



**‘TO KEEP THE PEOPLE IN THE RIGHT FAITH’
A STUDY OF CATHOLIC RESPONSES TO THE
EARLY DUTCH REFORMATION (1517-1528)**

RESEARCH MASTER THESIS HISTORICAL STUDIES



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Introduction

Religious reading in the first half of the sixteenth century in the Low Countries has often been closely linked with the rise of Protestantism. As we will see, books of Luther started to penetrate the Low Countries on a large scale during the 1520s, and much scholarly attention has been devoted to this. Contemporary Catholic literature of religious instruction, on the other hand, has often been marginalized or ignored, for it has been a strong tendency in historiography to present the late-medieval Church as somehow in decay, making the texts written by clerics less interesting. Historians studying this period have been predominantly interested in the rise of Lutheranism, other forms of early Protestantism or Erasmian thought, thereby downplaying the significant body of Catholic literature, both in Latin and in the vernacular.¹

The idea that the late-medieval Church was in ‘decay’, as was often claimed in the nineteenth century, has been nuanced by many scholars. In 1963, specialists like Jacques Toussaert still claimed that the Catholic Church was in a critical and weak condition at the beginning of the sixteenth century, interpreting the success of the Reformation as an inevitable result of this situation of crisis.² Dutch scholars such as Rogier came up with similar conclusions. They both wrote from a clerical perspective in a pillarized society, judging the late-medieval Church by anachronistic post-Tridentine criteria.³ This view of widespread decay has been challenged in the last decades. Historians such as John Bossy and Eamon Duffy have successfully shown that the laity was highly involved in the rich and diverse religious life in pre-Reformation England.⁴ Many were member of one or more confraternities, many of which had a strong civic function, for example by contributing to the rich procession culture in many cities.⁵

The laity was deeply involved in religious reading, and the demand for religious literature was great, which explains the great success of the printing press. In most major and even relatively minor churches, numerous altars could be present, founded and maintained by confraternities or guilds, and multiple masses could be going on at the same time, such as the frequent masses for the repose of the souls of the dead. For all these activities, many priests were required. In dioceses such as Utrecht, there was one secular priest for every 115 inhabitants, and on top of

¹ Bert Roest, *Franciscan Literature of Religious Instruction Before the Council of Trent*, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions, 117 (Leiden, 2004), 294.

² Jacques Toussaert, *Le Sentiment religieux, la vie et la pratique religieuse des laïcs en Flandre maritime et au "west-hoeck" de langue flamande aux XIV^e, XV^e et début du XVI^e siècle* (Plon, 1963), 606.

³ Judith Pollmann, *Catholic identity and the revolt of The Netherlands* (Oxford, 2012), 20.

⁴ John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1985); Eamon Duffy, *The stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400- c. 1580* (New Haven, 2005).

⁵ Paul Trio, *Volksreligie als spiegel van een stedelijke samenleving. De broederschappen te Gent in de late Middeleeuwen* (Leuven, 1993), 15.

that many men and women were part of one of the many religious orders, tertiary or beguine communities.⁶ Many of the secular and regular clergymen were university educated, and this reflected the high level of education in the Low Countries.⁷

The presence of a large number of well educated religious people and a highly literate laity created a great demand for religious texts. Already forty editions of vernacular Bibles had been published in the Low Countries before the Reformation started, and during the first three decades after 1517, eighty more vernacular Bible editions would be brought in circulation.⁸ Unlike in England, where vernacular Bibles were readily linked with the Lollard heresy by Church authorities, and unlike in France, where vernacular Bible reading was outlawed relatively quickly because of the perceived Protestant threat, vernacular Bibles were part of the fabric of Dutch religious life throughout the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, both before and after the coming of the Reformation.⁹ Vernacular Bibles were part of a great variety of religious texts available. One of the outcomes of the ‘long fifteenth century’ was a strong emphasis on (individual) devotion through the act of reading, and clerical writers enthusiastically catered to this market with a steady stream of books. Orders like the Franciscans had laid a strong emphasis on meditation on the Passion of Christ, and this is reflected in the publication of a large number of vernacular devotional texts on this specific theme. The idea of a literate laity and a Catholic clergy that provided them with devotional texts is now widely shared among specialists.¹⁰

However, where they divert is on the nature of religious instruction in the sixteenth century, especially after the start of the Reformation. Bert Roest claimed that most scholars working on this period have been working within a perspectivist paradigm, studying the developments in the early sixteenth century from the perspective of the rise of Protestantism. In their attempts to understand this rise, scholars ignored the studies which pointed to a resilient Catholic culture and a productive printing culture.¹¹ Franciscan authors wrote works and preached homilies for

⁶ R.R. Post, *Kerkelijke verhoudingen in Nederland vóór de Reformatie van 1500 tot 1580* (Utrecht, 1964), 36-48.

