from a Protestant preacher, Issac D'Huisseau⁴⁰⁶. The limit of Bredenburg's analysis remained in the determination of who was entrusted with discerning what is necessary or unnecessary for redemption. For the Collegiant no synod or institution could make this

⁴⁰⁴The whole title is *Een Praetje over Tafel tusschen een Remonstrant, Waterlands-Doopsgesinde, ende den Waerd. Behelsende Consideratien over den vrede-handel Nu tusschen de Remonstranten en de Waterlandsche-Doopsgesinden tot Rotterdam, voorgefallen. Waer van zy nu beyderzijds de Stucken hebben uytgegeven. Betoonende oock, ter dier occasie, de rechte Natuur der Onderlinge Verdraeghsaemheydt, en hoe die beyer zijden gepractiseert wordt.*, Tot Amsterdam, 1671. Kolakowski erroneously attributed this book to Laurens Klinkhamer. About the sources of this book see: VAN BUNGE L., *Johannes Bredenburg (1643-1691). Een Rotterdamse Collegiant in de ban van Spinoza*, Universiteits drukkerij, 1990. pp. 47-55.

⁴⁰⁵BREDENBURG, *Een Praetje over Tafel*, p.12.

⁴⁰⁶*Ibid.* p. 4. Bredenburg declares to have been inspired by *De Vereenighing van 't Christendom*, published for the first time in Samur in 1670 with the title *La Reünion du Christianisme, ou la manière de rejoindre tous les Chrestiens sous une seule Confession de Foy*.

distinction⁴⁰⁷; furthermore, redemption could be achieved through the practice of evangelical morality and the free reading of the Bible. Bredenburg seems here to prefer a program of religious reunification on the basis of confessional content reduced to a minimum. In this program of conflict resolution the author tried to reduce the confessional differences by ignoring them. What Bredenburg, through a Collegiant voice, was asking the other religious movements was to renounce their doctrinal content. It is not surprising, under these conditions, that mutual tolerance could not work.

Bredenburg elaborated and softened his position in a second work, *Heylzamen Raad tot christelyke Vrede ofte Aanwijzinge van het Rechte Middel tot Christelijke Vereeniging*⁴⁰⁸ (Salutary advice for Christian peace, or to show the right means to Christian unity), written as an answer to De Fijne's *Kort, Waerachtigh, en Getrouw Verhael* (Brief, truthful, and faithful history of the beginning and origin of the new sect of the Prophet of Rijnsburg in the village of Warmont)⁴⁰⁹, but in fact conceived as a further elaboration of the concept of tolerance. In *Heylzamen Raad*, Bredenburg's argumentation changes, widening the practice of *onderlinge verdraagzaamheid* to the possible formation of a Universal Church. The problem for Bredenburg was, as expressed in the text, to find a dimension of togetherness without falling back upon the doctrinal "lowest common denominator" as a unifying point of view. The priority was to find a way to build the "uyterlijke Kerke Christi hier op aarden, ingesteld volgens de natuur der Onderlinge Verdraagsaamheyd [...] met de benaaming van Voorstanders der Onderlinge Verdraagsaamheyd zullen denoteren, moeten en behooren in 't werck te stellen, om met elkanderen te vereenigen⁴¹⁰." Following the "nature of the *onderlinge verdraagzaamheid*" means, for the author, to practice "*collateraliteit*"⁴¹¹ and "*evengelykheyd*"⁴¹²." The main question emerging in this new work is the possibility of finding an egalitarian structure inside the visible Church:

⁴⁰⁷Ibid. p. 44.

⁴⁰⁸The whole title is: *Heylzamen Raad tot Christelyke Vrede, ofte Aanwijzinge van het Rechte Middel tot Christelijke Vereeniging, volgens de eyge Natuur der Onderlinge Verdraagzaamheid, aan alle Christenen, die elkanderen de broederschap waardig oordeelen*, Tot Rotterdam, n.d. (The publication date is most likely 1672; see Fix, p. 124.)

⁴⁰⁹This book, written by De Fijne, was published by his soon only in 1671 in order to accuse the Collegiants of never having practiced tolerance since their beginning. De Fijne refers to an episode that sees the first Collegiants, led by Van der Kodde, move to Rijnsburg to avoid the presence of De Fijne and other Remonstrant pastors in the community.

⁴¹⁰BREDENBURG, *Heylzamen Raad tot Christelyke Vrede*, pp. 1-2.

⁴¹¹The term *collateraliteyt* was one of the central concepts in Wtenbogaert's text *Tractaet van 't Ampt ende Authoriteyt eener hooger Christelijcker Overheydt in Kerckelijcke saecken*, Gedruckt by Johannes Nearanus, tot Rotterdam, 1647. This text is a reflection on power and the necessary control that the secular authority must have over the clerical. The author distinguishes between two kind of power: the *geestelijcke* or *kerckelijcke* authority and the *wereelijcker overheid*. Three types of authority are involved in the ordination to power: one is the superiority of the Church, which consider its power as a direct emanation from God; the second is the superiority of the State, which in this case represents the only institution directly inspired by God. The third type of ordination to power is *collateraliteyt*, where both the Church and the secular authority participate as direct emanations of God. *Collateraliteyt* involved, indeed, the presence of two powers but required a clear separation between the two spheres of interest of the two different powers. The Church has to limit itself, according to the author, to "dan dat sy de Tempelen ende publijcke plaetsen den Kercken-dienaren om den Gods-dienst te begaen opene." p. 19.

⁴¹²BREDENBURG, *Heylzamen Raad tot Christelyke Vrede*. p. 5.

De staat waar in wy ons alle tegenwoordig bevinden, en is geen andere, als de staat van collateraliteyt of evangelijkheyd, 't welk klaar kan afgenomen worden uyt de ontveeringe van eenige opperhoofdigheyd, of van een sprekenden Rechter; want indien'er eenige opperhoofdigheyd was, zoo waar de evengelijheyd wech genomen; maar dewijl' er die nu niet en is, volgens het volmondig toestaan van alle dese Christenen, zoo volgt dat we alle even hoog of even gelijk staan⁴¹³.

Bredenburg appreciates that this reconciliation cannot be realized in a normative way, peace cannot be confused with pacification, because the latter means the introduction of an illegitimate power inside the assembly:

Zoo een vergadering van moetmen, na mijn verstand, oordeelen zonder eenige kratht te kunnen zijn tot Vrede; je men mach die eerder noemen een vruchteloosen aanvang, of een middel tot twist, dan een middel tot Vrede⁴¹⁴.

The solution that Bredenburg finds, to ensure every confession or religious group their religious freedom and absolute equality, was a “federalist” approach⁴¹⁵. The author said that a possible reunification of such different religions or confessions could be based on an organization of different autonomous congregations that would periodically meet together in a neutral general assembly inspired by the Collegiants' *vergadering* in Rijnsburg⁴¹⁶. The periodical *Avondmaal* (Supper) would be the sign of the revived Universal Church, unified not in its external ceremonies or dogmas, but in the common practice of the *ondelinge verdraagzaamheid*, understood as the egalitarian possibility of freedom of speech for all participants. The general assembly was also understood as the only place to practice and learn mutual tolerance, where it was possible to search for the truth “met redenen en bewijzen”, as with the argumentation. As we can note here, Bredenburg minimized the idea of a “reduction to a common confession”, choosing instead to place more importance on mutual tolerance and on religious freedom, understood as a practical egalitarian confrontation⁴¹⁷. The *Lichaam* (the body, here understood as the Universal Church) is regulated only via tolerance, but the Bible, and what is presumed to be found in it, when represent reason of dispute, has to be left on the *particuliere* (private) side of the singular participants or groups⁴¹⁸.

The core of the book is a heated criticism of the Remonstrant C. Hersoeker, and his *Aanspraak tot Christelijke Vrede* (Claim for a Christian peace). Bredenburg criticized the possibility of understanding the *onderlinge verdraagzaamheid* as regulated and limited tolerance; moderating mutual tolerance means for Bredenburg, as we said before, losing its original nature⁴¹⁹. *Onderlinge* (mutual) tolerance must be, according to its nature, *onbepaalde* (unlimited)⁴²⁰; claiming the right to limit or regulate it can only bring additional controversy and dispute⁴²¹. The argumentation here was centered on the possibility of keeping a space open for all in the congregation

⁴¹³Ibid. p. 4.

⁴¹⁴Ibid. pp. 32-33.

⁴¹⁵Ibid. pp. 12-13. Here Bredenburg compares his project of a Universal Church to the political solution of the United Provinces.

⁴¹⁶Ibid. p. 15, p. 53.

⁴¹⁷Ibid. pp. 35-36.

⁴¹⁸Ibid. pp. 8-9.

⁴¹⁹Ibid. p.18. “de rechte natuur der Onderlinge Verdraagsaamheyd.” p. 27.

⁴²⁰Ibid. pp. 19-22.

⁴²¹Ibid. p. 21.

who want free speech. For this reason, no “*prediken*” or “*sprekende Recher*” could be admitted. On the subject of baptism and the mistakes of the uneducated, freedom and absence of regulation were the only ways to full tolerance⁴²². The attack against an authoritarian structure inside the general assembly became more explicit in this work. This reformulation indicated a change in the elaboration of the concept of tolerance compared to how it was formulated in *Een pratie over Tavel*. In the later work, Bredenburg bound the idea of tolerance to a necessary freedom, trying to release it from its original meaning of endurance⁴²³. A considerable share of this book was dedicated to this idea; here the author tried to find a solution in order to guarantee equal and free participation. It was for this reason that he began to analyze the principle of authority, the *hooge overheyd*, in the religious meeting. In some passages, Bredenburg explicitly criticized the possibility of having absolute power in the religious assembly because it involved the claim of infallibility (*onfeilbaarheid*) and the foundation of tyranny:

En dit zoude alles, volgen die absolute opgedrage macht, in stant moeten gebracht werden; waar door van ook die Christenen, die de waarheyd beter gevat zouden hebben, als die mannen, genootsaakt zouden werde tegen haar verstand, en tot ruijn van de waarheyd en Onderlinge Verdraagsaamheyd, en mogelijk tot vernietiging van de zaligheyd haar'er zielen, zulks voor goed te erkennen: 't welk niet alleen de Onderlinge Verdraagsaamheyd zou verbroken zijn, maar daar en boven zou daar door tyranny ingebracht werde⁴²⁴.

The critique of absolute power and the necessity of avoiding tyranny were, in Bredenburg's consideration, deferred in favor of the demand for wide freedom:

[...] of zy zouden die vryheyd geven in plaatsen daar her niet nuttig, of niet zonder aanstoot zou konnen gepractiseert werden [...] of te veel vryheyd gegeven is, om de waarheyd of de verschillen onderzoeken genootsaakt werden tegen haar verstand te gelooven en te leven, en daar uyt volgt dan weder het zelve 't geen boven aangewezen is; te weten Tyrannye⁴²⁵.

The aim of the author was, at the same time, penetrated by an immanent sentiment and a utopian one. It is for this reason that tolerance, as well as peace, has to be practiced and not just theorized⁴²⁶.

It is probably for this reason that *Heylzamen Raad* eluded all questions about the regulation of the religious assembly or the specific definition of the necessary content of the truths of faith. Many of the central problems were left open due to the authors' conviction that the best solutions for the religious community had to be solved through direct experience. By the same logic, some important concepts were left indefinite, such as the *waarheyd* (truth), a notion full of theological implications that recurred several times without ever being explicitly defined. The *waarheyd* remained only an outlined criterion, used by Bredenburg to define the practice of freedom⁴²⁷ and

⁴²²Ibid. pp.4, 6, 22, 44.

⁴²³See: WATERLOT G., *Les droits de l'homme et le destin de la tolérance*, in *Diogène*, no .176, Oct-Dec, 1996. Here the author demonstrates how tolerance, in its modern meaning, is a corollary of liberty.

⁴²⁴*Heylzamen Raad tot Christelyke Vrede* Ibid. pp. 30-31.

⁴²⁵Ibid. p. 30.

⁴²⁶Ibid. p. 49.

⁴²⁷Ibid. p. 19.

salvation⁴²⁸. Further, it was presented as a paradigm, always subject to investigation: “men moet met redenen en bewijzen haar zoeken te overtuygen, daar door kan dit ook eygentlijk en alleen geschieden; met actien en kan men haar niet anders als aanleydinge om na de waarheyd the zoeken”.⁴²⁹ The core of Bredenburg's argument was that the truth was no longer assumed to be a parameter of inclusion or exclusion; the truth was something that commonly had to be researched in order to reach salvation. Bredenburg seemed here to use a humanist argumentation, making the truth a corollary of tolerance and of religious unity, but this inheritance was rejected in the choice not to bind the truth to a particular religion.

Another central question that remained unsolved, at least on a theoretical level, was the identification of the parameters under which it is possible to achieve salvation. Bredenburg seemed to suggest, but never said explicitly, that the practice of mutual and unlimited tolerance and the wish for freedom and peace were ethical behaviors that assured redemption and the salvation of the soul. An ethical life was more necessary than external rituals or dogmas to achieve eternal life; claiming tolerance and practicing it was part of evangelical morality. Even if *zaligheid* (salvation) were an important and reclaimed theme throughout Bredenburg's work, the renunciation of a dogmatic core and of a *sprechende Rechter* (judge) produced an implicit relativism concerning salvation and the truth of faith.

All tolerance, which could be used as a source of ethical behavior, was no longer useful in the project of Church unification. In this light we can understand the polemical answer of the orthodox Mennonites, L. Bidloo and H. Schijn, who underlined that *onderlingen vredraagzaamheid*, as well as its unlimited freedom, led to the loss of the Church of Christ. As we can see, despite the pragmatic effort to think of a possible organization for a Universal Church, *Heylzamen raad* reached the same dead end as *Een Praetje over Tafel*. The choice to downplay the importance of necessary or unnecessary religious truth in no way changed the scope of religious indifference.

From the analysis of the disputes about the concept of tolerance and from Bredenburg's answers we can assume that the Collegiants elaborated a form of tolerance that rooted itself on the acceptance of freedom of speech. The Collegiants practiced the *onderling vredraagzaamheid* in order to give voice to their irenic aspirations within the *Doopsgezinde* community, but also conceived tolerance as a source of ethical behavior. This was a radical proposition that had two different aims. One intention was to sharply criticize a religion based on infallible authority, in order to return the faithful to an active role inside the community and with the exegesis of the Bible. The other purpose was to guarantee, through general assemblies, the possibility of a confrontation between different confessions. This formulation of the concept of tolerance was on one side an anticonfessional project and on the other an irenic one. We have to recognize that the Collegiants' efforts to lead Christians to unity were made through resolution of conflicts, and avoiding any form of authoritarian unification. Bluntly, the Collegiants' proposal asked, implicitly, for the renunciation of any dogmatism by the participants in the process of pacification and for the admission that all the theological disputes had no meaning. A renunciation of authority and

⁴²⁸Ibid. p. 19

⁴²⁹Ibid. pp. 55-56.

theological power that an institutional Church could not accept.

The anticonfessional nature of the Rijnsburger Collegiants seemed again to be a factor that prevented every possible pacification; they elaborated their theories with the conviction that, after the Reformation, religion could no longer assume the role of social peacemaker. Every process of pacification was a renunciation of a reunification of different Churches. This view was a direct consequence of the fracture of the *Respublica Christiana*, leading to the awareness that general and universal criteria for the truth were impossible to establish, and also that religious conflict represented the destructive potential of European states and societies.

If the Collegiants' theoretical solution to conflict was a not-normative answer to the request for civil peace, the practice of unlimited tolerance showed its utopian side in the chaotic religious and political situation in Holland. After 1672 the discussion about tolerance assumed a new European dimension: the United Provinces faced a political disaster (*het rampjaar*), when the armies of King Louis XIV invaded the Netherlands, on which France, England, Cologne, and Münster also declared war. On 20 August 1672 the brothers De Witt were brutally murdered by a mob of anti-Republican Calvinists. After this episode, for many Mennonites, as well as nonorthodox Calvinists, the request for tolerance assumed profound political value; religious conflict and dissent were no longer able to achieve, in the public sphere, an independent status from State policy and governance.

4.4. The “Bredenburgse twisten” and the dichotomy of tolerance

Between 1686 and 1699 the Rijnsburgers experienced a bitter rupture named the “Bredenburgse twisten”⁴³⁰ (Bredenburg dispute), which show, including within the religious movements, the limits of the *onderlinge verdraagzaamheid*. The dispute began with a long private dialog that reached the public sphere only in 1684, when the adversaries of Bredenburg, Frans Kuyper⁴³¹ and Abraham Lemmerman, decided to publish his manuscripts. First they published, without Bredenburg's permission, a manuscript written using the geometrical method (as in Spinoza's *Ethics*), *Wiskunstige demonstratien dat alle verstandelijke werking noodzaakelijk is* (Mathematical demonstration that all intelligible action is necessary). Here Bredenburg tries to resume his positions on the absolute necessity and possibility of reconciling religion and reason. Using the geometrical and mathematical methods to subject God to determinism was a sufficient proof to accuse Bredenburg of atheism, even if in his vision the causal necessity descended from God himself.

In the same year Kuyper and Lemmerman published another manuscript that Bredenburg wrote in 1672, *Verhandeling van de oorsprong van de kennis Gods en van desselfs dienst, alleen uyt natuurlijke reden afgeleyd, buyten alle openbaringen of mirakelen* (A treatment of the origin of the knowledge of God and of his service, taken only from natural reason without any revelations or miracles). It was an exposition of his view of rational religion conceived under fascination with Descartes' and Spinoza's

⁴³⁰VAN SLEE J.C., *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*, H&S, Utrecht, 1980. pp. 238-266.

⁴³¹Frans de Kuyper (Cuypers) was born about 1629. He became a Remonstrant preacher at Vlaardingen, Dutch province of South Holland, in 1652, but resigned in 1653 because he did not agree with infant baptism. He moved to Amsterdam and later to Rotterdam, and became a book printer. Among the most important publications by Kuyper is *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum, quos unitarios vocant*, (i.e. the Socinians. [...] De Kuyper died in 1691.” VAN DER ZIJPP, N., *Kuyper, Frans de (ca. 1629-1691)*. *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 2012.

philosophies. Kuyper added an introduction, where he explained that the consequences of the original rationalism and naturalism of Bredenburg was the negation of all belief, already an open declaration of atheism. Bredenburg, along with some supporters, reacted to this attack, placing, at the beginning, the basis of his defense on morals: the vile behavior of his adversaries showed that they could not be true men of faith. The whole dispute lasted from 1684 to 1686; in only two years the opposite sides produced 18 pamphlets, wherein two different visions of religious rationalism emerged. In August 1685⁴³² a large *vergadering* in Rijnsburg tried to put an end to this quarrel but in 1686 the Collegiants' movement was already divided into two parties; attempts at reconciliation made by other Collegiants like Pieter Smout⁴³³ and Laurens Klinkhamer⁴³⁴ were useless.

It is interesting to observe the practical consequences of this dispute, which translated itself on an organizational level to the aforementioned debate about tolerance. Before the public explosion of the “Bredenburg case” in 1681⁴³⁵ a *vergadering* was held in Rotterdam, where the position of Bredenburg in the Collegiant movement was indirectly discussed and where Kuyper and Lemmerman launched their first accusation of atheism. The specious question from Bredenburg's opponents was if it were possible to participate in the same assembly and discuss with someone who practices and professes visible ethical and theological mistakes⁴³⁶. Another member of the *collegia* added a supplementary parameter of exclusion: “dat hij ann de tafel des Heeren niet als broeder kon aanzitten met wie geen voorstanders waren van de weerloosheid”⁴³⁷. This was directly aimed against those who condemned any form of violence and refused to bear arms; Bredenburg was among those who practiced this principle with extreme inflexibility. The majority of Collegiants opposed this possible restriction of the *onderlinge verdraagzaamheid*, recognized as one of the principles of the Rijnsburger movements. Even after some apologies and menders assembly Kuyper and Lemmerman never ceased the accusations of atheism, and when Lemmerman proposed to limit the participation of women⁴³⁸ to the *collegia* because he found it unseemly and contrary to the Gospel⁴³⁹ (in particular, he quoted the First Epistle to the Corinthians 14.34), the Collegiants (especially Galenus Abrahamsz and Jan

⁴³²See SMOUT P., *Copie van een Brief door Pieter Smout, aan Galenus Abrahamsz geschreeven*, 1685. p. 7 (h).