⁷ Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 28.

⁸ A.D. den Hollander, *De Nederlandse bijbelvertalingen, 1522-1545* Bibliotheca bibliographica Neerlandica 33 (Nieuwkoop 1997), 17.

⁹ Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 29.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 47; Andrew Gow, ‘Challenging the protestant paradigm: Bible reading in lay and urban contexts of the later Middle Ages’, in: Th.J. Heffernan & Th.E. Burman (ed.), *Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), 161-191; Suzan Folkerts, ‘The Cloister or the City? The Appropriation of the New Testament by Lay Readers in an Urban Setting’, in: *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages. Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit, and Awakening the Passion*, ed. Sabrina Corbellini (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), 175-199.

¹¹ Bert Roest, ‘Franciscan Religious Instruction in the Low Countries, c. 1520-1560’, in: *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 85:4 (2014), 292-310, 294.

all levels of society, from the highly educated theologian at Louvain to ‘simple’ laity, and they did so with literature that had a thorough scriptural foundation. In these works, Roest argued, they addressed many issues the Protestants had raised about Catholicism.¹² When the Reformation started, the Catholic clergy had already much experience with the printing press and were ready to deploy it to write anti-Reformist polemics.

This notion of a Catholic clergy who had already much experience with the printing press prior to the Reformation is shared by some specialists. For example, James G. Clark has shown that instead of being opposed or threatened by the press, German Benedictine communities actively patronized printing presses. Already before the 1460s, Gutenberg’s Bible reached a monastic audience, and at the end of the fifteenth century even smaller rural religious communities used and patronized printing presses.¹³ In the Low Countries, the Franciscans were among the first to discover the potential of the printing press for their preaching mission. No other Catholic order was so actively printing material of religious instruction in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century as the friars. Koen Goudriaan concluded that no less than 148 editions of Franciscan texts have survived from this period, followed at a distance by the Carthusians with 47 editions.¹⁴

However, such studies about the Catholic printing output or studies on individual Catholic authors have never entered the main body of scholarship of religious life in the Low Countries. Very few changes have been made to the academic and popular perception of the religious life at the first half of the sixteenth century, and the history of Catholicism remains characterized by a perceived lack of doctrinal instruction.¹⁵ One of the historians who has recently reached such conclusions about the sixteenth century Church is Judith Pollmann. In her book, *Catholic Identity and Revolt in The Netherlands, 1520-1635*, she argued that one of the defining reasons for the success of the Protestant Reformation was the lack of doctrinal texts written by the Catholic clergy to equip the laity with arguments to counter the Protestant attacks on the Church. She followed a diary report of a Belgian Catholic Van Vaernewijck, who had written about priests who were more concerned with ‘instructing their flock to follow a good, honest and edifying life, than to explain the issues of faith, which are hard to understand.’¹⁶

¹² Roest, ‘Franciscan Religious instruction’, 294.

¹³ James G. Clark, ‘Print and Pre-Reformation religion: the Benedictines and the press, c.1470-1550’, in: Julia Crick and Alexandra Walsham (ed.), *The Uses of Script and Print 1300-1700* (Cambridge, 2004), 71-94, 76.

¹⁴ Goudriaan, ‘The Church and the Market’, 112.

¹⁵ Bert Roest, ‘Het ‘verdwenen’ Katholieke leven van de zestiende eeuw: de last van perspectivisme in de Nederlandse historiografie’, in: *De last der geschiedenis: Beeldvorming, leergezag en traditie binnen het historisch metier* (Nijmegen, 2013), 169-187, 173.

¹⁶ Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 44.

Furthermore, he had complained that, 'For the clergy, it is too much trouble to write even a small book', contrary to the reformist writers who would be publishing 'day and night'.¹⁷ Pollmann regarded these observations as being an accurate evaluation of the Catholic output. She concluded, therefore, that the Catholic output was mostly devotional in nature, in which the lay reader could, 'find little (...) that would help them counter Protestant arguments.'¹⁸

Later during the sixteenth century, Catholic writers would start countering Protestant view, but they would do so implicitly, not revealing the arguments which their teaching should counter. Pollmann asked what, exactly, 'Had the Church been doing about heresy in the five decades since Luther's first published his theses?'¹⁹ This question will be the starting point in this thesis. Five vernacular books by different clerical authors from the period 1517-1528 will be studied, and through this analysis a development in both perception of, and strategy against Lutheranism can be traced. I will argue, in contrast with Pollmann's position, that during the 1520s, because of the widespread circulation of Lutheran books, these authors felt forced to react in print, discrediting Lutheranism and equipping envisaged readers with doctrinal arguments against the Lutheran position, in an attempt to keep them loyal to the Church. Due to their doctrinal denunciation of Lutheranism and their fervour to portray Luther and his followers as hypocrites, the works written by clerical authors studied in this thesis provide a challenge to many lingering ideas about Catholicism in the sixteenth century.