⁴³³SMOUT, *Vrede en vryheid onder de Rijnsburgers verbroken*, Rotterdam, 1687.

Smout was the leader of Leiden *collegia*, which assumed a neutral position in the “Bredenburgse twisten.” In April 1686 there was also an attempt to hold a general assembly for Easter day, but there was little attendance. Source: VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 253.

⁴³⁴KLINKHAMER L., *Losse en quaade gronden van de scheur-kerk*, Amsterdam, 1686.

Klinkhamer was physician of Leiden and also a member of its *collegia*.

⁴³⁵See VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*, pp. 243-245; and VAN NIJMEGEN E., *Histoire der Rijnsburgsche Vergadering*, Jacob Burgvliet en Zoon, Rotterdam, 1775, pp. 139-140.

⁴³⁶BREDENBURG J., *Noodige Verantwoording op de ongegronde Beschuldiging van Abrah. Lemmerman*, Rotterdam, 1684. pp. 6-7.

⁴³⁷VAN SLEE, *De Rijnsburger Collegianten*. p. 244. This other Collegiant was named Paulus Jansz uit Krommenie, Van SLEE supported the idea that he was involved in the accusation of Bredenburg by deception.

⁴³⁸This problem was already asked and solved by the Quakers, who placed great importance on active female participation in the religious assemblies. In 1668 a text of M. Fell was translated into Dutch, stating the necessity of women speaking, *Vrouwen sprecken gerechtvaardigt, beweesen ende geeygen door de Schriftuer*.

⁴³⁹See SMOUT, *Vrede en vryheid onder de Rijnsburgers verbroken*, Rotterdam, 1687. p. 6.

Dionysius Verbung⁴⁴⁰) decided to forbid him from speaking. This attempt to exclude women from public assemblies was particularly unpopular within the Collegiants, where women's associations, as well as female preaching, had been accepted since the 1640s⁴⁴¹. The reaction of the Collegiants against Lemmerman and the severe sanction of exclusion to the *collegia* was the first cause of the subsequent "pamphlet war", which led the authors to publish Bredenburg's manuscripts and trying to organize, even if without success, separate meetings⁴⁴².

In a letter to Galenus Abrahamsz, Pieter Smout commented on the situation in these terms:

Of hy zeyde, dat hy by abuys of alteratie, qualijk hadde geleezen, dat mocht niet helpen. 't Was teegen de liefde, dat te gelooven. Is dit reedelijk gehandelt? Ik schaam my daar aan te gedenken, en acht dat het alle menschen moeten doen, die wel op de zaak letten.⁴⁴³

Smout was right to be disappointed, since this internal conflict severely challenged the tolerant attitude of the Collegiants.

From this situation arose some important issues that involved Collegiant identity. How was it possible to practice unlimited tolerance with the intolerant? Did the Collegiants' tolerance work only in the presence of a complete conformity of views⁴⁴⁴. Answering this meant confronting oneself with an internal limit of tolerance. The choice to ban Lemmerman from the Collegiants' *vergadering* was the consequence of the dichotomous meaning of tolerance. The defenders of tolerance were forced to contend with the limits of it, an impasse from which it was impossible to escape. Defending the possibility of *onbepaalde verdraagzaamheid* meant to appeal to a religious life rooted in ethical behavior, a vision that led to a radical anticonfessional position. The difference between unlimited or regulated tolerance is not a superficial one: these two approaches were conceptually different and involved another theological perspective. Regulated and limited tolerance was almost used as an irenic process that was hoped to encourage a possible reunification of the Church Christi, this position involved the perspective of a possible reformation of the Church. The *onbepaalde verdraagzaamheid* is rooted, on the contrary, in the impossibility or indifference to reforming the Church, a position that has as a consequence an implicit secularization. Collegiants never sided totally with one of the two positions, they tried to assume a radical religious non-exclusivism, rejecting its secularized consequences, a behavior that made their theological definition always hesitate.

This hesitation is the line that we have to follow to reconstruct the different theological orientation of Collegiants. The possibility of conceiving a Church Reformation or the decision to understand the religious institutions in a flexible way will be the subject of theoretical conflicts inside the Collegiants movement. That was

⁴⁴⁰See VAN NIJMEGEN E., *Histoire der Rijnburgsche Vergadering*, Rotterdam, 1775. p. 140.

⁴⁴¹ZIJLMANS, *Vriendenkringen in de zeventiende eeuw*. pp. 105-125.

⁴⁴²SMOUT, *Bewijs van de Ongerechtigheit de vier Regenten van het Weeshuis*, "Aldaer ter plaetse een vrij *Collegium* zou gehouden worden, daer de vrijheit van spreken, volgens de wetten van onzen heere Jezus Christus, altijd geoeffend zou worden. Dit hebben wij, om der waeheit getuigenis te geven, met onze eigene handen onderteekend." p. 8.

⁴⁴³See SMOUT, *Copye van een Brief door Pieter Smout*. p. 4.

⁴⁴⁴As was noted by a German writer in 1743. See RUES M.S.F., *Aufrichtige Nachrichten von dem gegenwärtigen Zustande der Collegianten oder Reinsburger, einer merwürdigen Kirchlichen Gesellschaft in Den vereinigten Niederlanden*, 1743.

a problem so important as to bring into question the organizational form and the very nature of the movement itself.

Chapter 5.

Epistemology and inner light in the Collegiant movement

5.1 Introduction

5.2 The epistemological paradigm of Descartes and Spinoza

5.2.1 Balling and the *imaginatio*

5.2.2 Balling and the *scientia intuitiva*.

5.3 Collegiants' dispute with the Quakers and the position of *Het licht op den Kandelaar*

5.4 *Het licht op den Kandelaar*, the possibility of knowledge, and the inner light

5.5. The idea of God and the true religion in Balling's *Het licht op den Kandelaar*

5.1. 5.1. Introduction

The Collegiants' radical practice of tolerance and their anticlerical approach to establishing and developing their religious organization have led to some scholars asking about secularization and rationalization tendencies inside the movement. Andrew Fix, in his book *Prophecy and Reason. The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment*⁴⁴⁵, proposes a detailed analysis of the radical change in rationality, which arose in the movement from 1659. For Fix the articulation of the rational proposal in the Collegiants started with Abrahamsz's formulation of "a Church Unholy" in the *XIX Artikelen*. The theorization of the absence of the Holy Spirit in the Churches, the congregations, and all religious institutions opened the way inside the movement to a rationalization of the approach to the divinity. The Collegiants were able to absorb and adapt in the religious field the improvements of the Scientific Revolution⁴⁴⁶ and of the rational influences of Socinianism. The confidence in human

⁴⁴⁵FIX A., *Prophecy and Reason. The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1991. pp. 134-185.

⁴⁴⁶To understand the role of the Scientific Revolution in the Dutch context see: VAN BERKEL K., *The Dutch Republic. Laboratory of the Scientific Revolution, Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 125, 2010. pp. 81-107.

reason was a legacy of humanism and of the new philosophy, which took the name of Cartesianism. Fix's writing is precious for full comprehension of the spread and contamination of such cross-thought in the Collegiant movement: their most interesting feature was being a field of experimentation for the relationship between science and religion in the 17th century.

According to Fix the turning points in the history of the Collegiant movement are to be found in the elaboration of Abrahamsz and Spruyt's *XIX Artikelen* and in the understanding of the rational inner light, a principle based on natural reason as a source of truth, which testifies to the progressive transformation of spirituality into rationalism. As shown in the Chapter 4, however, the acceptance of the Spinozist discourse and the penetration of his radical rational approach had a limit among the Collegiants, well represented by the reaction to Bredenburg's position. In the same way, the conversion of the spiritual and mystic approach to the concept of rational inner light represented a trend limited to only certain Collegiants' works. It seems necessary, indeed, to rethink the membership of the Collegiants as split in two parts, of which second embraced progressive rationalization and secularization.

The question about the rationalization process in religion presents, as argued by Kolakowski, a very particular paradox⁴⁴⁷. The declaration of self exclusion from a religious institution and the indifferentism to Christian rituals more often constituted the behavior of those who were absorbed by religious problems rather than those who practiced hidden atheism (the libertines). It is necessary, to understand this paradox, to grasp the two different models, which characterized two different approaches to religious indifferentism. One approach was deism or *religio naturalis*, a particular indifferentism towards religion that spread among scientists as well as the theologians. This was often not motivated by Reformer sentiments: it was based on the conviction that in religious matters it was possible to accept dogmas that could be found by natural rationality; for irrational dogmas it was sufficient to exercise a personal choice to believe. On the contrary, the open anticonfessionalism approach was adopted by strong religious interests and had less to do with intellectual indifferentism. The objective was to formulate a global reflection of the religious structure, which could lead to an open Reformation or to ideals of *religio universalis* (irenicism). As shown in the second chapter this difference in approach played a central role in the evolution of the concept of nonconformity on the basis of previous Nicodemism and indifferentism. For the second approach open anticonfessionalism played an important role in ecumenism, spirituality, and mysticism as well as the new rational ideas of the 17th century, which were used in accordance with strictly religious premises.

Looking at the different participants in the Collegiant movement, their varying reactions to the theme of rationalism, to the new Cartesian philosophy, and their conception of religion under these premises, it can be useful to delineate the importance that the trend towards the rational had inside the movement. Discovering the penetration of this tendency is also useful to answer another question, that is, to understand the role that the Collegiants played in the first expansion of the early Radical Enlightenment. The term Radical Enlightenment, as Jonathan Israel has described it in his book *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*⁴⁴⁸, denotes a cognitive and cultural change due to the

⁴⁴⁷See: KOLAKOWSKI L., *Chrétiens sans Église. La Conscience religieuse et le lien confessionnel au XVIIe siècle*, Édition Gallimard, Paris, 1987. pp. 208-209.

⁴⁴⁸ISRAEL J.I., *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, New

rationalization of the modern world, which turned in its political and religious declination proposing emancipation and antiauthoritarianism. For Israel the turmoil created by the Scientific Revolution and the new philosophical ideas had as consequences a crisis among the intellectual elites⁴⁴⁹, which suddenly experienced its expression and impact on the common people and the bourgeois life⁴⁵⁰. In the second half of the 17th century progressive rationalism moved closer to the religious sphere, with a gradual decline of the common beliefs in the existence of Hell and magic, with widespread Skepticism about the soul's immortality, and questioning of the reality of spirits and demons.⁴⁵¹ Israel does not forget, in presenting this atmosphere of general change and progress, to mention the vigorous forces that acted against the Radical Enlightenment. Within these forces was the Counter-Reformation, understood as reorganization of authoritarian structures around control of belief and political organization as promoter of cultural and social cohesion. The most efficient instruments of this doctrinal supervision were, according to Israel, the Calvinist *consistoires* and the Spanish Inquisition⁴⁵². These forces acted as a real factor in the Counter-Enlightenment, but also had the role of radicalizing the relationship that the new philosophy and scientific ideas played in the critique of ecclesiastical authority. The fragmentation of religious institutions and authority, religious pluralism, and polynomism do not, however, easily combine into a coherent and massive strategy to face the spread of the new ideas.

The machinery of power tried to repress all the rationalist tendencies, both moderate and radical. According to Israel, it is necessary to distinguish the Radical Enlightenment from, also in its first expansion, the moderate/mainstream Enlightenment:

Among its primary spokesmen were Newton and Locke in England, Thomasius and Wolff in Germany, the "Newtonians" Nieuwentijt and 's-Gravesande in the Netherlands, and Feijóo and Piquer, in Spain. This was the Enlightenment which aspired to conquer ignorance and superstition, establish toleration, and revolutionize ideas, education, and attitudes by means of philosophy but in such a way as to preserve and safeguard what were judged essential elements of the older structures, effecting a viable synthesis of old and new, and of reason and faith. [...] By contrast, the Radical Enlightenment, whether on an atheistic or deistic basis, rejected all compromise with the past and sought to sweep away existing structures entirely, rejecting the Creation as traditionally understood in Judaeo-Christian civilization, and the intervention of a providential God in human affairs, denying the possibility of miracles, and reward and punishment in an afterlife, scorning all forms of ecclesiastical authority, and refusing to accept that there is any God-ordained social hierarchy [...] From its origins in the 1650s and 1660s, the philosophical radicalism of the European Early Enlightenment characteristically combined immense deism, if not outright materialism and atheism, along with unmistakably republican, even democratic tendencies ⁴⁵³.

These were the limits within which fitted the differences between the moderate or mainstream Enlightenment and the Radical one. These borders were naturally continuously crossed, especially in the case of the Collegiants, where near a radical

York, Oxford University Press, , 2001.

⁴⁴⁹Ibid. pp. 14-22.

⁴⁵⁰A study of the nature of Dutch society in the 17th century is PRAK M., *The Dutch Republic as Bourgeois Society*, in *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, vol. 125, 2010. pp. 107-141.

⁴⁵¹ISRAEL, *Radical Enlightenment*. pp. 6-20.

⁴⁵²Ibid. p. 7.

⁴⁵³Ibid. pp. 11-12.

anticlericalism it was possible to find a conservative political position and always an explicit and official refutation of atheism. The development of a radical position about religion always concerned the organization and the power structure of the Churches or congregations but rarely amounted to a criticism of religion *tout court*. The critique of religious systems and organization did not mean a global criticism of law systems and authority.

“The crisis of European conscience,” as Paul Hazard named it in 1935, is a useful concept to describe the context in which the system of knowledge developed in the 17th century. As we showed in the second chapter, the existence of a pluralistic confessional system with the coexistence of different norms of belief and redemption did not avoid the presence of uniformity and a consequent nonconformity in religious behavior. The same happened in the field of knowledge, where the spread of mechanization did not mean a decline in Scholastic Aristotelianism. The individual and collective traumas of the change in system of thought had as a result a mental split between belief and rational argumentation. The Skepticism that permeated theoretical elaboration from Montaigne to Bayle and the new philosophy of Descartes represented a new state of mind, which, contrary to the ancients’ suspension of judgment, turned to anxiety and despair⁴⁵⁴. These consequences were particularly visible in the case of Pascal, with his *deus absconditus*, but also in the thought of those considered the principal contributors in the sciences. Newton commented on the Apocalypse and Descartes, in his arithmetical definition of reality, could not renounce the existence of a nondeceiver God. Modern astronomy and medicine were not separate from the eschatological perspective and the text of the Bible was used by scientists to interpret chiliastically the historical events of the century⁴⁵⁵. As suggested by Popkin⁴⁵⁶, Skepticism played an important role in religious controversies and in the development of a religious Skepticism that evolved into a particular form of fideism. Religious anxiety, tendencies of spiritual reformation, and the deep examination of oneself as the instrument for discussing the faith were part of the “rational behavior” of the 17th century. The censure of religious authority, if it did not become implicit criticism of political and social power structures, redefined the structure of belief, in particular the approach to the truth.

The Collegiants had the right to occupy a place in the history of the Radical Enlightenment, especially if we look at their position on Church organization and their criticism of all religions as institutions of power. What is questionable, however, is the place the Collegiants occupied in the spread of the “new philosophy” and in the reception of the new mechanistic theory as a framework for the coeval philosophical and scientific discourses. It should be noted that the concept of Enlightenment and its origin and development in the 17th-century Dutch context had a controversial history. As suggested by Mijnhardt⁴⁵⁷, the semantic development of the term Enlightenment

⁴⁵⁴See: SORELL T., ed., *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension Between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz*, Oxford University Press, 2000.

⁴⁵⁵See: WEBSTER C., *From Paracelsus to Newton. Magic and the Making of Modern Science*. Cambridge University Press, 1982.

⁴⁵⁶POPKIN R.H. *The Role of Scepticism in Modern Philosophy Reconsidered*, in *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 31, no. 4, October 1993; POPKIN R.H., *Prophecy and Scepticism in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century*, in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 1, March 1996.

⁴⁵⁷MIJNHARDT W.W., *Urbanization, Culture and the Dutch Origins of the European Enlightenment*,

testifies to the overlapping of two contrary meanings. The Dutch words *Verlichting* and *verlicht* (Enlightenment and enlightened) meant both enlightened by reason and by the Holy Spirit. Only at the end of the 17th century did this term seem to lose this contradictory meaning, to be vulgarized and used with a semantic connotation able to include both religious and secular meanings. Further, Mijnhardt suggests that the main characteristic of the Dutch Enlightenment was the outcome of a moderate compromise between religion and philosophy. All radical expression in religion, as well as in philosophy, was controlled and subjugated. This situation was mirrored in the political situation because “from the 1670s on, all stadholders were content to enhance their political power within the federal republican system. Moreover, Dutch intellectuals were now also prepared to praise their country's political and religious system, as can be shown from the *Boeksaal van Europe* (1692-1702), the first Dutch journal in the vernacular and intended for a general public unable to read Latin. Its founder was Pieter Rabus (1660-1702), a Rotterdam Latin schoolteacher of Arminian origins. The journal may be characterized as a mirror of the moderates' compromise: Newtonian as well as Cartesian, averse to all radicalism in religious and political matters⁴⁵⁸.”

This vision is partly shared by Van der Wall⁴⁵⁹, who argues that the first Dutch Enlightenment was characterized by a debate between morals and religion. This was inclined to search for moral values in order to ensure ethical stability in a society prone to large swings. These moral values, however, were, at the end of the 17th century, sought less and less in religion or theology. Philosophy played, according to Van der Wall, a central role in this process of de-theologization of morality, while the shift from theology to philosophy was often labeled with terms denoting unbelief, irreligion, and atheism. Central to understanding this process of de-theologization was the debate about the role of prophecy and Bible interpretation, and the growth of critical exegesis, especially with secular instruments. These were in contrast to the *theologia prophetica*, which claimed to construct a scientific methodology to read Bible prophecy as revelation of the historical future⁴⁶⁰.

The Collegiants constituted a field of application for these different tendencies. Meijer's philosophical exegesis of the Bible⁴⁶¹ and Serrarius's fascination with oracles and the millenarian and mystical vision of history were both part of Collegiant identity and both unacceptable to the official *theologia prophetica*, which reached the status of academic discipline under the leadership of Cocceius. The fundamental opposition between faith and reason, which lasted the whole 17th century, was, however, never the principal concern in Collegiants' text publication; it is for this reason that they never itemized their use of the terms *licht* or *verlicht*. The core of Collegiant religious behavior was essentially following another plan, that of

Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden, vol. 125, 2010. pp. 141-179.

⁴⁵⁸MIJNHARDT W.W., *The Construction of Silence: Religious and Political Radicalism in Dutch History*, in VAN BUNGE W., (ed.), *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic, 1650-1750*, Brill, Leiden, 2003. pp. 257-258.

⁴⁵⁹VAN DER WALL E., *The Religious Context of the Early Dutch Enlightenment: Moral Religion and Society*, in VAN BUNGE W., (ed.), *The Early Enlightenment in the Dutch Republic, 1650-1750*, Brill, Leiden, 2003.

⁴⁶⁰*Ibid.* pp. 42-52.

⁴⁶¹MEIJER L., *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres: exercitatio paradoxa in qua veram philosophiam infallibilem S. Literas interpretandi normam esse apodictice demonstratur et discrepantes ab hac sententiae expendentur ac refelluntur*, Eleutheropoli [= Amsterdam], 1666.

discussion of egalitarian and democratic participation inside the religious community, and tolerance. The themes of prophecy and exegesis were, thereby, tied to their anticonfessional exigences. Not surprisingly it is very difficult to find in Collegiants' texts (a particular case excepted), a direct reference to the struggle between faith and reason. The choice between the enthusiastic embrace of a mystical union with God and the understanding of reason as a means to the revealed truth was not seen by the Collegiants as a Manichaean question. Although it is possible to place the Collegiants in the cultural sphere of the Radical Enlightenment⁴⁶², it is not advisable to use this definition as a line of separation between mystical or enthusiastic behavior and rational. This continuous *mélange* of mystical and rational arguments as the basis for religious antiauthoritarianism is evident in the elaboration of the concept of light. Only some years after the composition of Balling's *Het licht op den Kandelaar*⁴⁶³ (The light upon the candlestick), the question about light and the "Enlightenment" become dominant in the works of Pierre Poiret, under mystical and visionary fascination with Antoinette Bourignon. The mysticism that dominated the irenic project of Pieter Serrarius, at least before the rupture of 1677, was a direct consequence of captivation by both Poiret and Bourignon.

The attempt to separate these mystical tendencies from radical, anticonfessional, and egalitarian options is not the best way, as shown in Chapter 2, to understand the cultural milieu and the changeable mentality in the 17th century. For the same reason the reality of religious relations in the 17th century appears very complex, upsetting all possible categorizations. This phenomenon is very clear in the case of Thomasiaus: consider the pioneer of the German early Enlightenment, but who shared and defended the ideas of mystics like Poiret⁴⁶⁴. The common ground on which these two authors operated should be researched in the social and political consequences of radical rejection of any form of structured confession. On this basis it is possible to identify different visions of knowledge and different ways to think or rethink the faith.

To discuss the degree of rationality of the Collegiants means not only looking at their religious responses and proposals, but also investigating to what extent the new conceptual framework functioned and was transformed inside the movement. The discussions within the Collegiants and their thoughts about religion and Bible exegesis resulted in an ambivalent and oscillating position between the spiritual and rational choices. From these discussions emerged a fundamental question about the way to regard religion: as an obedience machine that applies and develops its power on human sentiments and irrationality or as a means of emancipation and salvation. To answer this question and consider what was conceived as "rational" in the 17th century, it is necessary to analyze briefly the philosophical background of the Collegiant movement, such as the works of Descartes and Spinoza.

⁴⁶²See: ISRAEL J.I., *Enlightenment Contested. Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752*, Oxford University Press, 2006.

⁴⁶³See: HYLKEMA C.B., *Reformateurs. Geschiedkundige studien over de godsdienstige bewegingen uit de nadagen onzer Gouden Eeuw*, vol. I, Boum'a Boekhuis/Bert Hagen, Groningen/Amsterdam 1978. pp. 151-154.

⁴⁶⁴See: KORP H.A., *Fides et Ratio: An Early Enlightenment Defence of Non-confessional Religion by Poiret and his Circle*, in *Church History and Religious Culture*, Leiden, Brill, CHRC 90.I, 2010.

5.2. 5.2. *The epistemological paradigm of Descartes and Spinoza*

Between 1629 and 1649 Descartes lived in Holland, to find in its tolerant climate the conditions to work on his philosophy⁴⁶⁵. From 1656 the *Doopsgezinde* and Collegiant Jan Hendrik Glazemaker started the translation of Descartes's works, published by Jan Rieuwerts⁴⁶⁶. The philosophy of Descartes spread and was successful over the whole of the Netherlands, and penetrated the universities, in particular the University of Leiden, as a "new philosophy⁴⁶⁷." In the second half of the 17th century, talk about Cartesian philosophy became a debate about its conformity to the religious orthodoxy; it was used as a powerful access tool against the new Scholastic and Aristotelian teaching. During the century the exchanges between Cartesian and anti-Cartesian developed into the possibility of a rational theology⁴⁶⁸. The discussions about the possible comprehension of God, the relationship with reality and the presence of a Holy Spirit in the world, and the problems of knowledge or production of the truth, were the main preoccupations of radical religious groups and movements such as the Collegiants. The epistemology of Descartes and Spinoza can be regarded as the philosophical ground on which was made the mystic or rational choice of the Collegiants. Analyzing Descartes and Spinoza's positions on the possibility of knowledge of God can be useful for understanding how far this philosophy penetrated into the Collegiants' discussion.

During the 17th century the definition of the approach and method to reach the truth became a battle fought to confront different models: to investigate nature and to practice science. Descartes tried to stem Skepticism with clear and distinct knowledge based on mathematical ideas. The language in which to interpret nature was scientific knowledge constructed on mathematical and geometrical principles. Only these two disciplines were considered proper means to reach clear and distinct knowledge, because they had the capacity to build a model to understand the empirical world and to stem the errors of imagination. The mathematical foundation unified the epistemological and ontological horizons and provided the basis for the development of Cartesian metaphysics. This approach to reality and its comprehension was the Cartesian youth project: the *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* (Rules for the direction of the mind), 1628. The science in this early text by Descartes, as affirms Negri in his

⁴⁶⁵See: VV. AA. *Descartes et le cartésianisme hollandais*, PUF, Editions Française d'Amsterdam, Paris/Amsterdam, 1950; THIJSSSEN_SCHOUTE C.L., *Nederlands Cartesianisme*, Hes Uitgevers Bv, Utrecht 1989. See also: DIBON P., *Regards sur la Hollande du siècle d'or*, Vivarium, Napoli,, 1990.

⁴⁶⁶See: THIJSSSEN-SCHOUTE C.L., *Le Cartésianisme aux Pays-Bas*, in DEUGD, D.E., ed., *Spinoza's Political and Theological Thought*, North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Oxford/New York, 1984.

⁴⁶⁷Even the most orthodox preacher like Voëtius considered it necessary to read and study different opinions from various confessions (even Hebraism and Islam). About the teaching in the Dutch universities see: BROEYER F.G.M. *Theological education at the Dutch universities in the seventeenth century: four professors on their ideal of the curriculum*, in *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, vol. 85, no. 1-4, 2005. See also: MCGAHAGAN T.A., *Cartesianism in the Netherlands, 1639-1676. The New Science and the Calvinist Counter-Reformation*, Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1976.

⁴⁶⁸See: SCRIBANO E., *Da Descartes a Spinoza: percorsi della teologia razionale nel Seicento*, Franco Angeli, 1988.

Descartes politico o della ragionevole ideologia, has the task of producing a model to match reality: “Nel rapporto fra strumento gnoseologico ed ordine metafisico si chiarisce così lo stesso progetto delle *Regulae*: definire la scienza nel suo nucleo produttivo, esprimere la verità del suo rapporto con l'essere [...] la scienza è perciò anche norma interna alla struttura dell'essere, consapevolezza di un movimento e di un eventuale limite che sono determinati dallo stesso ordine dell'essere⁴⁶⁹.” A project using science that has the language of mathematics as the norm of the structure of existence is clearly expressed in *Regula I*.

After 1629 Descartes moved to the Netherlands and there he lived as if “dans le désert”. This period coincided with a radical rethink of mathematical reality. For a language able to understand the universe, Descartes substituted an external and transcendental will: God. The language of mathematics and science was no longer a useful means to unify the universe and to understand the essence of thought. This position was expressed in his definitive manner in Descartes’s mature work the *Meditations* and the *Discourse on the Method*.

In the *Meditations* Descartes tried to solve three different problems: the foundation of truth, the limits of human knowledge, and the foundation of the natural sciences⁴⁷⁰. Descartes became his *Meditations* using a Skeptical doubt, the methodological doubt, to establish the basis of indubitable knowledge provided by a rational principle: the *cogito*. This principle acted in radical separation from reality and found the epistemological foundation of clear and distinct knowledge in a transcendental will. The *cogito* represented the source of all knowledge and also the primacy of the thinking Substance over the extension. This superiority of the mind was founded on the *impuissance* of the body, unable to be active without the mind. The institution of a transcendental guarantor of rational knowledge was the only basis on which to construct its certainty. The intuition of the internal rational light (*sola rationis luce*) became the true comprehension of reality. In Descartes, intuition has to be understood as a faculty of the pure mind that gave no space to doubt. True knowledge acted as knowledge of the essence of things, which were present in the intuition in the form of universals, through an abstraction of our mind. The universals were, therefore, built as pure abstraction, which had no existence outside thought.⁴⁷¹

The “not a deceiver” God represented the infinite and absolute principle, which was, however, impossible to know using reason. This transcendental tension and the radical separation from empirical reality represented, as suggested by Negri⁴⁷², mystical stress, outcome of the crisis of thought in the 17th century. Descartes trying to reject Skepticism established knowledge that depended for its certainty on a transcendental will and implicit reaffirmation, especially concerning the power of knowledge of human reason. Descartes was, consequently, “un sceptique malgré lui,” as Gassendi described him in his response to the *Meditations*.

Descartes found in the division of the subject, split between the dual Substances of mind and body, a valid basis on which to base his epistemological paradigm. Descartes thought this was the difference between intellect and imagination. The intellect was a pure mind's understanding, while the imagination knew only consideration of some

⁴⁶⁹NEGRI A., *Descartes politico o della ragionevole ideologia*, Manifestolibri, Roma, 2007. pp. 39-40.

⁴⁷⁰See: GUERLUT M., *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons*, Aubier, 1968.

⁴⁷¹See Descartes' *Principle I*.

⁴⁷²NEGRI, *Descartes politico*. p. 80.

material form⁴⁷³. The answer to the question on the reality of the world remained, in the Cartesian epistemology, a pure image. The separation of the subject corresponded to that of the scientific and pragmatic methods to access the internal means of knowledge. Physics and metaphysics were no more able to communicate on the same level. What followed from this system was the uncertainty, not only of human reason but also of the true self, the solitude of the ego, and an *ascetismo laico*⁴⁷⁴.

In 1633 Descartes formulated and wrote one of his last scientific treatises: *Traité du monde et de la lumière*. In the same year he learned about the condemnation of Galileo and decided not to publish his book. This episode made explicit Descartes's external and formal conformity to the decisions of the Church, which were in conflict with his scientific vision. With this issue, truth became a stringent problem for Descartes. In the treatise we read:

Me proposant de traiter ici de la Lumiere, la premiere chose dont je veux vous avertir est, qu'il peut y avoir de la difference entre le entiment que nous en avons; c'est á dire l'idée qui s'en forme en nostre imagination, par le moyen de nos yeux, & ce qui est dans la flame ou dans le Soleil qui est appellé du nom de Lumiere. Car encore que chacun se persuade communément que les idées que nous avons en nostre pensée, sont entierement semblables aux objets dont elles procedent, je ne vois point toutefois de raison qui nous assure que cela soit vray [...] c'est notre esprit tout de mesme, qui nous represente l'idée de la Lumiere toutes les fois que l'action qui la signifie, touche notre oeil⁴⁷⁵.

Here was realized the total arbitrariness of the world as a materiality perceived through the senses. Knowledge of existence was not revealed by a demonstration or by science: for Descartes this was the consequence of the internal conscience⁴⁷⁶.

In these years, not only Descartes's vision but the whole scientific perspective was subjected to the same crisis. Near the mechanistic approach to reality, with its aim to substitute for the Scholastic physic, we always find the true as a product of divine creation. *Scientia naturalis* was, compared to the eternal truth of God, a human product with human criteria of knowledge. It was impossible to find any materialism or atheism in this concept of nature, because the operation of the universe was always dependent on a divine design.

The ontological and metaphysical adversary of Descartes was Spinoza. For many Collegiants he was the second main philosophical reference, in particularly for Jarig Jelles and Pieter Balling. In 1656 Spinoza was subjected to the *herem* (expulsion) from the Jewish community in Amsterdam. After five years, when life in the city was to become too dangerous for him, he decided to move to Rijnsburg. It is very probably that Spinoza was supported in his decision by his friend Balling, with whom he was in contact because of his past work as a merchant⁴⁷⁷. Spinoza, indeed, accepted

⁴⁷³See response to *Meditation VI*.

⁴⁷⁴Ibid. p. 98.

⁴⁷⁵DESCARTES R., *Le Monde de Mr Descartes, ou le Traité de la Lumiere et des autres principaux objets des Sens*, Paris, 1664. p. 2

⁴⁷⁶See the response to *Meditation VI*.

⁴⁷⁷The friendship with Balling and Jelles and the contacts that Spinoza had with the Collegiants represent a historiographical problem that goes under the name of *cercle spinoziste*. Meinsma published in 1896 a book with much information about the relationships between Spinoza and the radical religious groups of his time: *Spinoza en zijn kirng* (Spinoza and his circle). The proximity of Spinoza and the communication between him and his circle became a problem for the scholar in the discussion of his ideological influences and orientation. Carl Gebhardt (1881-1934) interpreted,

hospitality from a member of the Rijnsburg *collegia*, Herman Homan⁴⁷⁸. That period was very fruitful for Spinoza, who, at the request of his friends, wrote the *Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae Pars I & II* (Principles of Descartes's philosophy), published in 1663, with an appendix, the *Cogitata Metaphysica*, where he illustrated the differences between his philosophy and Descartes's. At that time he also wrote the *Korte Verhandeling van God, de mensch en deszelvs welstand* (A short treatise on God, man, and his well-being). The former treatise was the result of the exposure of Cartesian philosophy to a student at Leiden University: Johannes Caesar⁴⁷⁹. In 1664 Pieter Balling translated the *Principiorum* into Dutch, to make this Cartesian philosophy compendium accessible to those not able to read Latin. The second text, the *Korte Verhandeling van God*, circulated in the form of a manuscript among Spinoza's friends; it was published for the first time in 1862 by Jan van Volten. This treatise, divided into two volumes, was an elaboration of Spinoza's concept of God and of his epistemology, which he developed completely in the *Ethics*.

The intention of Spinoza's friends was to unmask those who used their authority to impose an incorrect vision of God and of the common good.

Spinoza began his treatise with the definition of God and of the Substance, as he would later do in the *Ethics*. Here we find the first radical criticism of Descartes; Spinoza did not recognize the possibility of the existence of two separate Substances. This theory had a strong impact on the interaction with reality, because the Substance was no longer understood as a transcendental principle but as an immanent cause. This *expression* of the substance in the final modes was never described by Spinoza in an emanative form. In the *Kort Verhandeling* was the first outline of the theory of modal existence: the Substance and the world were different and the modes were immanent modifications of the only infinite Substance.

With this metaphysical theory Spinoza conceived the body and the mind as modes. In this phase of his theoretical elaboration Spinoza was still very close to Cartesian language and some hesitations remained regarding the concept of the mind as the idea of an existent body, with these two codependent modes, composed of the unity of thought and extension. As stated in the *Ethics*, each significant difference between mind and body disappears and the two are conceived as modes acting in parallel. The double concept of the mind as an idea of finite body but also as an idea of the eternity of the Substance was the foundation on which Spinoza constructed his first tripartite theory of knowledge.

Waan dan noemen wij die omdat ze de dooling onderwurpen is, en nooit plaats heeft in iets daar wij zeker van sijn, maar wel daarvan gissen en meynen gesproken word. Geloof dan noemen wy de tweede omdat die dingen die wij alleen door de rede vatten van ons niet en worden gezien, maar zijn alleen aan ons bekend door overtuiging in 't verstand dat het soo en niet anders moet zijn. Maar klare keennisse noemen wij dat 't welk niet en is door overtuiging van reden maar door een gevoelen, en genieten van de zaake zelve, en gaat de andere verre te bove.

in his copious articles about Spinoza and his social context, Spinozist philosophy as *religio methaphysica*, showing how Spinoza's *Ethics* was oriented towards the mystical and religious works of his friends. This vision was seriously questioned by Madeleine Francés in her *Spinoza dans les pays néerlandais de la seconde moitié du XVII siècle* (1937). She tried to eliminate from the Spinozist circle all confessional influences to limit it to the libertines and *esprits libres*.

⁴⁷⁸NADLER S., *Spinoza: A Life*, Cambridge University Press, 2001. p. 182.

⁴⁷⁹See: letter 9 to Oldenburg.

Dit dan vooraf zo laat ons nu koomen tot haare uijtwerkingen waarvan wij dit seggen dat namelyk uijt de eerste hervoorkomt alle de lydinge (passien) die daar streydig zijn tegen de goede reden.

Uyt de tweede de doede Begeerten, en uyt de derde de waare en oprechte Liefde met alle haar uijtspruijtzels. Alzo dat wij dan de naaste oorzaak van alle de lydingen in de Ziele, de kennisse stellen. Want wy 't eenemaal onmogelijk achten, dat zo iemand op de voorgaande (gronden en) wijzen noch begrijpt noch kent, hy tot Liefde ofte Begeerte of eenige andere wyzen van Wille zoude kunnen bewogen worden.⁴⁸⁰

Spinoza, in his critique of Cartesian metaphysics, elaborated and divulged in the *Kort Verhandeling* an essential part of his determinism with the difference between *entia rationis* and *entia realia*.

This kind of concept of God, of Nature, and of the human being involves as consequence a sharp criticism of the anthropomorphous religion, a critique that Spinoza developed and perfected later in the *Tractatus Theologico- Politicus*. The argument against the idea of God affected by human sentiments and the revelation as the will of God was a radical assault on traditional Christian theology. These concepts of revealed religion and the division between the three form of knowledge had a strong impact, as will be shown, on Balling's *Het licht* and, more generally, on the Collegiants' understanding of religion.

The epistemological positions of Descartes and Spinoza, of which we attempt short summaries here, were important theoretical premises to help understand how the Collegiants developed their relationships with reality and how they grasped the possibility of knowledge.

5.2.1. 5.2.1 Balling and the *imaginatio*

In July 1664 Spinoza replied to a letter from Pieter Balling about the death of the latter's son and the power of imagination⁴⁸¹. This letter (only Spinoza's answer survived) testified to the amicable relationship between the two men and provided some information about the obscure biography of Pieter Balling. As we know from Spinoza's reply, Balling wrote his preceding letter to ask the philosopher about a premonition of the disease and death of his son. Spinoza answered his friend characterizing these premonitions as the power effects of the imagination.

Spinoza defined the imagination, in this letter, as a constant concatenation of images. Reality, as well as unreality, was a product of this chain, which was a way of understanding it. In this letter Spinoza introduced, for the first time, a difference between the images caused by the body and those caused by the mind. To the mind, indeed, Spinoza entrusted the possibility of predicting the future, but only in a confused and unclear way. From him this meant the possibility of predicting the causal connection of reality.

Effectus imaginationis ex constitutione vel Corporis, vel Mentis oriuntur. [...] Videmus etiam imaginationem tantummodo ab animae constitutione derterminari, quandoquidem, ut ex experimus, intellectus vestigia in omnibus sequitur, & suas imagines, ac verba ex ordine, sicuti suas demonstrationes intellectus, concatenat, & invicem connectit; adeó ut fere nihil possimus intelligere, de

⁴⁸⁰Ibid. Second Part. Cap. II.

⁴⁸¹On this letter see: BERTRAND M., *Spinoza et l'imaginaire*, Paris, 1983; MIGNINI F., "Ars imaginandi". *Apparenza e rappresentazione in Spinoza*, Naples, 1981. See also: LAUX H., *Imagination et religion chez Spinoza. La "potentia" dans l'histoire*, Paris, 1993.

quo imaginatio non aliquam é vestigio formet imaginem. Hoc cum ita sit, dico, omnes imaginationis effectus, quae á corporeis causis procedunt, nunquam rerum futurarum posse esse *omina*; quia corundem causae nullas res futuras involvunt. Sed veró imaginationis effectus, vel imagines, quae originem suam ab Mentis constitutione ducunt, possunt alicujus rei futurae esse *omina*; quia Mens aliquid, quod futurum est, eonfuse potest praesentire⁴⁸².

However, certain conditions are necessary for the realization of this premonition:

I. Si caus, qui filio in vitae decursu accidet, notabilis erit. II. Si talis erit, quem facillimé imaginari possumus III. Si tempus, quo hic continget casus, non admodum remotum est. IV. Denique si corpus bene constitutum est, non tantum quod sanitatem spectat; sed etiam si liberum, & omnibus curis & negotiis vacuum est, quae externe sensu turbant⁴⁸³.

As shown above, in Spinoza the theory of knowledge was a process of progressive removal of the error, starting with the imagination and developing itself through rational knowledge and the *intelligere*. The mathematics represented for Spinoza the way in which the rational mind knows. It was a norm to understand reality, the behavior of the human body and its complex “geometry of passions”.