Furthermore, I will investigate which books on topics like the Mass were continuously popular throughout the first half of the sixteenth century. This lasting success of instructional books on the Mass poses the question whether the commonly found juxtaposition between 'Catholics' and 'Protestants' in the early years of the Reformation is justified. I will argue that the continuation of a traditional Catholic sacramental life could coincide with an interest in Reformist thought. I will also argue that juxtaposition between 'Catholics' and 'Protestants' often found in previous scholarship is an anachronistic attempt to understand why the Netherlands turned, at least politically, to Protestantism in the decades after 1566.

For historians who argue that the clergy in the first half of the sixteenth century had failed to deliver doctrinal instruction to their flock, the iconoclasm of 1566 and the perceived lack of resistance to the religious violence in that year has been crucial in their interpretation of the religious sentiments in the decades preceding it. To understand why the 1520's, which is the

¹⁷ Ibidem, 45.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 47.

¹⁹ Ibidem, 45.

main decade that is studied in this thesis, is often characterized by a lack of doctrinal instruction, it is important to investigate why scholars have come to such conclusions. In her monograph, Pollmann has argued that the iconoclasm and the lack of resistance to it shows that the clergy had failed to keep the laity loyal to the Catholic Church, especially because they had deliberately not provided the laity with written doctrinal instruction. According to her, the only clear polemic texts were imported from France, where clerical writers, ‘unlike their Netherlandish counterparts, engaged in a spectacular polemical drive against the heretic, in which they made frequent and effective use of the vernacular press’, while in the Low Countries, ‘indigenous clerical writers, whilst increasingly active in developing and refining their anti-Calvinist polemics, wrote almost exclusively in Latin, for an audience of other priests and theologians.’²⁰

This would have been the result of a deliberate policy adopted by clerical writers from the Low Countries. They would have left the laity in the dark about the arguments of the heretics, in fear that they would ‘get ideas themselves.’²¹ By doing so, they had done little to ‘other’ the Reformist side, and had done even less to provide the laity with doctrinal arguments. Pollmann considered it, therefore, not surprising that in 1566 no Catholic party existed to staunchly defend ‘its’ faith against the ‘other’, in this case the Reformists. The Catholic laity was not able to defend their Church doctrinally when crucial point of doctrine were challenged, which either let them leave the Church or rendered them unable to defend it when it got physically under attack in 1566. By arguing this, she has laid the responsibility of the success of the Reformation at the feet of the Catholic clergy, most of all due to their lack of doctrinal instruction.

However, I will argue that the iconoclasm cannot be used to make such judgements. To be able to argue that the iconoclasm of 1566 cannot be fully explained by religious polarization and a lack of Catholic instruction in the preceding decades, the political prelude to 1566 will be examined. I will argue that, fundamentally, political dynamics and opposition against the Habsburg rule, which long preceded the Reformation, played a defining role, much more than a supposedly suppressed Protestantism and an uninstructed Catholic laity. Because political factors were crucial in the unfolding events of the 1560’s, the role of the clergy in failing to keep the laity loyal to the Church need re-evaluation.

²⁰ Ibidem, 48-49.

²¹ Ibidem, 51.

The political factors leading up to the iconoclasm of 1566.

Instead of interpreting the iconoclastic outbursts of 1566 as a purely religious struggle which was the outcome of years of violent suppression of Protestants, as is often the case, I will argue that to understand it properly, the violence must be situated against the background of a long struggle for local autonomy and the retainment of (legal) privileges, a struggle which dated back to the fifteenth century. When the Reformation started, the Low Countries were ruled by the emperor Charles V, and later by king Philip II of Spain. These territories were far from being a unified country. It was a collection of autonomous duchies, counties and principalities, and there was no such thing as a clear centre. Moreover, inside the different territories which together constituted the northern Low Countries (the counties of Holland, Zeeland and Friesland, the Duchy of Gelre, Utrecht and the so-called 'Oversticht' (Groningen, Drenthe and Overijssel), there was no strong hierarchy of great cities over lesser cities, something that characterized the southern Low Countries (notably Flanders and Brabant) with great cities such as Ghent, Antwerp and Louvain.²²

During the fifteenth century, Philip the Good became lord over the Burgundian lands and started a political reorganization which meant mostly a centralization of power in the southern Netherlands and a move towards centralized institutions in Brussels. The northern elite considered this a threat to its independence and privileges by an external political force on which it had little influence. The Burgundian court had French as an official language and the elite knightly order of the Burgundians, the Order of the Golden Fleece, was fully dominated by the southern nobility. As a result of this, different cities, primarily in Holland and Zeeland, forced Mary of Burgundy in 1477 to acknowledge a charter which confirmed many privileges of these northern provinces.²³ When the Reformation started, leadership and authority in the Low Countries was still far from being a strong and centrally organized entity. That might help to explain why the early Reformation in the Low Countries differed substantially from the German Reformation, in which great princes took the lead.

The familiar theme in the northern Low Countries of privileges and autonomy being threatened continued throughout the sixteenth century. The reorganization of the bishoprics by the Habsburg authorities met with intense opposition in the northern Netherlands, for the new bishops, who were more or less considered to be Habsburg appointees, and whose dioceses matched territorial boundaries much closer than before, were feared to be Habsburg appointees

²² Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic. Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806* (Oxford, 1995), 16.

²³ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 28.

and propagators of Habsburg political influence.²⁴ In the course of the sixteenth century, resentment against the Spanish overriding of long-standing privileges and customs continued to grow, especially when territories and cities felt their autonomy being threatened by increasingly fierce anti-heresy laws issued by the administration of Charles V and Philip II, and when the instalment of the inquisition in 1523 infringed on the juridical independence of the local elites.²⁵

The political opposition to the anti-heresy laws, the inquisition, as well as to increased taxations would become the defining factor in the unfolding of the Reformation in the Low Countries.²⁶ This is visible during key-moments, such as the petition that a considerable faction from within the Low Countries elites offered Margareta of Parma in 1566, in which they condemned the aggressive inquisitorial practices. These local elites and the magistrates of major towns did not consider ‘heretics’ to be a big threat to public safety, whereas the laws which forbade any interaction with heretics could severely damage trade relations with merchants from countries which traded the most with the Low Countries, namely Germany and Denmark.²⁷ In the provinces where the Habsburg had more direct control, the inquisition had success in enforcing the strict anti-heresy laws. However, elsewhere, reluctant city magistrates who were responsible for the enforcement of the anti-heresy laws often chose to overlook many offenders.

There was, therefore, a big discrepancy between the aims of Charles V, and even more those of Philip II, and the readiness of territorial and urban authorities to enact the laws resulting from those aims. Especially Philip II had very little understanding with regard to what was going on in The Netherlands. He did not speak the Dutch language, he was rarely present, and because of his personal aim to eradicate heresy, he was incapable of tolerating opposition in these matters, as a result of which his advisers often lied to him about the realities in his northern possessions.²⁸ Therefore, his understanding of the situation in The Netherlands did often not correspond with the complex reality on the ground, and during his reign, the Spanish inquisition grew even more fierce.²⁹ Reformist writers and printers made use of the resentment against

²⁴ Bert Roest, ‘Franciscan Urban Preachers in Defence of Catholicism in the Low Countries c. 1520–1568’, in: *Franciscan Learning, Preaching and Mission c. 1220-1650*, The Medieval Franciscans, 10 (Leiden, 2014), 319.

²⁵ Christine Kooi, ‘The Netherlands,’ In: David M. Whitford (red.), *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research*, (Kirksville, 2007), 273-289, 274-276.

²⁶ Alastair Duke, ‘Moulded by Repression: The Early Netherlands Reformation 1520-55’, in: Alastair Duke (ed.), *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Low Counties*, (Aldershot, 2009), 77-99, 96.

²⁷ Duke, ‘Moulded by repression’, 81.

²⁸ Juliaan Woltjes, ‘Public opinion and the persecution of Heretics in The Netherlands, 1550-59’, In: *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, 121 (Leiden, 2006), 105.

²⁹ Alastair Duke, ‘The elusive Netherlands. The question of national identity in the early modern Low Countries on the eve of the Revolt’, In: *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, 119:1 (2004), 10–38, 15.

these Spanish measures. Especially German printers spread the image to the Netherlands of Spanish cruelty.³⁰ It was good propaganda material; they could equate the Church with the anti-Christ, and many Christians who encountered the fierce heresy suppression in their cities were receptive to this message and as a result became more critical of the ‘Old Church’.³¹