In 1664, at the time of the first elaboration of the *Ethics*, Spinoza in his answer to Balling was already conscious of the power and importance of the theory of imagination. In the second book of the *Ethics*, dedicated to the mind (*De Mente*), Spinoza defined or, it is better to say, redefined a *verba usitata*: the imagination. We could, according to Spinoza, be affected by two different types of *imago*: the material one, which was the formation of the image in the eye, and the mental image. As the first type of knowledge the imagination did not represent a mistake *per se*, but showed an incorrect way to understand the reality (only when the subject was deprived of consciousness):

Porró, ut verba usitata retineamus, Corporis humani affectiones, quarum ideae Corpora externa, velut nobis praesentia repraesentant, rerum imagines vocabimus, tametsi rerum figuras non referunt. Et cum Mens hac ratione contemplatur corpora, eandem imaginari dicemus. Atque hic, ut, quid sit error, indicare incipiam, notetis velim, Mentis imaginationes in se spectatas, nihil erroris continere, sive Mentem ex eo, quod imaginatus, non errare; sed tantum, quatenus consideratus, carere idea, quae existentiam illarum rerum, quas sibi praesentes imaginatus, scilicet. Nam si Mens, dum res non existentes, ut sibi praesentes, imaginatus, simul sciret, res illas revera non existere, hanc sané imaginandi potentiam virtuti suae naturae, non vitio tribueret, praesertim si haec imaginandi facultas á sola sua natura penderet, hoc est (per def 7.p.I.) si haec Mentis imaginandi facultas libera esset⁴⁸⁴.

In the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* Spinoza used this definition of imagination, dealing with prophecy and denying the possibility of finding true knowledge in the Scriptures. The danger of the prophets was, then, in confusing the imagination with the intellection. The prophet did not, for Spinoza, have a more developed mind, but a powerful imagination. The excitation of the imagination was the only way to communicate with uncultivated Jewish people. The use of metaphor, however, was an imperfect way to communicate, because it produced an identification of the image with the concept. Spinoza recognized in prophetic speech the only means of constructing and stabilizing the early Jews' political life.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸²SPINOZA B., *Opera Postuma*, Amsterdam, 1677. Letter to Balling (no. XXX).

⁴⁸³Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴Ibid. (EII, 17 schol)

⁴⁸⁵Ibid. (TTP Cap. II §19).

The imagination worked in the same powerful way with the image that the human being had of God. Understanding God as a king⁴⁸⁶ or with anthropomorphous characteristics were the results of a limited capacity of distinguish between imagination and intellection. The human being had a tendency to understand God in an unclear way because of the impossibility of thinking about God without the help of images, by which human beings were continuously affected. Spinoza, however, did not deny that the mind could have a clear and adequate knowledge of God:

Mens humana ideas habet [...] ex quibus [...] se suumque corpus [...] et [...] corpora externa ut actu existentia percipit adeoque [...] cognitionem aeternae et infinitae essentiae Dei habet adaequatam⁴⁸⁷.

Adequate knowledge is possible because the human being is *pars naturae*. The imagination is, indeed, not a pure negative quality in human nature, which provides a kind of knowledge of reality via a concatenation of images. Understanding this reality is fundamental to knowing the working of the imagination with the help of rationality. This is in the nature of the reason that the contemplation of reality becomes necessary and not contingent⁴⁸⁸. Only with comprehension of absolute contingency and acknowledgment of the power effects of imagination is it possible to construct a correct epistemology. If we remain confused by the effect and the concatenation of a different image, the main results are superstition and belief in falsity. The power of human knowledge has, indeed, much potential to develop a powerful status. It is only in this way that Skepticism works in Spinoza's philosophy, e.g. without denying the positive construction of a theory of knowledge.

The definition of imagination as an ambiguous knowledge process is always present in Spinoza's work. The *Ethics* has to be thought of as a human itinerary to liberate the mind to the mistake. Imagination as well as rationality have to be understood as part of the process leading directly to the full development of the mind's potentiality: the third kind of knowledge, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

5.2.2. 5.2.2 **Balling and the *scientia intuitiva***

The third kind of knowledge, *sub specie aeternitatis*, was, as we said before, not fully developed when Spinoza wrote the *Korte Verhandeling*, and the definition of *sub specie aeternitatis* was not used in this earlier Spinozist treatise. Spinoza seems to develop only in the *Ethics* the definitive⁴⁸⁹ difference between the infinite and the eternal mind. Was the concept of the mind as eternal what found the third kind of knowledge⁴⁹⁰? Eternity is existence as eternal truth, the necessary consequence of the

⁴⁸⁶Ibid. (E II 3 schol).

⁴⁸⁷Ibid. (E II 47 dem).

⁴⁸⁸Ibid. (E II 44).

⁴⁸⁹See: DI VONA P., *La conoscenza "Sub specie aeternitatis" nell'opera di Spinoza*, Loffredo, Napoli, 1995.

⁴⁹⁰On the variation of the term *Sub specie aeternitatis* and its different relations to the second and third kinds of knowledge we refer to the already quoted DI VONA, *La conoscenza*. Regarding the concept of the eternal mind and the relationship with the body, there exist different and discordant interpretations. For the difference between *concepio*, *percipio*, and the *exprimo* of the third kind of knowledge, we refer to the famous DELEUZE G., *Spinoza et le problème de l'expression*, Editions de Minuit, 1978.

only *res aeterna*, which is not conceivable through time, i.e. is understood as of infinite duration. This difference is not irrelevant in the definition of the knowledge of God in Spinoza's thought. The *res aeterna* is eternal truth; in the last part of the *Ethics* this truth is identified with God⁴⁹¹.

To speak about the rational knowledge of things, Spinoza used the verbs *contemplor* and *percipio*. *Percipio*, however, is not related only to the imagination and *contemplor* not only to the *scientia intuitiva*. When reason perceives the necessity of the *res*, at the same time it perceives the same necessity of the God's nature. With this kind of knowledge it is possible for Spinoza to achieve the rational understanding of God, such as the contemplation of the eternal things inasmuch they are eternal in God (*in Deo sunt*)⁴⁹². In part five of the *Ethics*, in proposition 30, Spinoza makes clear that the knowledge (*sub specie aeternitatis*) of God signifies the understanding to be in God, to be thought through him. With this definition of the *sub specie aeternitatis*, Spinoza laid the foundation for the definition of the third kind of knowledge: the *scientia intuitiva*. He defined it in the fifth book of *Ethics* in proposition 31 as dependent on the eternal mind.

It is not our intention to illustrate further the complexity of Spinoza's system of knowledge in the *Ethics*; as shown above, it is not possible to find the Dutch expression *sub specie aeternitatis* in the *Korte Verhandeling*. It is, however, necessary to know, in relation to the elaboration of the comprehension of God in the Collegiant movement, that the epistemological theory of Spinoza has a rigorous relationship to his ontology and metaphysics. Spinoza turned upside down the traditional epistemology and expressed the exigence to found a new logic. This logic has to function not through abstraction and universals but by understanding the causal order. This kind of knowledge is the effect of a new form of truth, which is no more a product of transcendence but an act of objectivation.⁴⁹³

We assume, in absence of evidence to the contrary, that Balling was not aware of this aspect of knowledge when he wrote *Het licht* in 1662⁴⁹⁴; it is for this reason that is useful to consider the Spinozist epistemology as it was developed in the *Korte Verhandeling*. The third kind of knowledge is defined in this early treatise as *waare kennisse*, which is the cause of *liefde*:

Aangezien dan de reeden geen magt heeft on ons tot onze welstand te bregend, zo blyft dan overig dat wij onderzoeken, of wij door de vierde en leste manier van kennisse daar toe kunnen geraaken. Wij hebben dan gezeid dat deze manier van kennisse niet en is uyt gevolg van iets anders, maar door een onmiddelijke vertooninge aan het vertand van het voorwerp zelve. En zo dat voorwerp dan heerlyk is en goet, zo werd de ziele noodzaakelijc daar mede vereenigt, zo wij ook van ons lichaam gezeid hebben. Heir uyt dan volgt onwederspreekleijk; dat de kennisse die is, welke de liefde veroorzaakt. [...] dat deze vierde kennisse die daar is de kennisse Gods, niet en is door gevolg van iets anders, maar onmiddelijc blijkt uijt dat geene, dat wij te vooren bewezen hebben hem te zijn de oorzaak van alle kennisse die alleen door zich zelfs an door geen ander zaak bekend word; daar benevens ook hier uijt, omdat wij door Natuur zodanig met hem vereenigt zijn, dat wij zonder hem noch bestaan nog verstaan kunnen

⁴⁹¹See: MOUREAU P.F., *Spinoza: l'expérience de l'éternité*, PUF, 1994.

⁴⁹²SPINOZA, *Opera Postuma*. (E IV 62)

⁴⁹³BIASUTTI F., *La dottrina della scienza in Spinoza*, Patron Editore, Bologna, 1979. p. 22.

⁴⁹⁴We know from Spinoza's *Epistolary* (in a letter from S.J. De Vries) that a group of his friends was reading the first part of the *Ethics* in Amsterdam. Parts of the book were provided by Pieter Balling, who acted as intermediary. This letter suggests that in 1663, and maybe before, Balling had already read the first part of the *Ethics*, but not the second, where Spinoza writes for the first time about *sub specie aeternitatis*.

worden⁴⁹⁵.

This fast outline of Spinoza's theory of knowledge is indispensable to understanding how Balling conceives of the knowledge of God in his *Het licht*.

5.3. 5.3 Collegiants' dispute with the Quakers and the position of *Het licht op den Kandelaar*

The interest that many scholars show in Pieter Balling's life and works is due, we have to admit it, to the very important place that he occupies in Spinoza's *Epistolary*. As we showed above, Spinoza's letter to Balling is an important tessera in the elaboration of the concept of imagination and on the productivity of its power. Despite the curiosity that Balling creates, we still have very little information about his life. We know that he was a merchant in Amsterdam and that he received a solid humanist education that enabled him to read and translate from Greek and Latin. Balling was also the translator of *The Principles of Descartes's Philosophy*.

Balling produced three works: *Het licht op den Kandelaar* (1662)⁴⁹⁶, *Verdediging van de Regering der Doopsgezinde* 1663 (Dense of the government of the Mennonite community), and *Nader Verdediging van de Regering der Doopsgezinde* 1664 (Further defence of the government of the Mennonite community). The last two texts were pamphlets written to defend Galenus Abrahamsz in a polemical contest: a fight within Amsterdam's Mennonite community. With *Het licht* Balling intervened in a dispute between the Collegiants and the Quakers, as usual to support Galenus Abrahamsz. These interventions in favor of the founder of Amsterdam's *collegium* suggest that Balling shared most of Abrahamsz's positions.

The history of this book's supposed authorship is very complex: *Het licht op den Kandelaar* was published anonymously in 1662, but until 1684 was attributed both to the Quaker pastor William Ames and to Adam Boreel. In 1684 Jan Rieuwertsz, Balling's friend and the main printer of the Collegiants' texts, explained the reasons for this misunderstanding and revealed the identity of the author in the preface of *Het licht's* last edition, which was included in Jelles' *Belydenisse des Algemeenen en Christelyken Geloofs* (Confession of universal Christian belief). The circumstances that led to these mistakes were manifold: the anonymity of the author, and the different translations of *Het licht*. The book was, indeed, translated into English under the name of Ames. The inner light was a central concept in this Quaker's discourse, and we know, through Sewel's statement (see below), that Ames approved the content of the book⁴⁹⁷. Balling's text was also wrongly introduced in its Latin translation in Adam Boreel's *Opera Postuma*.

Het licht was, as we said before, published in a period of vigorous disputation

⁴⁹⁵SPINOZA B., (MIGNINI F., ed.), *Korte Verhandeling van God, de mensch en deszelvs welstand*, in *Werken van Spinoza*, vol. III (*Korte Geschriften*), cap XXII, Amsterdam, 1982. .

⁴⁹⁶BALLING P., *Het licht op den Kandelaar. Dienende tot opmerkinge van de voornaaste dingen, in het Boekje genaamt de verborgentheden van het Rijke Gods, &C, tegens Galenus Abrahamsz en zijn Toestemmers&c verhandelt en beschreven ddor William Ames*, 1662

⁴⁹⁷SEWEL W., *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of the Christian People called Quakers*, London, Darton and Harvey, 1834. pp. XIX-XX.

between the Quakers and some of the most important Amsterdam Collegiants. The confrontation began in 1656 when William Ames⁴⁹⁸, with other followers, came to Amsterdam. The first Quaker mission entered the United Provinces in 1653; its major figures were John Stubbs and William Caton⁴⁹⁹, who arrived in Middelburgh and traveled to Rotterdam and Amsterdam. In the second half of the 17th century, the Quaker mission spread into all the United Provinces, and the attitude of the authorities to the diffusion of Quakerism was incredibly hostile. Quakers were seen as a public and political danger, as firebrands, and capable of enmeshing ingenuous souls. Political and religious authorities operated everything in the Dutch disciplinarian machine to stop the advance of Quakerism, Socinianism, and Collegiantism in the name of the common good⁵⁰⁰. These questions were debated during the Synod of South Holland, held in 1660 in Gouda. In March 1657 the Dutch authorities were already informed about the Quakers' regular meetings, which were held each Sunday. A few months after William Ames' arrival, as he wrote in a letter to Margaret Fell and later in a pamphlet published in Dutch, he was questioned by an Amsterdam magistrate of Amsterdam and arrested for six days. After this episode he was expelled from the city, but he left Amsterdam only some time later⁵⁰¹. According to our main source, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress of the Christian People called Quakers* by William Sewel, after 1659 Ames spent much of his time in Holland⁵⁰² pursuing the Quakers' conversion project. He left Holland in 1663 and, after a brief and turbulent period in Rotterdam, he moved to the Palatinate. In the same year he started to travel in Germany, Danzig, and Poland, where he continued Quaker conversions; for this reason he was brought several times to the court.⁵⁰³

William Ames was born in Somerset (near Bristol) and he spent part of his life as a soldier of King Charles I; after the death of the king he became a marine soldier under Prince Rupert⁵⁰⁴. During that period he came into contact with many Dutch people, from whom he learned the language. After a meeting with the Quakers, Ames suddenly joined this religious group, writing his *A declaration of the Witness of God in Man* (1662), in which the author spoke about the nature of the divine light. He described it

⁴⁹⁸The Quaker William Ames should not be confused with the identically named Puritan pastor William Ames (1576-1633), who took part in the controversies between the Calvinists and Remonstrants during the Synod of Dordrecht.

⁴⁹⁹See: HULL W.I., *The Rise of Quakerism in Amsterdam*, Swarthmore College, 1938.

⁵⁰⁰HULL., *The Rise of Quakerism in Amsterdam*. Hull quoted important documents from Gouda's archives regarding the reaction of the authorities opposing the spread of nonconformist religion; see: pp. 48, 49.

⁵⁰¹Ibid. pp. 31-33. On this occasion Ames wrote a pamphlet, printed in Dutch and then translated into German. In it he explained his legal experience: *Een verklaringe van den oerchvaerdighen handel van de Magistraten van Amsterdam, tegens Willem Ames and Humble Thatcher, occurring in the Year 1657*, n.d.

⁵⁰²See: HYLKEMA, *Reformateurs*, vol. I. pp. 56-63.

⁵⁰³See: NEFF C., *Ames William (d. 1662)*. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. from <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/A45736.html>

The periodization proposed by Neff therefore does not seem reliable and does not agree with Sewel (1834) and Meinsma (1983). According to Neff, Ames left Holland to travel in Germany from 1659 until 1663 (when he returned to Holland). This was, however, the period of Ames's dispute with the Collegiants and of the publication of his pamphlets in Amsterdam. Indeed, as confirmed by Meinsma, Ames left the city in spring 1659 and came back in fall 1659.

⁵⁰⁴For the role that the English army played in the spread of religious nonconformity and for social mobility see: HILL C., *The World Turned Upside Down. Radical Ideas during the English Revolution*, Penguin Books, 1975. pp. 58-59.

as an internal voice of the conscience, which had always led him to the knowledge of good and evil, wisdom that was totally independent from the Scriptures. In this text sin is treated as something unavoidable in the life of men; for Ames following Holy Scripture cannot be helpful, because they described unattainable behavior, humanity how it should be and not how it is. On salvation, since this early text was, indeed, not bound with ceremonies or rituals, the only necessary belief in order to be saved is that “Christ dyed in Jerusalem and was buried, and the third day rose againe &c.” After the publication of this text Ames was sent to Ireland (1656) “to preach the gospel, and perhaps also to procure the aid of John Stubbs on his Holland mission⁵⁰⁵.” In a letter of 2 September 1656, to Margaret Fell, he described his first impressions of Holland:

I shall now declare unto thee y particulars of my pceedings in holland after I landed at Rotterdam I remained thear som few dayes finding Littell to doe only a rumour theare was about y Citty y I was Com & som reported y I was a Jesuite & many [...] I finding my worke not to be theare at y time departed from thence to Middelburgh in Zeeland according to my freedom⁵⁰⁶.

After the first conversions that the Quakers achieved among the Mennonites, they made the *Doopsgezinden* as their main conversion target⁵⁰⁷. The conversion of the Sewel family, member of the Flemish community, caused some disturbance in Amsterdam's religious life. The Quakers believed that their affinities with the Collegiant position could present a possibility of converting them to Quakerism. These affinities are well expressed in a letter that Benjamin Furly, a Quaker merchant in Rotterdam, wrote to Locke:

They [Quakers] require no bundle of articles to be subscribed, nor any listing of names; as among other sects, nor the use of the things called sacraments. So they have nothing they admit a man to, nor seclude him from. Their meetings are open and free for all comers, and goers. A man may so converse with them, as long as he please, and abstain when he please⁵⁰⁸.

Despite these affinities in the organization of the religious life, after a first period of amicable contact, the Collegiants started a pamphlet war with some of the most important members of the Quaker mission in Amsterdam. Converting Collegiants became increasingly unlikely when the Flemish community, threatened by the internal conflict and by the external influence of the Quakers, decided to run to the shelter of a conference held in Rotterdam in 1657 and again in Gouda in 1659, where the Quaker question was discussed. The Flemish preacher decided that it was necessary “as much as possible to resist the Quakers and faithfully to protect their flocks⁵⁰⁹.” Quakers displayed the will to address other confessions, as well as the Jews. In 1658 there was distributed among the Jewish community in Amsterdam a Hebrew translation of the pamphlet of the English Quaker Margaret Fell, well known as “the queen of the Quakers”. In a previous letter to Fell, Ames wrote that he had received the help of a young Jew, banished from his community, to translate this pamphlet. This assertion led many historians to suppose that the Jew was Spinoza, who made contact with the

⁵⁰⁵Ibid. p. 22.

⁵⁰⁶Letter quoted in HULL, *The Rise of Quakerism in Amsterdam*. p. 23.

⁵⁰⁷See: HYLKEMA, *Reformateurs*, vol. I. pp. 79-87.

⁵⁰⁸See: LOCKE, J., *Correspondence*, 4: 613 (letter 185).

⁵⁰⁹Ibid.

Quakers through Pieter Serrarius⁵¹⁰.

The Quakers' conversion project in Holland encountered many obstacles, from the other religious groups or from police repression. William Ames had to face some eclecticism and extravagances in the practice of the “new” Quakers, as in the case of Isaac Furnier:

Isaac Furnier, who formerly (as I heard my uncle tell, who had seen it himself) lived as another Diogenes, using, at the fire, instead of a pair of tongs, a split stick; and now conversing among the Quakers, so called, made it a piece of holiness to use the most blunt language he could think of; how absurd and irregular soever. In fine, he so behaved himself, that the orthodox Quaker rejected his society. He it was, as I have understood, who was the author of that ridiculous saying, “My spirit testifieth”: which though not approved nor used by the true Quakers, yet hath been so spread among the people in the Low Countries, that it hath been constantly credited, and is not yet quite disbelieved, that the Quakers used to say so of any thing they intend to; and that if any one, whoever it be, says so, they will give credit to his saying. The abovesaid Dr. Galenus told me, that this man coming to his door, and finding the doctor's name writ on the post of the door [...] did, with his knife, scratch out the letters Dr. signifying doctor. On which the doctor asked him, why he did so? And his answer was, because the spirit did testify so unto him. [...] Furnier was a passionate and giddy-headed man, whom the true Quakers could not own, though he had translated many of their books out of English into Dutch; and would also preach amongst them⁵¹¹.