However, popular resentment against the heresy laws alone did not lead to the iconoclasm of 1566, as many historians have tended to believe. These historians claimed that the inquisition successfully repressed Protestant sentiments, but that it engendered the violent outbursts of 1566.³² In the words of Jonathan Israel: ‘The surge of hedge preaching released an accumulation of tension which had built up over four decades.’³³ Repressed Protestantism was in this view like the suppressed steam in a steam engine; hold it too long and it will find a way to escape. However, it is far from clear what were the exact sentiments that drove the iconoclasts in 1566. Recent research has suggested that these outbursts were much smaller, and more fragmented and isolated than has long been assumed. Many sporadic outbursts were organized by the local baronage as acts of protest, targeting the Spanish regime that had threatened their privileges, and symbolic attacks to churches proved useful in their opposition to Spanish rule.³⁴ Many iconoclasts admitted, during later judicial trials, that they had followed orders from the nobility.³⁵ To regard this violence to Catholic property as primarily a univocal subversive religious Protestant act is, as Joke Spaans has argued, a case of projecting communal identities on religious groups, which were by no means crystalized yet.³⁶

The projection of a clear struggle between Protestants and Catholics onto the political situation neither takes into account that the initial aim of the protest, started by a politician like William of Orange, was not to form a Protestant confessional political state, but to enforce a degree of political autonomy and religious tolerance. The eventual result of the Reformation, in which the Dutch Republic would officially become a Reformed state, resembled the German situation. Yet this ‘German style Reformation’ flowing forth from the outcome of the Pacification of Ghent in 1572 was very distinct from the initial ideals of William of Orange and many other

³⁰ Kooi, ‘The Netherlands’, 277.

³¹ Jelle Bosma, ‘Preaching in the Low Countries, 1450-1650’, in: *Preachers and People in the Reformations and Early Modern Period 2* (Leiden, 2001), 327–355, 339.

³² Israel, *The Dutch Republic* 148.

³³ *Ibidem*, 147

³⁴ Jo Spaans, ‘Catholicism and Resistance to the Reformation in The Netherlands’, in: Philip Benedict, Guido Marnef, Henk van Nierop, Marc Venard (red.), *Reformation, Revolution and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555-1585* (Amsterdam, 1999), 149-163, 155.

³⁵ Judith Pollmann, ‘Iconoclasts Anonymous: Why did it take Historians so long to identify the Image-breakers of 1566?’, in: *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, 131:1 (2016), 155–176, 158.

³⁶ Spaans, ‘Catholicism and Resistance’, 152.

protesters, who had preferred a different style of Reformation, in which freedom of conscience and a high degree of religious tolerance for all major parties would be ensured.³⁷

The revisionist conclusions about the iconoclasm of 1566 are in line with other conclusions of historians about the nature of Protestantism in the first half of the sixteenth century. As we will see in greater detail below, the explicitly polemical Reformist works were much less popular than the more irenic works. A foreshadowing of the split with the established Church cannot be found in the books that were widely read during the first half of the sixteenth century.³⁸ Therefore, I regard it as highly plausible that the ‘mass-movement’ of 1566 has long been overestimated. As a consequence, it is a fruitless task to search for massive Catholic resistance to the iconoclasts.

Another reason why the early sixteenth century cannot be characterized by a struggle between polarized religious identities which culminated in 1566 is that the formation of confessional identities was a process which only took off in the second half of the century. Only the Anabaptists could to an extent be interpreted as a religious group with a strong identity of its own, but also for them, clear confessions of faith in the form of catechisms only came after the fall of Münster. The first specimen of this, the *Fundament des Christelijcker leer* (Fundament of the Christian teachings), was written by Menno Simons not earlier than 1539.³⁹ The 1540s saw the beginnings of the long process of confessionalization, as Catholics also made initial steps to elaborate much more clearly what made Catholicism distinct from other emerging competitive confessions. An indication of this is the statement of belief concerning what constituted Catholic orthodoxy, issued by the theological faculty of Louvain in 1544.⁴⁰

However, confessionalization was by then only getting started, and some historians argue that it was a process that was never finished. During the first decades of the Republic of the Seven United Provinces, members of the Calvinist Church only made up five to ten percent of the entire population.⁴¹ If only a small fringe-group was truly part of the Protestant church in the newly formed Republic by the late sixteenth century, when Protestantism was about to become the official religion, it is clear that the early sixteenth century can by no means be defined by a clear struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism.

³⁷ Ibidem, 154.

³⁸ Koen Goudriaan, ‘The Church and the Market: Vernacular Religious Works and the Early Printing Press in the Low Countries, 1477-1540’, in: Sabriana Corbellini (ed.), *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages: Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit, and Awakening the Passion* (Leiden, 2013), 93-117, 100.

³⁹ Duke, ‘Moulded by repression’, 94.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 94.