Despite the religious and political stigmatization of the Quakers, their ideas sparked some interest in the Collegiants, and the natural similarity of the two groups also led to some conversions⁵¹². The reason for the change in the Collegiants and Quakers' relationship -(at the very beginning peaceful and marked by mutual interest) in a pamphlet war in the years 1660 and 1661, was caused, as stated by Sewel, by a “misapprehension⁵¹³.” Sewel says: “W. Ames found also some reception among the Baptists there [Amsterdam], who at first were pleased with him, but J. Stubbs did not please them so well; as Dr. Galenus Abrahams once told me, who compared Ames to a musician that played a very melodious tune, and Stubbs to a disturber of the harmonious music; though Ames afterward, for his great zeal, was found fault with also⁵¹⁴.

The “misapprehension”⁵¹⁵ had its inception in 1660 after a meeting in the house of the Collegiant Pieter Serrarius⁵¹⁶. On this occasion John Higgins and Benjamin Furlly

⁵¹⁰At that time Spinoza had been subjected to the *herem* for two years, and for this reason is regarded as the probable translator. See: POPKIN R.H., *Spinoza's Relations with the Quakers in Amsterdam*, in *Quaker History*, vol. 73, no. 1, spring 1984; HULL., *The Rise of Quakerism in Amsterdam*; MEINSMA., *Spinoza et son cercle*.

⁵¹¹SEWEL, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress*. p. 178.

⁵¹²Ibid. p. 218.

⁵¹³Ibid. p. XX.

⁵¹⁴Ibid. p. 177.

⁵¹⁵The differences between Quakers and Collegiants were reported in a document of the proceedings brought by the burgomaster of Haarlem against the Quakers: “Jan Jansen Westerhoven, [residing] in the Conighstraat, having been summoned because he had been in conversation with the aforesaid Willem Tick the Quaker, admitted this, but said that his views could not coincide with [Tick's], and then let it be understood by his discourse that he was most inclined to the side of the aforesaid Abrahamsz. He was therefore forbidden to frequent longer the company of Galenus Abrahamsz, as well as that of the aforesaid Quaker, under penalty as above.” Quoted in HULL, *The Rise of Quakerism in Amsterdam*. p. 64.

⁵¹⁶VAN DER WALL E., *De mystieke chiliast Petrus Serrarius (1600-1669) en zijn wereld*, Leiden, 1987. pp. 220-230. For the Ames–Serrarius dispute see: VAN DEN BERG J., *Religious Currents and Cross-currents. Essay on Early Modern Protestantism and the Protestant Enlightenment*, Brill,

had the first heated exchange with Adam Boreel⁵¹⁷, who read a paper called *A warning against the Quakers*⁵¹⁸. The beginning of the pamphlet war was provoked by a dispute over the Collegiants' statement on the unholy situation of the coeval Church, and started with Abrahamsz's *Drie Vragen* (Three questions). In 1659 Serrarius intervened in the dispute with his *De Vertredinge De Heyligen Stadts*⁵¹⁹ (The treading underfoot of the Holy City), in which he criticized Quakers' claims to have restored the primitive Christian Church. He reiterated Abrahamsz's statement on the currently decayed status of the Church, suggesting that the end of nonconformity can only come after the Apocalypse, a statement that starts from the title, which is a quotation from Apoc 11.2. With the publication, in 1660, of *Het Ligt dat in de duisternisse schijnt beweesen den weg tot God te sijn*⁵²⁰ (The Light which shines in the darkness proved to be the Way to God) William Ames answered all the Collegiants' accusations. In this work he confirmed his critics' hostility to the *Nader verklaringe*, in particular article 16 where, Abrahamsz theorized the absence of the Holy Spirit in contemporary Churches and the impossibility of building a God-inspired congregation on the Earth. Ames accused the Collegiants of being false prophets living in a unholy status. He considered ridiculous the Collegiant theory on the Holy Spirit's absence from the religious community, "Eilaes voor u! Wat een Gemeente is die niet en ruft an eenig God nogte tenig Exempel in de Schriften des Niuwen Testamentes nogte op eenige extraordinarie autoriteit last ofte commissie. Eilaes arme manschen!⁵²¹" This text was, however, principally written in a polemic with Serrarius. Quakers' millenarianism was essentially spiritual: the arrival of God and the union with him was possible for all believers through the inner light. Without the acknowledgment of this light it was impossible, for Ames, to be part of Christ's spiritual kingdom, which was located in the hearts of all men. The dispute's arguments focused, indeed, on the value of the inner light, the Holy Spirit's inspiration and the effect of divine authority on the people. Quakers' eschatology was rooted in the battle between light and darkness; the dimension of salvation as well as the second coming of Christ was considered a spiritual event. This position led Ames to express himself in these terms: "Maer dir segge ik u Petrus, dat den Dag gekomen is (alhowel ghy in uwe blindheit die niet siet) dat God (in sijn Heerlik Ligt tot het welke geen vleeselijk oog naederen kan) verscheenen is [...] Ende dit segge ik u, indien ghy niet in het Ligt gelooft, ende daet in wagt nae de kragt Gods⁵²²."

Following these charges, the Collegiant supporters of Abrahamsz's position started

Leiden, 1999. pp. 117-133.

⁵¹⁷BERTI S., CHARLES-DAUBERT F., POPKIN R.H., ed, *Heterodoxy, Spinozism, and Free Thought in Early-Eighteenth-Century Europe. Studies on the Traité des trois imposteurs*, Kluwer Academic Publisher, Dordrecht, 1996. p. 382; SEWEL, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress*.

⁵¹⁸See: SEWEL, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress*.

⁵¹⁹SERRARIUS P., *De Vertredinge De Heyligen Stadts ofte een klaer bewijs van 't Verval der Eerste Apostolische Gemeente, gestelet tott Antwoort op de drie Vregan diesaegaende aen Dr. Galenus en David Spruyt uytgegeven*. By Broersz Joost, Amsterdam, 1659. To this text Ames answered with his *Een Antwoort op iets in de eerste ende tweede Pagina van een Boek genaemt, De vertredinge de Heyligen Stadts, uitgegven door den geseiden Serrarius*. In 1660 John Higgins wrote in favor of Ames his *Eenige waerdige ende gewichtige Aenmerckingen voor Galenus Abrahamsz ende Adam Borrel ende haer Aenhangers*, to which Serrarius answered with *Een Antwoort op eenige Aenmerkingen die uitgegeven waeren foor John Higgins*.

⁵²⁰AMES W., *Het Licht dat in de duisternis schijnt beweesen den weg tot God te sijn*, Amsterdam, 1660.

⁵²¹Ibid. p. 9.

⁵²²Ibid. p. 7.

the publication of their counter-pamphlets. In 1661 Pieter Serrarius published a new text against the Quakers: *Van den waere wegh tot God*⁵²³ (Of the true Way to God). Ames answered with his *Het waere licht beschermt*⁵²⁴ (The true Light protected), in which text he listed all the misunderstanding and the calumny against the Quakers⁵²⁵. The central arguments of the debate were the definition of the figure of Christ and the definition of *licht*, which was understood by Ames as a natural element present in each person in direct reference to John's Gospel (1.4,5). Ames rejected all difference between the natural light that all individuals possess and the light of God himself: "O grote verwarring! Te seggen dat God niet en is te vinden in 't Licht dat alle Manschen verscheenen is, mael we in 't Licht Sijner eygen verschijninge; Wanner de Schrift getuyght dat het Licht, dat een ijder Mensch verlicht die in de Wereld komt, de verschijninge Gods is: ende daer in hebben wij God ghevonden ende daerom weten wij dat ghij de waerheydt niet en spreeckt⁵²⁶." This refusal underlines again the Quakers' concept of eschatology: "Om dat die gene die salig worden in 't Licht wandelen⁵²⁷." It is clear in this passage how the Quakers clearly refused each definition of the light as from a human capacity for knowledge or understanding without a divine and transcendent element.

The central issue of this dispute was to determine the nature of the light. The Quakers named this light *Gods Woord*, *Christus in on*, *he inwendige rijk* or the *Geest*. They believed in the strong influence of this inner light, which has to be understood as a lead voice for everyday life decision. Serrarius criticized this approach because, for him, what the Quakers understood as the direct inspiration of God was nothing more than a voice of conscience, to which it was not possible assign a divine nature. Serrarius expressed the same criticism in a letter against Antoinette Bourignon⁵²⁸, where he doubted the divine nature of Bourignon's illumination. Another important difference between Serrarius and Ames's perspectives was the Quakers' exclusivity regarding the direct relationship with the divinity and the secondariness of the Scriptures. Serrarius's approach included the exegesis as a part of revelation and he maintained the possibility of considering the Scripture as God's word⁵²⁹.

In 1662 Ames wrote *De verborgentheden van het rijcke Gods* (The mysteries of the kingdom of God), again criticizing the Collegiants⁵³⁰. This text was answered in the

⁵²³SERRARIUS P., *Van den waere wegh tot God: tot bewijs dat niet alle licht dat inde duysternisse schijnt, den wegh zy tot God*, Moerbeek Jacob Pietersz Alkmaar, 1661.

⁵²⁴AMES W., *Het waere licht beschermt, ende de onnooselheydt van de eenvoudige bevrijt van de onwaerheden ende valsche beschuldigingen, door Petrus Serrarius*, n.d. 1661.

⁵²⁵The list of 1661 pamphlets is, however, longer. In the same year, Serrarius responded again with his *Drieentwintigh vragen aen Willen Ames ende John Higgins*, which were suddenly answered and refuted by Ames at different times.

⁵²⁶AMES W., *Het waere licht beschermt, ende de onnooselheydt van de eenvoudige bevrijt van de onwaerheden ende valsche beschuldigingen, door Petrus Serrarius*, n.d., 1661. p. 12.

⁵²⁷*Ibid.* p. 20.

⁵²⁸In the Library Bijzondere Collectie in Amsterdam is preserved the manuscript refutation of Serrarius's letters.

⁵²⁹See: VAN DEN BERG J., *Quaker and Chiliast: the "contrary thoughts" of William Ames and Petrus Serrarius*, in KNOX R. BUICK, *Reformation, Conformity and Dissent*, London, 1977.

⁵³⁰AMES W., *De verborgentheden van het rijcke Gods*, Amsterdam, 1662. In the same years the Quakers were protagonists in another polemic with the reformed clergyman Jacobus Coelman on sin, the existence of damnation, and the personal devil. Coelman published his *De Valsche Profetten Bekend* to which Ames answered with *De Valsche Profetten Bekend aen Haere Vrugten, ofte een ontdeckinge van sommige van dese leeraers*.

same year by Balling's *Het licht*. In April 1662 the Quakers published *Adam Boreel ontdeckt door sijn Vruchten* (Adam Boreel discovered through his profit), a flier in which was made public the discussion between Adam Boreel and William Ames, held at Serrarius's house in 1660. The Quakers defended themselves against the accusations of Adam Boreel, collected through various testimonies (among others Benjamin Furly, John Higgins, William Ames). The quarrel concerned James Naylor's blasphemous simulation of the Christ, an event that took place in Bristol in 1656 under, as said Naylor, the inspiration of the inner light. As Sewel informs us, the case of Naylor had great reverberations in Amsterdam, and the pamphlet *Den gepretendeerde nieuwen Christus*⁵³¹ (The new pretended Christ) was published, together with many others, with the intention of discrediting the Quakers⁵³². Adam Boreel accused the Quakers of being disciples of Naylor and “dat legionen der Duyvelen van den Hemel neder gedaelt zijn, en dat in yder Quaker een is⁵³³.”

The polemics around the figure of Christ became, in these years, a central question because of the publication of a New Testament complete with some annotations by Socinus⁵³⁴. The public authorities were informed about the publication of an antitrinitarian New Testament and declared the book full of aberrations regarding the divinity of Christ. The deliberations of the consistory reported the existence of Socinian assemblies where up to 150 Quakers and Boreelists met together.⁵³⁵ Naylor's case probably offered the Collegiants the right occasion to underline their differences from the adversary. In this year, the “Socinian case” blew up: the public authorities were engaged in the persecution of Daniel Zwicker, writer of the *Irenicon Irenicorum*⁵³⁶ and printer of numerous Socinian texts. The Collegiants, led by Galenus Abrahamsz, played a major role in the reception of Polish exiles⁵³⁷, but they always defended themselves from accusations of Unitarianism.

The central question in the disputes between Collegiants and Quakers seems not to

⁵³¹ANONYMOUS, *De gepretendeerde Christus, zijne een wonderlijke inrijdinge binnen Bristol in engeland, door en Engels-man gedaan in november 1656*, Jan Rieuwertsz, Amsterdam, 1656. This text consists of an extract of a letter written in Bristol, probably to Adam Boreel, on 8 November 1656, and *Nader Verklaringh over 't Extract* written by Jan Rieuwertsz. In the further explanation Rieuwertsz invites the Quakers to answer and justify the behavior of James Naylor (James Neillert in the text).

⁵³²SEWEL, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress*. p. 247.

⁵³³*Adam Boreel ontdeckt door sijn Vruchten*, Amsterdam, 1662.

⁵³⁴FELBINGER J. (ed.), *Das Neue Testament, aus dem Griechischen in's Teutsche übersetzt*, Amsterdam, 1660.

⁵³⁵MEINSMA, *Spinoza et son cercle*. pp. 248-249. They did not consider the German version, published by Felbinger, a danger but they did destroy all the Netherlands copies that Pier de la Burg printed.

⁵³⁶ZWICKER D., *Irenicum Irenicorum, seu Reconciliatoris christianorum hodeirnorum horma triplex*, 1658.

⁵³⁷After the defeat of the Polish community in Rakow many Socinians moved to the Netherlands. The Socinians had tried since the very beginning to have contact with the Remonstrants and other radical reformers in the Dutch Republic. “A letter by Johannes Statorius Stoinski to Adam Francus Sr. (1590-1656), a pastor in Koloszvar, in which he stated that an abundant harvest may be possible in the Dutch Republic, created a row. The letter was intercepted by King Gyorgy I Rakoczi (reign 1630-1648) and handed over to the Utrecht theologian Johann Heinrich Bisterfeld (1605-1655). The letter was promptly translated and published by Voetius, who included virulent comments directed especially against the Remonstrant minister, Wtenbogaert, whose name occurred in the letter.” KNIJFF P., VISSER S.J. (ed), *Bibliographia Sociniana. A bibliographical reference tool for the study of Dutch socinianism and antitrinitarianism*, Doopsgezinde Historische Kring, Amsterdam, 2004. p. 22.

have been strictly related to this judicial event, but it is important to observe that a large part of their discussion involved issues relating to Christ's figure, divinity, trinitarianism, and inspiration. The debate around the inner light, one of the main points of contrast, was deeply related to Quakers' sense of election and to the effects that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit had on the people. The cases of Naylor, the eccentricity of Isaac Furier, but also the episode reported by Sewel about Galenus Abrahamsz (who asked the Quakers who scratched his name on the door, if "so be that spirit did move him to stab the doctor with the knife, whether he would follow that motion, he answered [...] as the doctor affirmed to me, 'Yes'⁵³⁸.")) were unacceptable examples of the insanity that could follow "inner light" inspiration. Collegiant spirituality and mysticism were influenced by chiliastic and peaceful ideals, directly inspired by Castellio's *De Arte dubitandi et confidenti ignorandi et sciendi*, which did not lead to missions or attempts at conversion. In the same way, the use of doubt in Castellio was made to protect religious tolerance and freedom in the interpretation of the Bible. According to Elisabeth Feist Hirsch it is possible to understand Castellio's doubt as an anticipation of Descartes's doubt, was prompted by desire to discover "clear and distinct ideas." Castellio's doubt enlisted the help of the senses and the intellect to come to terms with the extent and limitation of biblical truth. In addition, both Castellio and Descartes had recourse to God, who willed it that the senses and the intellect guide man to knowledge. Both thinkers had in the end the highest regard for reason⁵³⁹."

It was in this polemical context and with this framework that, in 1662, Balling's *Het licht* was printed. In the dispute the light Balling's text, although written in defense of Galenus Abrahamsz, seems to remain closer to Quaker convictions. This behavior is justified, according to Sewel, by Balling's persuasion of the rightness of Quaker doctrine. The only reason pushing Balling to write against Ames seemed to be their difference about the visible state of the Church, a reason that did not involve direct questioning of the Quaker teaching about the nature of the light⁵⁴⁰.

5.4. 5.4 *Het licht op den Kandelaar, the possibility of knowledge, and the inner light*

Balling wrote *Het licht op den Kandelaar*, as Jan Rieuwertsz explains in the preface, to respond to William Ames's *De verborgenheden van het Rijcke Gods*, a polemical text against Galenus Abrahamsz. These years were greatly troubled for Galenus Abrahamsz, who became the leader of the *Het Lam* party, and had to face the accusations of the orthodox Flemish community⁵⁴¹ and the attacks of the Quakers. In

⁵³⁸SEWEL *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress*. p. 178.

⁵³⁹FEIST HIRSCH E. (ed.), *De Arte dubitandi et confidenti ignorandi et sciendi*, Brill, Leiden, 1981. pp. 5-6. "[...] he (Castellio) finally identified reason with Christ" [...] the son of the living God who in Greek is called *Logos* that is reason or word which are the same (since reason is so to speak an inner and eternal speech and word which always speaks the truth)..." [...] "It seems to me that the whole passage is misplaced here and reason a misnomer for what Castellio had in mind. He conjoins two disparate terms namely reason as judgment and the Spirit revealed by Christ to the world. Unfortunately this confusion persists in the last chapters of the first book."

⁵⁴⁰See: SEWEL, *The History of the Rise, Increase and Progress*.

⁵⁴¹See: WIJNGAERDT T.G., *Oogh-Water voor de Vlaemsche Doops-gesinde Gemeente tot Amsterdam*,

the letter of Spinoza to Balling, in July 1664, the philosopher seems to refer to these religious divisions and quarrels “tuam prudentiam, & animi fortitudinem perpendo, quibus fortunae, vel potius opinionis incommoda eo tempore, quo validissimis te oppugnant armis, contemnere nosti⁵⁴².” Balling starts writing *Het licht*, recalling, indeed, the Collegiants' main argumentation: condemnation of the large number of disputes and divisions within Christianity. Further, he introduced an argumentation that was not common within the Collegiants. For Balling the main cause of disputes and division was the perverted use of the language. He based his argumentation on affirming the absolute arbitrariness of the language: “De zaken zijn niet om de woorden, maar de woorden om de zaken⁵⁴³.” (Things are not for words, but words for things). This Skeptic argumentation, partly recovered from Spinoza and Descartes' text, and the assumption of the language as an historical and human instrument, was used against Port Royal's nominalism. It is possible to find in the religious history of the Collegiants a precedent for this position. Dirk Camphuysen, one of the main theoretical sources of the Collegiants, already expresses a similar vision about language and about good works. One year after Balling's first publication of *Het licht*, Jan Rieuwertsz published the *Theologische Wercken* of Camphuysen, where the author described his position regarding epistemology. He affirmed the absolute arbitrariness of the language and the importance of placing at the center of all human action the heart (*herten*) and not the imagination (*fantasije*)⁵⁴⁴. This arbitrariness makes it difficult, for Balling impossible, to tell the truth, which is, nevertheless, simple evidence for the inner light:

Doch dewijle wy ondervinden; dat het hier mede heel anders gelegen zy: en dat twee menschen, de selve woorden en redenen sprekende of schrijvende, nochtans verscheiden ja ook wel tegen een strijdende gedachten kunnen hebben; zoo wort daar uit klaarlijk kunnen hebben; zoo wort daar uit klaarlijk de onvermogenheit om door woorden en redenen dit bequamelijk te kunnen doen afgenomen [...] En de onvolmaaktheid der zelve is zoo groot; dat indien iemand die zodanigh als die nu in 't gebruik zijn gemaakt hadd' men zoud' moeten geloven dat hy of zeer winich of geen kennisse van de zaken die daar door beteikent willen worden gehabt hadde. Zoo dat dan indien men door woorden en redenen iemandt de zaken zelven beter zoude willen indrukken men van noden hadde nieuwe woorden en by gevolghten heele nieuwe taal te vinden. [...] nu door onverstant dan door loosheit of boosheit gebogen en verdraeit wierden, tegen de meining van den Spreker of Schrijver op zuklk een wijze als zy die dit doen hun beoginge alderbest meinen te bereiken waer uit dan by gevolg al dat bedriegen, eerroven, twisten en wat des meer is voortkomt.⁵⁴⁵

In this quotation are listed the main themes of the book. The suggestion of Balling to escape all sterile disputations is also a reflection about religion as an ethical and epistemological apparatus and an attempt to discover the role that the true religion can play in social life. This case of incomprehension, due to the arbitrariness of the language, characterized the failure in communication between Collegiants and Quakers. Balling had, however, a second polemical objective: the perverted use of the language refers also to the argumentation of orthodox preacher and theologians, who use the language as an instrument of separation and domination. The same problem

By Johannes van Someren, Boek-verkooper op den Dam, 1664.

⁵⁴²SPINOZA, *Opera Postuma*. Letters to Balling, (no. XXX).

⁵⁴³BALLING P., *Het licht op den Kandelaar*, t'Amsterdam, Jan Rieuwertsz boek-verkooper, 1684. p. 5

⁵⁴⁴CAMPHUYSEN D.R., *Theologische Wercken, Bestaende in drie Deelen*, Jan Rieuwertsz en Jan Hendricksz Boom Boeckverkoopers, 't Amsterdam, 1661.

⁵⁴⁵BALLING, *Het licht*. pp. 5-6.

occurs reading and understanding the Holy Scriptures. Balling's criticism also involves a different exegetic approach to the Scriptures.

On this basic assumption, Balling built his discourse about the inner light. He defines this concept several times throughout the text, each time with a different nuance. The difficulties in understanding Balling's *Het licht* include the polemical stratification and the crypto-quotes that we find in the book. The text attracts and expresses some elements of the mystical tradition from the Quakers, but also represents the deep influences of Spinoza and Descartes's thought. Kolakowski, contrary to Fix's interpretation, inscribes Balling's inner light in the current of the mystical. Balling describes the knowledge of God as direct and immediate, and this relationship with God, without discursive elements or rational proofs, represents, for Kolakowski, a clear trace of mysticism. The authors do not deny, however, the rationalist invasion to which Balling and Jelle's texts testify⁵⁴⁶. Balling inherited, through the works of Coornhert, the humanist spirituality that describes the union with God in terms of a relationship between human conscience and divine justice. In his text Balling avoids describing the light as ecstasy or extraordinary experience of the divinity⁵⁴⁷. This individualist contact with God expresses itself, furthermore, only in the ethical consequences of human behavior and never in the moral injunction of a religious institution such as the Church.

To fully appreciate the mystical and rational influences that shape his work, and to understand how Balling developed the concept of inner light, it is necessary to retrace the definitions. The first occurrence of the phrase inner light in Balling's *Het licht* is used to exhort the reader to find the truth not in the external world but in the clear and distinct knowledge independent from it:

Wy zeggen dan dat wy een ygelijk mensche aanmanen in te heren tot het *licht* dat in hem is (wy noemen het heber met de benaming van *Licht*, las met eenige andere, anders is 't ons om 't even of men het noeme *Christus*, den *Geest*, het *Woort* enz. Dewijle alle deze op een en zelbe zake uitloopen maar dewijl het woort *Licht*, in zijn eigentlijke beteikenisse wat anders is als 't gene wy daar onder verstaan; zoo zullen wy met korte woorden klaarlijk trachten uit te drukken wat onder deze benaminge by ons wort beteikent.

Het Licht (da zeggen wy) is een klare en onderscheidene kennisse van waarheit, in het verstant van een ygelijk mensch, door welk hy zodanich overtuigt is, van het zijn, en hoedanich zijn der zaken, dat het voor hem onmogelijk is, daar aan te kunnen twijffelen⁵⁴⁸.

These passages are a clear evocation of Cartesian language. We find the same definition of truth in Proposition 14 of the *Principles of Descartes' Philosophy*, and in Spinoza's *Cogitata Metaphysica*. Spinoza defines the truth as: *quod sit clara et distincta* (which is clear and distinct) and *quod omne dubitum tollat* (that removes all doubt). For Balling this light is a principle (*beginzel*) that is *onfeilbaar*⁵⁴⁹ but, added Balling, this principle need to be discovered and nurtured⁵⁵⁰. The discovery of the truth is, for our author, a gradual process, a progressive emancipation of the knowledge

⁵⁴⁶ KOLAKOWSKI, *Chrétiens sans Église*. p. 210.

⁵⁴⁷ This way to describe the "union with God" as a long-term process and without mystical and enthusiastic argumentation characterized the later German pietism. See: SORKIN D., *The Religious Enlightenment. Protestants, Jews and Catholics from London to Vienna*, Princeton University Press, 2008. pp. 128-136.

⁵⁴⁸ BALLING, *Het licht*. p. 10-11.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 19.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 9.

from all the errors.

The exhortation to turn inside oneself is, indeed, a way to retrace the epistemological experience of the *Meditations*. Similarly to Descartes, Balling establishes the absolute priority of interior knowledge; the epistemological principle of knowledge is not outside, in the world of experience and material, but inside⁵⁵¹. Balling developed this estrangement from the world, identifying the exterior as a corrupting factor for the internal force of knowledge. What prevents the full development of the clear and distinct knowledge are the obstacles coming from the exterior. The empirical experience of things and feelings of desire for noninfinite things are impediments to the free development of the inner light. This indispensable abstraction from the world and this turn inside oneself is, for Balling, the only means to reach salvation. As we showed above, for Descartes, the certainty of the truth is in the evidence of the human being's rational essence, the *cogito*, which is a faculty continuously created and conserved by God, who cannot be a deceiver God. Balling, in his description of inner light as a natural capacity that can be progressively discovered, objected to the idea that only chosen and elected people could know divinity through a special gift. The aim of Balling's argumentation seems to be the anticonfessionalism, to oppose, therefore, each claim to charisma and election.

The effects of the clear and distinct knowledge lead to the right distinction between *goed* and *quaat*, *waarheit* and *valscheit*. The light is the only internal criterion for the understanding of the sin (*Quade dat hy bedrijft*), which clarifies the “werken der duisternisse” and the causes which “van Ghodt afdwaalt⁵⁵².” The author is again, in this definition, near Quakers' metaphor of light and darkness, and distant from Spinoza's definition of good and evil as *entia rationis*, which makes possible their radical relativization. For Balling the light is “dat hem oordeelt en verdoemt⁵⁵³,” an idea of punishment and sin absent in Spinoza's philosophy. A few pages after this first definition, however, Balling again defines the relationship between the light and the good using terminology that places in the foreground a certain determinism and relativism:

De duisternisse wort niet verbreden als dorr licht; het onverstant niet als door kennisse. 't Is dwaasheit iets te willen daar neit is, zonder oorzaak is geen wekinge daar moet dan iet zijn dat den mensche veroorzaakt te doen ; zoo hy iet zal doen. [...] De natuur van een ygelijk mensch is zodanich dat hy gedwongen wort dat 't welke hy het beste oordelt voor het slechtste te verkiezen en gaarne altijt daar voor te willen verwisselen⁵⁵⁴.

A definition of good, this one, which cannot fail to evoke the words of Spinoza in the third part of the *Ethics*:

Constat itaque ex his omnibus, nihil nos conari, velle, appetere neque cupere, quia id bonum esse judicamus; sed contra, nos propterea aliquid bonum esse judicare, quia id conamur, volumus, appetimus atque cupimus⁵⁵⁵.

The consequences of such a definition of human nature, determined to follow his better, bring Balling to answer the problem of the existence of the evil in a Spinozist

⁵⁵¹ Ibid. p. 17.

⁵⁵² Ibid. p. 11.

⁵⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 15.

⁵⁵⁵ SPINOZA, *Opera Postuma*. (E. III Prop. IX Scholium).

way. If the light leads us to the best and it is a principle of clear and distinct knowledge, how can choosing evil happen? To formulate the question with Spinozist terminology we can ask: how is it possible to see the better but follow evil (*quamquam meliore sibi videat, deteriora tamen sequi*⁵⁵⁶)? Spinoza answers this question on the basis of his ontology, showing how absolute determinism leads human action and how the illusion of free action leads to false understanding of the causal order. Balling answers this question with a lack of knowledge, such as uncertainty of knowledge due to the incomplete development of the light.

Gebeurt het gelijk het meest doet, dat hy het slechter voor 't geen beter is kiest; het hapert hem aan kennisse, 't is tegen zijn eigen oogmerk, en zoo doolt hy, niet geleit zijnde door 't ware *Licht*⁵⁵⁷.

The causes of this lack of knowledge are different. Balling assumes, from the beginning of his work, that although all people possess the light as natural and innate, this principle works in each individual in a different way⁵⁵⁸. Other causes are the numerous sources of error that come from the external world. The definition of the truth needs, for Balling, the exclusion of all possible external sources, within which we also found the Bible:

[...] dit [the light] is de predikingen aan allen Schepzelen onder den Hemel, schoon zy nooit van de Schriftuur gehoord, of die gelezen hebben⁵⁵⁹.

This approach to the Holy Scriptures was, again, not shared by the Collegiants but common within the Quakers. Balling underlines, in different passages of his text, the function of the Bible as an external, and for this reason uncertain form of knowledge⁵⁶⁰. This attitude to the Scriptures should not be interpreted as a total rejection of them. Suspicion of the Scriptures is the consequence of Balling's Skepticism towards the language. Further, on the title page of *Het licht* are mentioned two passages of the Bible (1 John 1.5 and Ephesians 5.13), commonly used by the Quakers. What Balling here tries to refuse is a literary interpretation of the Bible: an attempt, for example, to find in the language the truth of the divinity. As Balling expresses in a clear way, the revelation of God is direct and cannot act through discursive elements⁵⁶¹, and the knowledge of God through only linguistic signs makes impossible the full understanding of the revealed word:

Want stel by voorbeelt dat Ghodt zich aan den mensch door woorden willende bekent maken, zeyde *Ik ben Ghodt*, en dat dit het teken zoudt zijn, waar door hy zich wou te kennen geben: men ziet klaarlijk dat het de mensche onmogelijk zoude zijn, hier door Ghodt eerstmaal te kennen kennen: want zo hy van de zin der woorden iet zou begripen, hy moest nootzakelijk de *beteikenisse* van het woort *Ghodt*, en wat hy daar by te verstaan heeft al te vooren gehadt hebben⁵⁶².

This immediate and nondiscursive knowledge of God is again a paraphrase of Spinoza's *Korte Verhandeling*:

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid. (E IV, Praefatio)

⁵⁵⁷ BALLING, *Het licht*. p. 15.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid. pp. 12-13.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 12.

⁵⁶⁰ See also: *ibid.* p. 19.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid. p. 17.

⁵⁶² Ibid. p. 22.

Zoude men met recht mogen vraageb, hoe zich dan God aan de mensche kan bekend maaken, en of zulks geschied off geschiede zoude konnen door gesproken woorden, off onmiddelyk znder eenig ander dink te gebruiken door 't welke hij het zoude doen? Wy antwoorden, door woorden altijd niet want als dan most de mensch alvooren geweten hebben de beteeknisse van die woorden eerze tot hem gesproken wierden, als bij exempel, zoude God aan de Israeliten gezeid hebben ok ben Jehova uwe God, yo mosten zij dan al te vooren geweten hebben zonder de woorden dat hij God was eer zij konden verzekerd zyn dat hij het was⁵⁶³.

For Balling it is, therefore, essential to understand the sense of the words, and the word “God” is no exception. The interpretation of the Scriptures can be made only through the principle of the light, such as the direct understanding of God's voice⁵⁶⁴, which can never be mediated by language as well as human teaching. The direct reading of the Bible, also in its original language, remains, for Balling, a combination of letters and words that have no meaning without the interpretation led by the light⁵⁶⁵. “De *letteren*, de woorden, deze en zijn niet de Schriftuur maar alleen den *zin* is de Schriftuur.” This approach to the Bible is the only possible way to make it *levendich* (alive), to extract from the Scripture the ethical teaching that must determine all human actions⁵⁶⁶.

Balling's criticism of language as a human and arbitrary construction can be understood as recovering Quakers' argumentation, a form of Skepticism, but also a consequence of the reading of Spinoza. This choice completed, in a different way, Abrahamsz's position on the Church Unholy. Balling, following Spinoza, dissociated the name of God from the essence of the divinity himself. The assumption that the name of God has to be understood as a part of human language and is, therefore, subjected to the same arbitrariness, represents the end of the performativity on which was based all the Christian identification of God with the Logos. For Balling and for some Collegiants was no longer possible to understand God in the diction of his name, which no longer represented the identification of name and essence, word and thing. There was a precise reason that brought Balling to refuse and violate one of the rules of the linguistic game: to put in question the essence self of the nomination. The name of God is recognized as a simple linguistic form and no longer exercises its capacity to be the guarantor of the truth. This absence of a transcendental measure of truth recovers and completes, in a different way, Galenus's description of the absence of God in the religious community. Balling's reflection on epistemology and language, and the statement of the absence of divine inspiration, strengthens his understatement of light as an individual and internal source of knowledge. The subtraction of the name of God from the religious institution and from the language creates a visible absence of divinity which, as stated by Giorgio Agamben, accomplishes the end of the metaphysics: “se il nome di Dio si ritrae dalla lingua – e questo è ciò che è avvenuto a partire dall'evento che è stato chiamato la morte di Dio o, come si dovrebbe dire più esattamente, de nome di Dio –, allora anche la metafisica giunge a compimento⁵⁶⁷.” This absence or death of the divinity represents the deepest meaning of Dutch

⁵⁶³ SPINOZA, (MIGNINI, ed.), *Korte Verhandeling van God*, in *Werken van Spinoza*, vol. III (*Korte Geschriften*) . p. 118.

⁵⁶⁴ BALLING, *Het licht*. p. 17. This is in the text presented as another definition of the *licht*.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 20.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.* p. 18.

⁵⁶⁷ AGAMBEN G., *Il sacramento del linguaggio*, Edizioni Laterza, 2008.

nonconformity, which embraces a necessity of veridiction characterized no more by an external norm but by a correspondence, a conformity, between the moral action and the conscience. The truth of faith is, in the same way, no more in the correspondence between word and reality, also because the external guarantor of this conformity, God, is absent, as we see.

5.5. 5.5 The idea of God and the true religion in Balling's *Het licht op den Kandelaar*

Balling completed his discourse in *Het licht* confirming his Skeptical attitude towards miracles (*uitwerkingen*), which represent the more explicit case of limited human understanding of nature's causal connections. To express this position, Balling quotes again, in an indirect way, a passage of the *Kort Verhandeling* :

Want wij alschoon eenige werkinge of werk in de Natuur bemerkte welkers oorzaak ons onbekend was, zoo is 't nochtans onmogelijk, om voor ons daar uijt dan te besluyten dat er om dit gevrochte voort te brengen, een oneijndelijke en onbepaalde zaak in de natuur moet zijn. Want offer om dit voort te brengen veel oorzaaken hebben te zamen gelooopen, dan offer maar een enige is geweest, hoe kunnen wij dat weten?⁵⁶⁸

All these indirect quotations from Spinoza's work give us some space (that Balling's text cannot because of its conciseness) to introduce a hypothesis about Balling's understanding of God and the relationship with him. The description of the light never described it as human rationality but as a principle of understanding. The numerous quotations of truth and reality as the concatenation of causality, and the description of God as “een eenige onendige, en onbepaalde oorzaak⁵⁶⁹” make evident the importance that the Spinozist epistemology has for Balling. Although, as we said above, the theory of the three kinds of knowledge were, in the *Kort Verhandeling*, deprived of some important concepts that Spinoza developed later in the *Ethics*, Balling was profoundly inspired by his epistemology and used the Spinozist language to describe the only true knowledge of God. The first sign of this filiation is Balling's exclusion of any anthropomorphical description of God, who is never presented as a judge who dispenses punishments or rewards. Further, Balling avoids, throughout the text, mentioning the word rationality and never describes the *licht* as a capacity of the mind but always as a process of knowledge. This choice again reflects Spinoza's position in the *Kort Verhandeling*, of which the aim was to propose a *medicina mentis* and *emendation intellectus*, to correct and improve the mind and the intellect as a faculty of knowledge. In other passages, however, the *licht* is explicitly described as the Quakers do, as a natural characteristic of inspired religious people. This use of the *Kort Verhandeling* and the strong presence of Quaker language suggest that *Het licht*, more than a polemical text against the Quakers, seems to be an attempt at mediation between them and the Collegiants' position. If we want to identify the degree of rationality in Balling's proposal it is vital to think that these elements do not have to

⁵⁶⁸ SPINOZA, (MIGNINI, ed.), *Korte Verhandeling*, in *Werken van Spinoza*, vol. III (*Korte Geschriften*). p. 119.

⁵⁶⁹ BALLING, *Het licht*. p. 23.

be searched in the relationship with God but in the practical and moral consequences of this approach. Balling's distinction from the Quaker interpretation of the light was essentially visible as a question of the moral conduct of the believer. Quakers' light must have appeared to the Collegiants as an idea that was able to justify each eccentric and individual position. Quakers' light could lead to individual excess no longer controllable by the community.

The centrality that Balling ascribed to the conscience, the identification of the truth with a corresponding internal dimension and the moral act, can be considered as an elaboration of the Calvinist primacy of the sentiments over reason. Calvin was, indeed, the first to underline the importance of the sentiments of belief instead of the rational knowledge of God. The same critical position was taken by Dirk Camphuysen, who was, as has been shown, a theoretical source of the Collegiants. The traditional critique of speculation assumes in Camphuysen's works the supremacy of the sentiments over rationality. Affectivity is judged the only nonimaginative and illusory means to reach the truth.

Wy seggen dan dat eenige Leere sy zy waerachtig of valsch op tweederley wijze kan toe-gestaen worden: of metter herten ende in der daedt; of allenlijck nae waen met de fantasije ende met de tonge. Het eerste kan alleen eygentlijck toe-staen ofte gelooven genoemt worden; het tweede geensins, maer alleenlijck wanen ofte opinie hebben. Met het herte gelooft men. Het herte is de fonteyne van alle werck. Al wat dan het herte toe-staen ende ghelooft, daer nae sal sich de mensche reguleeren⁵⁷⁰.

This absolute internal principle, the *herte*, is the only one to follow in order to act as a true Christian and reach the truth. Camphuysen recognizes no utility for the external rituals or the language⁵⁷¹. The parameter of truth is then to be found in the proximity between the word and the heart, a teaching not far from Paul's Gospel (Romans 10. 6-10), where the word of faith is defined as a personal and internal element representing the only possible truth of believe. Balling's *Het licht* belongs to this critical tradition and it is for this reason that for him the relationship with God cannot be "rational." This position, however, does not place Balling too far from Spinoza's thought; on the contrary, the importance of the choice to use Spinozist language consists in Balling's capacity to see a point of contact between the Christian tradition and Spinoza's philosophy. Collegiants' reading of Spinoza consists in the attempt to use his philosophy in religious disputation and to construct a different vision of Christianity. Spinoza, indeed, in order to describe the third knowledge of God, renounces rational terms, and defines it with the vocabulary of the affections, as *amor intellectualis*. In contrast, the second kind of knowledge is described as *geloov, waar geloov, overtuyging, betuyginge, and reede*, with terms meaning both belief and rationality⁵⁷². Further, the position of Spinoza on revealed religion rejects each rational approach, especially in the interpretation of the Scriptures.

Balling's agreement with Spinoza's determinism and, partly, with his concept of God make some choices of the author understandable. The rejection of the "external world" as a means of knowledge should not be interpreted as a will to find a superior transcendental being as a source of clear and distinct knowledge, but as a solution to the impossibility of explaining an infinite and unlimited cause through its limited and

⁵⁷⁰ CAMPHUYSEN, *Theologische Wercken*. p. 44.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.* p. 45.

⁵⁷² For analysis of the language of the *Kort Verhandeling* see: MIGNINI F., ed., *Kort Verhandeling*, Japadre Editore, l'Aquila 1986. p. 102.

finite *modus* (the modifications of the eternal and infinite cause). Bluntly, Balling tries here to abandon the first kind of knowledge (the *imaginatio*) to found his conception of light on the third kind of knowledge (the *scientia intuitiva*). It is impossible for us to know how extensive was Balling's awareness of Spinoza's determinism and concept of God, but we can assume that he used the *Kort Verhandeling*, a veritable compendium of Spinoza's philosophy. The first intention of this treatise is a direction to deploy the exercise of ethics and of the true philosophy against those who are not able to understand God. This will is fully understandable with the use of Spinoza's language in the definition of *licht* as knowledge and union with God.