⁴¹ Jelle Bosma, ‘Preaching in the Low Countries’, 349.

Chapter one: Gerrit van der Goude and his Mass-treatise as a sign of a lively Eucharistic centred religious culture throughout the sixteenth century.

While clear confessional identities cannot be distinguished at this stage, books of Luther and other early reformers were incredibly popular in the Low Countries. Only one look at the book burnings of these books suffices to bear this out. There was an outspoken fear among clergymen for the spread of these books. For example, *Den Schat des Kerstens gheloofs*, written in 1530 by the Franciscan theologian Franciscus Titelmans, starts with the following statement: “Noticing with sadness of heart that day by day evil and harmful books are being published in several languages, which are disseminated and spread by some masters of delusion that only seek to deceive the simple people with her false teachings.”⁴² However, contemporary witnesses noted that many people who went to meetings where the religious matters of the day were discussed, apparently still went to mass and led a Catholic sacramental life. Furthermore, even in the evangelical-minded works printed during the 1520s and 1530s, a foreshadowing of the later split with the Catholic Church is often hard to find.

To historians who project later confessionalization on this period, this poses a dilemma. They sometimes come up with unsatisfying answers. For instance, Jonathan Israel characterized the Dutch Christians as ‘non-dogmatic crypto-Protestants’ who inwardly partook in the new theology and spirituality but outwardly still conformed to Catholicism.⁴³ Historians looking at this period with hindsight, and aware of the official outcome of the Reformation in The Netherlands can indeed be drawn to this conclusion. However, in the initial years of the Reformation, the idea that, eventually, a split between a Protestant and a Catholic Church would take place must have seen absurd. It was initially something that many Christians who wanted to reform their Church were not after.

As Jonathan Israel noted, even the lay persons who were susceptible to reformist literature continued to go to Mass, which was a ritual at the heart of their devotional and communal life.⁴⁴ We can get a glimpse of this dynamic and ongoing devotion to the Eucharist in the decades that the books of Luther were widely read in the Low Countries by studying one of the most

⁴² Franciscus Titelmans, *Den Schat des Kerstens gheloofs*, (Antwerp, 1530). “Aenmerckende met droefheyt mijnder herten datter dach bi dach uitgegeven worden in verscheyden talen veel quade ende schadighe boexkens die welcke onder tghemeyn volc gespreyt ende verbreyt worden wer sommeige meesters der dwalingen die ander niet en soeken dan die onnoselen ende simpele menscen te bedriegen met haer vlasche leeringe.”

⁴³ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 95.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 95.

frequently printed books of religious instruction in the sixteenth century: the *Boexken van der Missen* (Book of the Mass) by the Observant Franciscan Gerrit van der Goude. This work provides an important insight into what the laity read and in what kind of instruction they continued to show great interest. Van der Goude was born in Gouda and became a Franciscan friar in the Cologne province. Before writing this book, he had already written a Latin treatise on the Mass called *Expositio mysterorum missae*, a work that was printed no less than sixteen times, mostly in Deventer.⁴⁵ The *Boexken van der Missen* was written in Dutch, and between its initial publication in 1504 and 1529, which is the end of the period studied in this thesis, sixteen editions of the work were published.⁴⁶ This reveals an extraordinary interest in the Mass and it is, therefore, surprising that historians used a supposed lack of interest in the Eucharist as an explanation why the French Catholics were more zealous in defending their faith than their Dutch counterparts.⁴⁷ It also shows that a great interest in Reformist books coincided with a great interest in traditional Catholic literature.

The book explains the Mass to the lay reader, and it contains a wealth of instructive material on the Mass. However, the instruction it offered is of a different kind than a neat summary of important religious doctrines in the form of later catechistical instruction. Standing in a long medieval tradition of lay instruction with the focus of more intense devotion, the goal was not solely to provide a set of articles of faith one should believe in. Gerrit van der Goude used many different sources, including canon law to instruct the reader on proper Mass-practices, and established theological authorities such as Augustine to show what the benefits of the Mass are. Yet scriptural foundation lies at the heart of the book, as he tried to make the reader understand the Mass deeper by rooting every element of it in biblical stories.

The book is divided into three parts, with each part containing 33 chapters, corresponding allegorically to the life of Christ. The first part focuses on the history of the Mass. The second part provides the reader with an overview of the different parts of the Mass itself, and subsequently links every step of the Mass with important moments in the life of Christ. The third part deals with how one should receive the Sacrament, mostly dealing with the way to make a proper confession. Therefore, the doctrinal knowledge it contains primarily served religious praxis. In that sense, when Judith Pollmann described that most literature available to

⁴⁵ Andrew Pettegree, *Netherlandish Books (NB) (2 Vols): Books Published in the Low Countries* (Leiden, 2012), 594.