Dit is'e gene, dat den mensche in waarheit leit op den wegh tot Ghodt. Dat hem ontschuldight in 't goedt doen, en vrede geeft in zijn geweten: ja hem aan leidt, tot een vereniging met Ghodt; waar in alle heil, en geluzaligheid gelegen is⁵⁷³.

Balling chose to use the expression “union with God” (*vereniging met Ghodt*) to describe the nonmediate relationship with the divinity. The choice to speak about union with God, and not about inspiration or communication with God, indicates that Balling is resorting again to a paraphrase of Spinoza's *Kort Verhandeling*. Spinoza describes in these pages the union with God as the last kind of knowledge, the *amore dei*:

So dat als wij op deze manier God komen te kennen wij dan noodzakelijk, (want hij zich niet anders als de alderheerlykste en aldergoetste en kan vertonen, noch van ons gekent worden) met hem moeten verreenigen. In het welke alleen gelyk wy nu al gezeit hebben onze zaligheid bestaat. Ik zeg niet dat wij hem zo hy is moeten kennen maar het is ons genoeg dat wij hem, om met hem vereenigt te zijn, eenigzins kennen. Want ook de kennisse die wij van 't lichaam hebben, en is niet dat wij hez kennen zo als is, of volmaaktelijk; en nochtans wat een vereeniging? Wat een liefde? Dat deze vierde kennisse die daar is de kennisse Gods, niet en is door gevolg van iets anders, maar onmiddelyk blijkt uijt dat geene, dat wij te vooren bewezen hebben hem te zijn de oorzaak van alle kennisse die allen door zich zelfs en door geen ander zaak bekend word; daar benevens ook hier uijt, omdat wij door natuur zodanig met hem vereenigt zijn, dat wij zonder hem nogh bestaan nog verstaan konnen worden⁵⁷⁴.

On this knowledge of God, which Spinoza chose to name *liefde*, is based the *gelukzalikheyd* (beatitude) and the *welstand* (well-being) of the human being. In the same way Balling accepts the limitations of human knowledge: with the light it is possible for us to come into union with God (*in vereeniging met Ghodt*) as limited and finite (*endige en bepaalde*) creatures who can know something unlimited and infinite (*oneindige en onbepaalde*). The true knowledge of God must be emancipated from each form of *gelof*⁵⁷⁵, because with only belief it is impossible to be unified with the object of knowledge. Following Spinoza, Balling establishes as the basis of *Het licht* the achievement of the *heil* (safety) and *welstand*:

[...] wy nodigen u tot jets t'welk een middel kan zijn om tot u zelfs heil en welstant te geraken. [...] door de liefde an vereeniging met de vergankelijke dingen verloren ga, veddoemt werde, en de eeuwige gelukzalicheyt derve: het *Licht* nochtans 't welk in een ygelijk mensche is komende in de werelt blijft

⁵⁷³BALLING, *Het licht*. p. 12.

⁵⁷⁴SPINOZA, (MIGNINI, ed.), *Korte Verhandeling*, in *Werken van Spinoza*, vol.III (*Korte Geschriften*). p. 111.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 58 “Het gelove is een krachtige betuyging van Redenen, door welke ik in mijn verstand oertuygt ben, dat de zaak waarlyk en zodanig is buijten myn verstabd, als ik in mijn verstand daaraf oertuygt ben. [...] Deze dan vertoon ons wel wat de zaake behoort te zijn, maar niet wat zy waarlyk is. En dat is de reeden waarom zy ons nooyt en kan doen vereenigen met de geloofde zaak.”

in eeuwicheit onveranderlijk⁵⁷⁶.

In *Het licht* redemption is, therefore, presented as the means for well-being. The true knowledge of God, the union with him, has, indeed, no relation to the punishment or to the reward.

The description of the term *light* in Balling's text is a consequence of the deep influence that Spinoza's thought had on certain members of the Collegiant movement. Balling's choice to speak about the *licht* in such Spinozist terms cannot be considered, at least in the author's intentions, as a manifestation of the mysticism. However, the language used by Spinoza constitutes an obstacle to comprehension that is not easy to overcome. As shown above, Spinoza builds his philosophical concepts on the *verba usitata*, using, that is, a language borrowed from the Scholastic. In the *Kort Verhandeling* as well as in the *Ethics* the scholastic language is progressively emptied of its meaning in order to be rebuilt according to new definitions. This exigence is particularly evident in the case of the *Kort Verhandeling* because Spinoza wrote this treatise with an instructive aim. He refers to a devotee community highly sensitive to religious themes; he uses a language and chooses terms that reflect this sensibility. To fully understand Balling's approach, the way in which he chooses to use the Spinozist language, conscious of referring to a complex philosophical system but at the same time avoiding every accurate definition and explanation of the term that he employs. With this use of Spinozist language, Balling tries to bend the thought of the "new-philosophy" to a pragmatic use, he makes the effort of bringing his Cartesian and Spinozist studies into a religious diatribe. We can recognize the radicality of Balling's proposal precisely in the practical consequences of this effort.

As we have seen in *Het licht*, the principle of inner light is defined several times and each time with different attributes: as innate, as a means to the knowledge of good and evil, as an inner ear to hear the voice of God, as truth, and as a means to reach the knowledge of God. Balling also uses the concept of light to delineate his idea of true religion:

*Dit Licht is ook het eerste gebinzel van de Ghodsdiest: want dewijle geen ware Godsdiest kan zijn zonder een kennisse Ghods; en geen kennisse Ghods zonder dit Licht: zoo moet nootzakelijk den Ghodsdiest zijn aanvank nemen door dit Licht*⁵⁷⁷.

The true religion has for Balling some important characteristics: the absolute interiorization of the relationship with the divinity without any mediation, the exclusion of the preacher and the Bible from the communication of the knowledge principles of the true religion. From these certain premises follow, as already expressed by Abrahamsz: the absolute absence of divinity in the Church institution. Each religious community has to be conceived as a human institution. The true religion, about which Balling speaks, is based on a noncharismatic and nonconfessional model, very similar to the Collegiants'. Balling excludes each possibility of election or of a particularly privileged position enables somebody to know divinity. This aim is openly expressed by affirming indifference to religious institutions with these words:

⁵⁷⁶BALLING, *Het licht*. p. 13-14.

⁵⁷⁷Ibid. p. 14.

Wel aan dan gy, wie gy ook zoudt mogen zijn; wy en willen u niet aftrekken van den eenen hoop menschen en u wederom tot een anderen overvoeren; het is tot wat anders, waer toe wy u willen nodigen⁵⁷⁸.

These words represent an answer to our pivotal question about the rational tendencies in the Collegiants movement. The elements of what is called the first enlightenment, and the rationalization trends in the Collegiant movement, are to be searched for in the practical relevance of Balling's language. The religious institutions, as well as the simple words or the Bible, are presented here as external means that are unable to develop the individual internal light.

If we want to define the degree of rationality in this concept of light it is important to ask which role religion plays in the development of the light and why Ballings needs to build a new definition of religion: the "true religion." In the case of Balling the critique against Church authority and election is related to that of revealed religion. The redefinition of what is commonly understood as religion is indispensable, to eliminate any possible misunderstandings in communication. From the Collegiants' discussions about the role of religious institutions and their lack of any spiritual inspiration emerges a fundamental question: how is it possible to reach rationality after appealing to a means that reproduces emotional impulse? Balling speaks about the rise and development of the inner light as a process of self-emancipation that cannot be led to exterior forces. The cause of the inner light, as we have already explained, cannot be founded on external authority, via persuasion or coercion. The true religion is, for Balling, the discovery of its own inner light, such as the capacity of directly understanding the divinity. The revealed religions, which are only human forms of religion, are constructed by a series of moral injunction that provide no means of discovering the inner light. The only possible external help, which Balling recognizes as useful, is the exhortation to turn inside oneself to discover the light principle. This has to come from the people who "kennisse van zaken hadden, die hun natuur beter waren⁵⁷⁹."

Balling's way of considering revealed religion is very close to Spinoza's reflection on it. Spinoza develops his consideration about the role of true religion and revealed religion in the *Kort Verhandeling* and in the *Tractatus Theologico- Politicus*⁵⁸⁰. For Spinoza the religion founded on revelation is not able to emancipate humanity from the domination of passions or to conduct the believer to adequate knowledge, the *amore dei intellectualis*. Despite this criticism of the revealed religion Spinoza keeps open a positive interpretation: the original core of the revealed religion can be considered a source of truth. Between this original core and the rational religion Spinoza does not recognize a difference in principles or content but a different way in which the two religions are communicated. The development of the priestly caste, the consideration of the Scriptures as a source of divine inspiration, and the corruption of its ethical teaching, understood as a complex of obligations and norms, has rendered the revealed religion an instrument of obedience and not of emancipation. Belief contrary to knowledge and understanding is a form of obedience to dogmas, which are expressed in an inadequate way. For Spinoza, this kind of obedience can have positive

⁵⁷⁸Ibid. p. 8.

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 16.

⁵⁸⁰ See: MIGNINI F., La dottrina spinoziana della religione, *Studia Spinozana*, no.11, 1995.

results for those who are not able to develop an adequate knowledge, because the dogmas, although irrational in their formulation, are capable of producing behaviors conforming to reason because of their original rational core. The *credo minimum* of the Scriptures, although based on pure imagination, is a universal value that can lead to rational behavior. This “positive” evaluation of obedience is completely absent from Balling's formulation of true religion. Without full understanding of the good, and adequate knowledge of God, it is impossible, according to Balling, to reach *gelukzaligheid*:

En hierom dan, is het niet zeer slecht dat men doorgaans wil en noch meint reden te hebben tot zulk doen dat de menschen dit of dat ghoet moeten doen of quaat moeten laten; omdat men het hen zo aanzet, zonder iets meer als ten hoogsten de gewoonlijke beweegreden waarom even of dit genoeg waar? Wie kan doch zulke uitwerkingen zien als hier begeert worden in deze oorzaak? Door wy ik altijd niet. De ervarentheit leert het ook: want waarom zoud dit alles anders zoo in een fleur en gewoonte kunnen verdwijnen zonder enige vrucht? Dit en zijn dan de rechte middelen niet⁵⁸¹.

The revealed religion can never be the right means to reach adequate knowledge and with it beatitude. This refusal to conform to exterior norms seems to be led not by individual separation from reality but Spinozist awareness of being part of it. For this reason reality does not have to be searched far away, but in the nearest place, in oneself⁵⁸², and in an autonomous rather than in a heteronomic way.

Balling's critique of Church institutions seems here to be more direct than that of Spinoza. Balling's initial Skepticism turns into confidence in the human capacity to discover the inner light. His attempt to describe contact with the divinity via Spinoza's third kind of knowledge should not be considered a form of rationality. The implications of Spinoza's philosophy in religious matters, which, as in the case of Meijer's *Philosophie sacre scripture interpretes*, led to a form of rationalization of the religion or of the revelation, were clearly not accepted in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. The knowledge of God can be, then, described only with an adjective of immediate and nondiscursive form and not as a mix of imagination and rationality. Balling's refusal to speak about rationality can be considered as an attempt to follow Spinoza on that line, trying to find an exit to Cambridge neoplatonism, the influence of the new Scholastic and to each form of enthusiasm⁵⁸³. Acknowledging the role of reason in prophecy, as well as in the direct revelation of God's light, is to be interpreted as a description closer to theological tradition than to Spinoza's form of rationalism.

Balling's understanding of human nature had radical outcomes for the religious life of his time. More than a polemical pamphlet against William Ames, *Het licht* represents a reflection on revealed religion and, with its religious and philosophical vocabulary, is an admonishment of theological disputes as simple effects of an inadequate knowledge. The Collegiants proposed at that time a different model of organization and the position expressed by Balling and Galenus Abrahamsz was in

⁵⁸¹BALLING, *Het licht*. p. 15. On the role played by Scholastic rationalism and the rejection of it, see: KOLAKOWSKI L., *Dutch Seventeenth-century Anticonfessional Ideas and Rational Religion: The Mennonite, Collegiant, and Spinozan connections*, in *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, no. 3/4 (Jul/Oct) 1990. pp. 414-416.

⁵⁸²*Ibid.* p. 9.

⁵⁸³See: HUTTON S., *The Prophetic Imagination: a Comparative Study of Spinoza and the Cambridge Platonist, John Smith*, in *Spinoza's Political and Theological Thought*, North-Holland Publishing Company, Amsterdam/Oxford/New York 1984.

theoretical support of this practice. The rationalism of this position and its Radical Enlightenment nature are to be found in the antiauthoritarian and anticonfessional criticism of the Collegiants and in the ethical behavior guided by a process of self-emancipation.

Conclusion

As this dissertation has sought to show, the antiauthoritarian and anticonfessional nature of the Collegiants did not necessarily coincide with rational behavior towards religion. On the contrary, it seems that in the 17th century the rational justification of belief coincided with the progression of an authoritarian justification in religious life, with strong elements of transcendentalism. One emblematic figure of this tendency was Van Dale, champion of the new rationality of the Scientific Revolution; he was an opponent of all mystical and prophetic behavior but, at the same time, defender of the traditional and controlling structure of the Church. The relationship between Collegiants' criticism of priesthood and their progressive rationalization, which, it has been stressed by many authors, seems not to have had, in this context, a biunivocal determination. Rational and radical behavior did not overlap or include each other. It should be noted, furthermore, that the penetration of rational arguments *tout court* in the Collegiants was limited to certain authors like Meijer and Jelles, while the final phase of the movement seemed to testify to an increase in devotional and mystical elements. Arminianism and Socinianism represented two strong sources of influence in the determination of Collegiants' rational interpretation of the Scriptures, though these leanings were highly sanctioned inside and outside the movement. Only Meijer, with the influx of Cartesian methodology, appeared to have developed the most radical interpretation of the Scriptures, stressing the primacy of the philosophy over the theology and over the Scriptures themselves. However, as has been demonstrated, Meijer has to be considered an exception, his name is hard to find in religious disputations, and his text about the interpretation of the Scriptures was, significantly, written in Latin, not in Dutch. What seems equally important, though, is to stress that in the 17th century Spinozist penetration into the religious life and within the Collegiants can be judged marginal. Bredenburg's attempt to use Spinoza's philosophy in matters of faith was violently rejected within the Collegiants and the penetration of Cartesian argumentation had more success stressing the mystical than the pure rational.

The misunderstanding that sees radical religious trends always accompanied by rational tendencies, arose from the multiple use of the term rationality. This concept was tied to the Scientific Revolution but also the Scholastic tradition, with the emergence of the new Cartesians, who represented in certain aspects a metaphysical articulation of the Christian tradition. The rational line seemed to develop in a progressive justification of traditional and orthodox religion, ridiculing only the practices that were later defined as superstition.

While Spinoza and Hobbes emphasized the importance of religion as a means to

govern and rule a country, the religious radical movement attempted to reform the religious life and even to rethink the way in which religion had to be experienced. Examining the consequences of this behavior among the Collegiants involves a question about the way in which rational argumentation penetrated into this explicitly religious project. More than proposing a rational justification of the religion, they tried to propose a new form of religious life. It has been shown that the Collegiants could be described as fervent believers who were mainly worried about the issues of redemption and salvation. Quotation from the Holy Scriptures, used as principal texts for discussion and argumentation, displays the devotional side of this movement, which was surely not interested in transforming the religion as a philosophical exercise. The Collegiants' discussions were, indeed, focused especially on the visible situation of the Church and their antiauthoritarian vision was not directly tied with the rationalization of the religious life.

Finally, the Collegiants seemed to testify to what is, in this dissertation, defined as reasonable empirical behavior. More than being interested in philosophical or theological speculation, the Collegiants tried to find a practical solution to the religious problems of their time. A considerable share of the Collegiants' position originated from the will to activate a widespread tolerance that could allow the co-presence of different confessions. The Collegiants' movement included a mix of positions: hard to synthesize, they were affected by mystical and rational trends, with some authors who tried to Christianize the philosophy of Descartes and Spinoza. This plurality led, however, to a certain uniformity of argumentation, the Collegiants showing a constant and shared interest in what it is possible to name a form of "public religion," which had to avoid exclusivity and the pretense to the concord in order to guarantee the civil peace. In order to achieve this aim the Collegiants crossed a line that led them despite themselves to a substantial secularization of religion. With the theory of a Church without God, published in 1649 with the *Nadere Verklaringen*, the Collegiants declared the absence and lack of interest of God regarding human affairs. This position is useful to deprive religion of its dangerous component, and to eliminate its charismatic and elective factor, but it also transforms religion into a faith without whichever confession or other element of identification. This form of militant faith, based on the voluntary participation of the individual and on strong personal motivation seems to have been the principal cause of the end of the Collegiantism in the 18th century. The Collegiants vanished in the context of absolute interiorization and privatization of belief or via the progressive choice of its members to join religious groups that were more strongly characterized. The Collegiants' proposal appeared to lose its meaning when, at the end of the 17th century, the ethical discourse in the public sphere was monopolized by the figure of the "virtuous atheist." It meant that the religious discourse of the "Christian without Church", and the appeal for tolerance and inclusion, began to be substituted, potentially by an ethical nonbeliever. The 17th century developed the possibility of declaring its own devotion without belonging to a Church: at the end of the 1600s the idea of non-Christian ethics likewise became justifiable and acceptable.

To conclude, the most important consequence of being "Christian without Church" was a profound reorganization of the religious institution, a challenge that had the aim of rethinking the whole meaning of belief. The Collegiants had the opportunity to force this discourse to the extreme limits; this constitutes, in terms of material, a well-endowed study subject examining shifts of the concept of religion in early modernity.

In this field a central role is played by the concept of nonconformity, which introduced an ideal of pluralism, changing in a positive way the idea of religious difference. The defense of freedom of conscience and of tolerance were significant but the struggle for acceptance of diversity as a richness factor seems to be the most important Collegiants contribution activating a deep dynamic in the religious field. After the 17th century it was finally possible to contemplate the religious fragmentation and the differentiation of belief as richness factors for the capitalist countries. This change, which introduced a positivization of concepts that before the 17th century had a negative meaning, marked the inception of what would later be a consistent component of Enlightenment ideology.

Appendix 1:

XIX Artikel

5.6. Introduction

In this Appendix it is possible to find the translation of some of the most relevant articles of Abrahamsz and Spruyt's *Nader verklaringe van de XIX. Artikelen*. This choice is imposed by the necessity to give to the reader direct experience of the original text. As it has been possible to notice this approach has been maintained for the whole of the Dissertation in order to guarantee to the reader constant confrontation with the Dutch terms and Collegiants' rhetoric. As it has already been stated in this Dissertation the language and word selection made by the Collegiants is essential to understand their position and their approach to determinate questions. The articles presented here are the most representative of Abrahamsz and Spruyt's theory of absence of Holy Gifts and of their theory of nonconformity. In some articles, as for example III and V, there are Biblical references and explanations of some of the central concepts of the *Nader verklaringe*.

XIX. Artikelen

Artikel I	Article I
<p>Nadien in de schriften des <i>N. Testaments</i> maer van een eenige Kerck gelesen word/ onder de benaminge van (a) de <i>Bruydt</i>, (b) <i>Huysvrouw</i> ende 't (c) <i>lichaem Christi</i>: wiens (a) <i>Bruydegom</i>, <i>Man</i> (b) ende (c) <i>Hooft</i>, <i>Christus</i> de heere genaemt word.</p> <p>1- aa Matth.9.V.15; Marc.2.V.19,20; Ioan.3.V.29; Apoc.21.V.2.9; en cap. 22.V.17. bb 2. Cor.II.V.2; Apoc.21.V.9. cc I. Cor.12.V.12,13,27; I Ephes.1.V.22,23; en cap.4.V. 4.7. 15, 16.</p>	<p>Since in the scriptures of the <i>New Testament</i> it is possible to read about more than one Church under the name of Bride, Wife and Body of Christ: who is Bridegroom, Man and Head, he is called the Christ.</p> <p>1- aa Matt.9.V.15; Mark.2.V.19,20; John.3.V.29; Apoc.21.V.2.9; and ch. 22.V.17. bb 2.Cor.II.V.2; Apoc.21.V.9. cc 1.Cor.12.V.12,13,27; Ephes.V.22,23; ch.4.V.4.7.15,16.</p>
Artik. II	Article II

<p>Dat oock de selbe heere Iesus Christus in dese Kercke sommige tot Apostelen, sommige tot Propheten, sommige tot Evangelisten, en sommige tot Herders, en Leeraers, gegeven heeft; gesamentlijk streckende tot de volmakinge der Heyligen, tot ht werck der bedieninge, en de tot opbouwinge deser Kercke, die sijn lichaem ghenoeemt wordt.</p>	<p>The same Lord Jesus Christ has given in this Church, some to the Apostles, some to the Prophets, some to the Evangelists, and some to Shepherds and Teachers; together striving for the perfection of the Saints, for the work of the service and striving for the edification of this Church, which is called his body.</p>
<p>Artik. III</p> <p>Dat hy haer oock tot desen eynde met behoorlijcke gaven des H. Geests versorgt heeft: als noodige wijsheyd, noodige kennisse, rechte onderscheydinghe der Geesten, macht, om de vyanden en tedenstrijders der Waerheydt/ na gheleghentheydt en eysch der saken/ te straffen of te tuchtigen; bequaemheydt om oock anderen tot Opsienders, en Leerars, te stellen; en die gestelt zijnde/ door hare ghebden/ en oplegginge haerder handen /de gaven des H. Geestes/ noodigh tot volvoeringe van hun Ampten, mede te deelen; en voorder om door veelderley wonder-werken haer Ampten, en de waerheydt van hun Leere, te bekrachtigen.</p> <p>3- <i>Haer</i>, verstat dit van een vegelijcke order der bovengenoemde personen, en ampten, yder in sijn standt, en graedt.</p> <p>a- <i>Wijsheydt</i>, om in alles sonder feylinge voorsichtelijk, verstandigh, en na gheleghentheyd van personen, tijden, en saken, in de dingen des Gods dienst te handele. Siet hier af Luce 21. V. 14. 15; Actor.6.V 10; I Cor.2.V. 6,7; en c. 12. V.8.</p> <p>b- <i>Kennis</i>, verstaet ware wetenschap van alle noodige en nuttige waerheydt; Item, van alle verborgentheden tot de Christelijcke Godts-dienst behoorende. Siet I Cor. 2. van v. 6. tot het eynde des Capittels: Een seer voorname plaets, om't gene geseyt is te</p>	<p>Article III</p> <p>That he also until this end provided her with appropriate gifts of the Holy Spirit: with the necessary wisdom, necessary knowledge, right distinction of the Spirits, power, to punish or discipline the enemies and adversaries of the Truth, by opportunity and reclaiming things. Capacity to put also the Attendants and the Teachers; to impart, once they are in the place, through their prayers and with the imposition of hands, with the gifts of the Holy Spirit necessary for the accomplishment of their Offices; and to confirm the Offices and the truth of his Doctrine through multiple miracles.</p> <p>3- <i>Her</i>; this means a comparable order of the aforementioned persons, and offices, each in its position and degree.</p> <p>a- <i>Wisdom</i>, understand everything without errors and in a clear way, and the possibility to serve persons, times, and things in the matter of the religion. See: Luke 21.V.14.15; Acts.6.V.10; I Cor.2.V. 6,7; and ch 12.V.8.</p> <p>b- <i>Knowledge</i>, is to be understood as the true science to all necessary and valuable true. Item, to all hidden things which are part of the Christian Religion. See: 1.Cor. 2. from V.6. to the end of the chapter. A prominent passage that everybody can see and ratify; Rom.15.V. 14; 1.Cor.12.V.8; 2.Cor.3.V.18; with ch 4.V.6.</p>

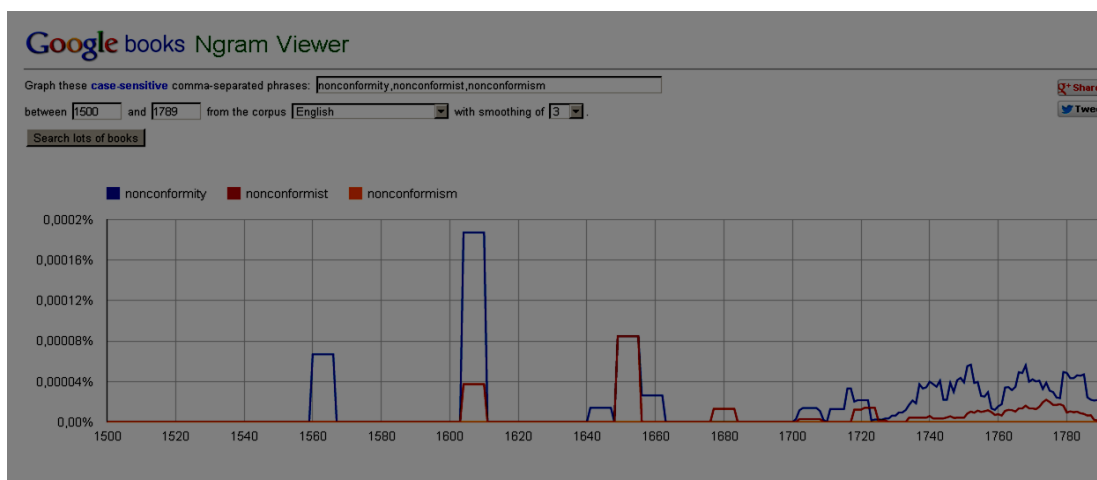
<p>bekrachten. Rom.15.V. 14; I Cor.12.V.8; 2. Cor.3.V 18; met cap.4:V.6.</p> <p>c- <i>Onderscheydinge der geesten</i>, om te proeven, of sy uyt Godt waren, of niet. Joan.4.V.I; I Cor. 12.V.10; Actor.5.V.3.</p> <p>d- <i>Macht &c.</i> Siet 2 Cor.10.V.2,3,4,5,6,7,8. De uytwerckinge van dese geestelijke <i>Macht</i>, siet 1. Cor.5.V. 3,4,5; I. Tim I., V. 20.</p> <p>e- <i>Bequaemheydt</i>, siet Actor.I.V.15, &c; en c.6.V.6; Actor. 14.V.23; 2Tim 2. V. 2; Titum I. v. * 5 Merckt, dat de <i>Opsienders</i> en <i>Leeraers</i>, van de <i>Apostelen</i> Selfs, of sulcke die daer toe van haer gelast waren, ghestelt zijn gheweest; ende niet door <i>omstemminge</i> der <i>Broederen</i> [alleen:] gelijckheden onder ons geschiedt.</p> <p>ff- Siet Actor. 6.V.6; en c. 8.V.15,17,18; en c. 14. V.23; en c. 19.V.6; I Tim. 4.V.14&c.</p> <p>g- In de <i>Handelingen der Apostelen</i> doorgaens; Item, Rom. 15.V.18,19, 2 Cor.12.V.12&c.</p>	<p>c- <i>Discernment of the Spirits</i>, to prove if they are from God or not. 1.John.4.V.1; 11.Cor.12.V.10; Acts.5.V.3.</p> <p>d- <i>Power etc.</i> 2.Cor.10.V.2,3,4,5,6,7,8. The consequences of this <i>Spiritual Power</i> see: 1.Cor.5.V. 3,4,5; 1.Tim I.V. 20.</p> <p>e- <i>Ability</i>, see: Acts.I.V.15, &c; and ch 6.V.6; Acts.14.V.23; 2.Tim 2.V.2; Tim 1.V.*5. Note that the <i>Attendants</i> and the <i>Teachers</i>, of the same <i>Apostolos</i>, were ordered, and put in place, and not through the choice of the Brothers [alone:] happens equally with us.</p> <p>ff- See: Acts.6.V.6; and ch 8.V.15,17,18; and ch 14.V.23; and ch 19.V.6; 1.Tim.4.V.14&c.</p> <p>g- In the <i>Acts of the Apostles</i> generally: Item, Rom.15.V.18,19, 2.Cor.12.V.12&c.</p>
<p>Artik. V.</p> <p>Alsoo dat niet alleen sy/sie dit <i>Woordt</i> spraecken/ten vollen verseeckert zijn weest; dat het Godt op dese/ en gheen andere wijze/door en van haer wilde gesproken hebben: maer dat ook de ghene/die 't hoorden/volkomelijck van de <i>Waerheydt</i> des selfs verseekert konden zijn/en waren.</p> <p>5.</p> <p>a- Joan.14.v.*26; Act.5.v.*20; I Cor. 2.v.12.*16.</p> <p>b- De Toe-hoorders konden volkomelijck van de <i>waarheydt</i> van dit <i>Woordt</i> verseeckert zijn. I. Voor so veel haer Leere als <i>Waerheydt</i>, <i>Goddelijck</i>, en uyt Godt zijnde, de harten der menschen innerlijck en net, reackte: vermidts de openbaringe der <i>waerheydt</i>, door hen geschiedende, mede ghetuygenisse der <i>waerheydt</i> vondt in de <i>conscientien</i> der goetwillige Toehoorders.</p>	<p>Article V.</p> <p>Those who speak the <i>Word</i> want to be assured they are not alone, that God wanted to speak in this manner and not in a different way, through and from them: but that also those who absolutely did hear from the <i>Truth</i>, the same could be assured.</p> <p>5.</p> <p>a- John.14.V.*26; Acts 5.V.*20; 1.Cor. 2.V.12.*16.</p> <p>b- The audience can be absolutely sure about the <i>truth</i> of this <i>Word</i>. 1. For so many the teaching that <i>Truth</i>, <i>Divinity</i>, are from God, it hits inside the heart of the people: since the revelation of the <i>truth</i>, happening through them, with the witness of the <i>truth</i>, found in the <i>conscience</i> of the benevolent audience. In St Paul it is clear; 2.Cor.4.V.2.</p> <p>2. For so much they through their <i>wisdom</i>,</p>

<p>Waer op den H. Paulus schijnt te sien. 2. Cor.4.V.2.</p> <p>2. Voor soo veel sy door hare <i>wijsheydt</i>, <i>kennis</i>, en verder <i>bequaemheydt</i>, <i>spijse</i> konden <i>geven ter bequamer tijdt</i>; en toepasselijck spreken na de gestalte, en stant, van yders ghemoedt en leven. Siet hier van I. Cor. 14. V. 24. 25.</p> <p>3. Voor soo veel de Toehoorders de <i>waerheydt</i> dese <i>Woordts</i>, ende der <i>Leere</i>, aennemende, 't <i>effect</i> des selfs in der daet daer op genooren; en tot bevestigingh, van dat dit <i>Woort</i>, en <i>Leere</i>, <i>Waeheydt</i> was, door 't ontfangen des H. Geestes, in hare harten <i>verzegelt</i> wierden; siet Ephes. I. V. 13; Gal. 3.v.2.5.14; c.4.v.6. Behalven dat hier benven haer heyligh en onstraffelijck leven, t'samen met het cruys, vervolgh, en lijden, ('t welck sy, deses <i>woords</i> en <i>leerens</i> halven, ghewilligh en lijdtzaam verdroeghen) te ghelijck met het mede-ghetuuygenisse Godts door veerley <i>wonderen</i>, en <i>krachten</i>, haer <i>Woordt</i>, en <i>Leere</i>, niet weynigh bekrachtighden; en de Toehoorders van de <i>warheydt</i> des selfs verseeckerden.</p>	<p><i>knowledge</i>, and <i>ability</i> can give at the right time, and speaking in an appropriate way, after the shape and stature of each one's peace and life. See here 1.Cor.14.V. 24,25.</p> <p>3. For so many in the audience who keep the <i>truth</i> of these <i>Words</i> and <i>Teaching</i>, enjoy the <i>effect</i> of the same; and confirm this <i>Word</i>, and <i>Teaching</i>, <i>Truth</i>, from when the Holy Spirit was sealed in our hearts; see Ephes. 1.V. 13; Gal. 3.V.2,5,14; ch 4.V.6. Except for here with their holy and blameless lives, together with the cross, oppression and suffering exist (these <i>words</i> and <i>teachings</i> endured the willing and suffering together), similarly to the co-witness of God through numerous <i>miracles</i> and <i>forces</i> of his <i>Word</i> and <i>Teaching</i>, and not less powerful; and the audience of the <i>truth</i>, which is self-assured.</p>
<p>Artik. VIII</p> <p>Voeght hier by: dat beneffens de voorgemelte <i>Ampten</i> ook andere waren/die yder tot hun <i>Dienst</i> met <i>behoorlijcke gaven</i> des <i>H. Gheestes</i> voorsien waren, als/ <i>behulpfels</i>, <i>regeeringen</i>, & c. en mede tot <i>opbouwinge</i> en <i>onderhoudinge</i> der <i>Kercke</i> streckten: sae dat yegelijck der ghemeene <i>Ledematen</i>, nae mate haers geloofs en standts/ d'eene dus en d'ander soo begaest waren; alsoo dat beyde die gene die in <i>Ampten</i>, en die daer buyten waren/ghesamentlijck <i>door eenen Geest</i> tot <i>een lichaem gedoopt</i> waren: 't welck soo gesamentlijck ghenomen/in waerheydt den naem een <i>Gemeente Gods</i>, <i>Bruydt</i>, <i>Huysvrouw</i>, en <i>lichaem Christi</i> toequam.</p> <p>8. a- I. Cor.12.v.28,29,30 b- Eph.4.v.7 <i>Elck een van ons</i> (hy spreeckt</p>	<p>Article VIII</p> <p>Add here: that in addition to the aforementioned <i>Offices</i> there were also others that were all provided with <i>proper Gifts</i> of the <i>Holy Spirit</i> for <i>help</i>, <i>government</i>, <i>etc.</i> and with the intention of <i>building</i> and <i>maintaining</i> the <i>Church</i>: see that each <i>member</i> of the community, to the extent of their faith and position, benefits from these, for the one as for the other. Both those inside the office and those outside were baptized together <i>through one Spirit</i>, into <i>one body</i>: which, including this altogether, in the truth of the name of the <i>Community of God</i>, <i>Bride</i>, <i>Wife</i>, and <i>body of Christ</i>.</p> <p>8. a- 1.Cor.12.V.28,29,30 b- Ephes.4.V.7 <i>To each of us</i> (he speaks about the whole <i>Community</i> and its</p>

<p>van de ganzsche <i>Ghemeente</i> en haer onderlinghe Ledematen) <i>is de geandegedeven na de mate der gave Christi</i>. Siet verder vers 15, 16, I. Corin 12.v.11. c- I. Cor.12.v.13</p>	<p>members) <i>grace is given after receipt of the gifts of Christ</i>. See the following verses: 15, 16. 1.Cor.12.V.11. c- 1.Cor.12.V.13</p>
<p>Artik. XII</p> <p>Dat mede dese soo op-gerechte en ingestelde <i>kercken</i> en onder dese oock die <i>Gemeente</i>, daer wy teghenwoordigh nu noch onder sorteren/ (doo ten opsichte van haer op-rechtinge/en instellinghe /als ten aensien van haer teghenwoordigen stant/en staet:) <i>heel niet conform zijn</i>, de op-rechtinge/instellinge/ en standt/ van die eerste en eenige <i>Kerck</i>: wien alleen /en geen ander/de naem van een <i>Gemeente Gods, Bruydt, Huys-vrouw</i>, en 't <i>lichaem Christi</i>, in de <i>Schriften des Nieuwen Testaments</i> ghegeven wordt.</p> <p>12. * <i>Niet conform zijn</i> Om dit wel te onderscheyden, (aenghesien daer seer veel aenghelegen is) dienen alle <i>qualiteyten</i>, en omstandighen, der eerste <i>kercke</i>, tegen den stant deser tegenwoordiger <i>Kercken</i>, en die van onse <i>Gemeente</i>, neerstelijck, en in <i>de vreesse des Heeren</i>, overwogen te zijn.</p>	<p>Article XII</p> <p>The founders of this legitimate and well-built <i>Church</i> and under this also the <i>Community</i>, under whom we are actually ordained (in relation to this legitimation and institution, concerning the actual position/state). <i>Be highly nonconforming</i>. The legitimation, institution are maintained by the first and only <i>Church</i>: which is named alone and without any other name except that of <i>Community of God, Bride, Wife and Body of Christ</i>, in the <i>Scriptures of the New Testament</i>.</p> <p>12. * <i>To be nonconforming</i> To distinguish well (shining is very important) all the <i>qualities</i> and circumstances of the first <i>Church</i>, it has consider the state of the actual <i>Church</i>, and of our nearby <i>Community</i>, and in the <i>peace of the Lord</i>.</p>
<p>Artik. XVI</p> <p>Nadien 't van/seggen wy sluytelijck/met dese saeck/ en den toestant der hedensdaghsche <i>Kercken</i>, en onder dese oock met den toestandt van die <i>Ghemeente</i>, daer wy tegenwoordigh nu noch onder sorteeren/aldus/ als boven gemeldt is/staet en ghelegghen is, soo segghen wy: (alles altooren <i>in de vreesse des levendighen Gods</i> overwoghen hebbende/en noch gheneghen zijnde verder te overweghen). Dat wy de <i>oprechtinge, en instellinge</i>, van dese onse hedendaeghsse <i>Gemeente</i>, (onder welcke wy tot hier toe met merckelijcke bekommeringhe den naem van <i>Leeraers</i> hebben ghedragen). Hooger nier en kunnen aenmercken: als een weck/ 't welck nae 't beste goet-vinden van goedt-meenende</p>	<p>Article XVI</p> <p>Afterwards we say, finally, on this matter of the contemporary <i>Church</i>, and also of contemporary <i>communities</i>, which are actually divided as we explained above, so we say (everybody in the <i>fear of the living God</i>) that we the <i>legitimation and institution</i> of our <i>Community</i> (under which we, until now, with notable anxieties, sustained the the name of <i>teachers</i>). We cannot consider as work that in which the best consent of well-intentioned people consider each commandment expressed in the <i>example</i> of the <i>New Testament</i>, for which extraordinary gifts and and authority were granted by <i>Christ the Lord</i>, or some other generous representative of the <i>will of God</i>. But satisfaction is granted only by faith and the</p>

<p>menschen gedaen zijnde/ niet en rust op eenigh <i>expres</i> Gebodt/ofte <i>Exempel</i>, in de <i>Schriften</i> des <i>Nieuwen Testaments</i>, des aengaende vervaet; nochte oock op eenige <i>extra-ordinaire</i> <i>authoriteyt</i>, <i>last</i> ofte <i>commissie</i>, hier toe van <i>Christo</i> de <i>Heere</i> selfs verleent; ofte eenighe andere volle verseeckertheydt van <i>Godes</i> wil: maer alleen op een bloot vertrouwen/en tot noch toe onversekerde hoop/ van dat het den <i>grooten Huys.vader</i> soude mogen behaghen; en dat <i>Hy</i> 't/ nae sijn grondeloose goedertierentheydt/ voor soo veel 't uyt goeder meeningh geschiedt is/ gunstelijck soude moghen aensien.</p> <p>Ghemerckt <i>Godt</i> de <i>Heere</i> geen ontwijffelijck <i>medeghtuyghenisse</i>, tot hier toe/ over dit werck ghegheven heeft: hoedanigh <i>Hy</i> genadelijck met de eeniche eerste <i>Kercke</i>, boven meermaels gemeldt/ ghehandelt heeft Als <i>Hebr.c.2.v* 4.</i> te sien is.</p>	<p>assured hope that comes from the <i>Great House of the Father</i>. . <i>He</i>, with his infinite goodness and generosity, we thank for so much that good understanding makes it possible to see.</p> <p>Notice that <i>Christ the Lord</i> had no doubt in his <i>testimony</i>, until here, in the work that he gives. Today <i>He</i> is merciful to the first <i>Church</i> (<i>Hebr.2.V. * 4.</i>)</p>
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Appendix II: Occurrence of the word nonconformity, nonconformist and nonconfrmism between 1500 and 1789



Source: Google Ngram vision

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