⁴⁶ Koen Goudriaan, *Piety in practice and print. Essays on the Late medieval religious landscape* (Hilversum, 2016), 284.

⁴⁷ As is argued in: J.J. Woltjer, 'Geweld tijdens de godsdienstoorlogen in Frankrijk en in de Nederlanden: een vergelijking', in: Trajecta: *Tijdschrift voor de geschiedenis van het Katholiek leven in de Nederlanden*, vol. 3:4 (1994), 281-296.

the laity was devotional in nature, she was right.⁴⁸ However, she seems to make a strict distinction between ‘devotional’ works and ‘doctrinal’ works, which is, I think, applying an anachronistic distinction on the literature written for the laity of this period. This becomes problematic when one wants to explain the reason for the rise of Protestantism by pointing towards a supposed lack of doctrinal works.

Gerrit van der Goude attempted to ground the current theology and practise of the Mass firmly in the Bible. In an interesting projection, Gerrit wrote Catholic theology and practises into the Gospel narrative, instead of using the Gospel to justify current practices. He wrote, ‘Christ himself had founded the Sacrament during the Last Supper and has read the words of the Consecration as a veritable priest (..) As a Great Bishop, he ordered his Apostle priests and all priests who would follow to do the same.’⁴⁹ To state the universality of the Church, he wrote that Peter read the first Mass in Rome, James the first in Jerusalem, and Marcus the first in Alexandria.⁵⁰ The Mass-setup would have been introduced under the guidance of the Holy Spirit by authoritative bishops and popes such as Gregory, Blasius, Celestine, Ambrose and Augustine. ‘They have ordered it to be as it is now, and how it will remain to be done.’⁵¹

After this short explanation of the history of the Mass, Gerrit turned to issues regarding its proper execution. His citations and references to Church fathers are rather sparse in this section, and when they are being referred to, the text often states: ‘As some doctors say.’⁵² However, Gerrit’s references to canon law are much more numerous. For example, canon law indicates that everyone should go to Mass in his or her own parish church, and believers found in another church should be sent away.⁵³ It also dictates that one should not read other kinds of masses, such as the Requiem Mass or the Mass of Our Lady on important Holy Days such as Easter or Pentecost. Believers should also abstain from working on the greatest feasts. Nevertheless ‘On some smaller feasts, one may work, as long as the work done is for another and not for oneself.’⁵⁴ This potential conflict between artisanal life and religious life, which is a big theme in the work, reveals something about the text’s target audience; the urban craftsman or woman who next to his or her craft invested in religious books, and tried to balance religious and socio-economic duties.

⁴⁸ Pollmann, *Catholic identity*, 47.

⁴⁹ Gerrit van der Goude, *Boexken van der missen*, (Antwerp, 1520), 46. Consultable online through the Early European Books collection. Url: < <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2090321971?accountid=139415>>.

⁵⁰ Van der Goude, *Boexken van der missen*, 46.

⁵¹ Ibidem, 48.

⁵² Ibidem, 66.

⁵³ Ibidem, 64.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, 55.

The layperson is also urged to not only go to Church during Mass. ‘One performs not a good work by only hearing the Mass and not hear the sermons (..) If it is your custom to not hear the sermon it is a grave sin.’⁵⁵ As the Franciscan were homiletic experts, the apparent habit of some laypersons to go to Church only to hear Mass and experience the consecration of the Sacrament, and to leave prior to the sermon, meant for a Franciscan friar like Gerrit skipping an essential part of the church service, namely the religious instruction during the sermon. Another Franciscan element in the text is the great emphasis on the sacrament of reconciliation and penance. Confession and absolution were cornerstones of late medieval spirituality, and the Franciscans had greatly contributed to this.⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, the first part of the *Boexken van der Missen* aims to make the reader familiar with what canon law ordered on this issue. Regarding confession, however, he did not find the canon law regulations sufficiently strict, as he wrote; ‘Even as people are not obliged to confess more often than the times the Church has ordered for it to be done, you are still obliged to have remorse for your sins each Sunday, and to commit yourself not to sin again.’⁵⁷

The role of the priest in the proper execution of the Mass also came under scrutiny, and Gerrit van der Goude did not restrain from condemning priests who performed Mass in a wrong manner, or even worse, who would read Masses for their own profit. Echoing an issue as old as the times of Augustine, he devoted a chapter to whether it was more profitable to hear Mass from a devout priest than from a reckless and sinful priest, and staunchly denied this on the grounds that the Sacrament is the blessed body of Christ, which is not affected by either a good or a bad priest.⁵⁸

Gerrit van der Goude concluded his first part of the book with a list of benefits for those who participate in the Mass. He often repeated that Mass is the most important ritual of Christianity and cites sayings of Chrysostomos to add further weight to his statement: ‘The offer on the altar is no less than the death of Christ on the cross. As the death of Christ saved us from eternal Death, so do we receive eternal life through Mass.’⁵⁹ The doctrine of Transubstantiation tries to explain how Christ is present in the Eucharist, but Gerrit van der Goude was even more enthusiastic in his ideas about what the sacrament invoked: ‘The Trinity, Mary, all Angels and all Saints are present. As St. Gregory wrote: Who would doubt that the heavens are opened

⁵⁵ Ibidem, 59.

⁵⁶ Joseph Goering, ‘The Internal Forum and the Literature of Penance and Confession’, in: *Traditio* Vol. 59 (2004), 175-227, 190.

⁵⁷ Van Der Goude, *Boexken van der missen*, 60

⁵⁸ Ibidem, 50.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, 71.

when the priest consecrates the Sacrament and the Son of God arrives as a king of glory with a great host of angels.’ Personifying this host with his late medieval mindset, Gerrit van Der Goude envisaged that a great majesty like Christ would bring ‘his noblemen and knights and squires with him whenever he appears.’⁶⁰

In the years after the first version of Gerrit’s work was published, the envisaged *realis praesentia* would become the centre of intense theological debates within Christendom, first under the umbrella of Catholicism and later in the debates with different Protestant denominations. Later, it even became one of the most dividing issues between Lutherans and Calvinists.⁶¹ The *Boexken van der Missen* might not always have supplied direct answers to all the questions regarding the theology behind the transubstantiation doctrine and whether the Mass was a sacrifice. Perhaps this might explain why it remained such a popular work throughout the sixteenth century. Late medieval spirituality was increasingly Eucharistic-centred, and many of the ritualistic practises were, in fact, taken over with modifications by early Protestant reformers. They had rejected many point of Catholic theology such as the transubstantiation, but the Reformers use many late-medieval practises in their own versions of the Last Supper, which remained central in every Christian confession.⁶² Therefore, books like the *Boexken van der Missen*, which were more focused on (devotional) practise than on theory and theology kept appealing to a broad audience. Gerrit van der Goude even consciously refrained from neat theological explanations of the Eucharist, and instead focused on its excellence, as becomes clear in his reference to the Franciscan theologian Peter Aureol: ‘In his compendium of theology, in the sixth book in the eighteenth chapter, he wrote (..) The Mass is so full of Godly mystery, just as the sea is full of waterdrops, the sky full of stars and eternal life full of angels.’⁶³

Instead of explaining the theory of the Mass, Gerrit van der Goude was more eager to refer to the benefits of going to Mass to ‘prove’ its validity. ‘O, what will the person earn who will hear three or four Masses every day (..) The Angels will stay close to him, as David spoke: ‘God ordered His Angels that they will guard you in your ways’ (..) And as Augustine said, ‘In this way God grants humans all their bodily necessities. (..) It will protect you from an unexpected

⁶⁰ Ibidem, 71.

⁶¹ Peter G. Wallace, *The Long European Reformation. Religion, Political Conflict and the Search for Conformity, 1350-1750*, (Hampshire, 2004), 99

⁶² Amy Nelson Burnett, ‘The Social History of Communion and the Reformation of the Eucharist’, in: *Past & Present*, 211 (2011), 77-119, 115.

⁶³ Van der Goude, *Boexken van der missen*, 73.

death.⁶⁴ He reminded readers that they shared in the Masses of all Christians around the world, as this was part of an article of faith: the communion of Saints.⁶⁵ Finally, he concluded his list of benefits with quite mundane advantages from Mass-visits, for instance by stating that, ‘Women who are about to give birth should go to Mass, for giving birth will become lighter.’ But these practical benefits were not only granted to women: ‘Everything you will do after Mass, you will complete with more success.’⁶⁶

The second part of the book fully focuses on the liturgy itself, and was meant to be read as a preparation for Mass. Gerrit van der Goude aimed to ground every element of the Mass in a corresponding moment of Jesus’ life. For him, these correspondences were more than nicely fitting comparisons, for he used the term ‘this proves’ (dit bewijst) continuously. By making these parallels, he made pivotal moments of Christ’s life ‘present’. The Gospel passages were not stories about something that happened a long time ago, but were present in the acts of the Mass. The transubstantiation is a culmination of this, as he already wrote earlier, ‘The offer on the altar is no less than the death of Christ on the cross.’⁶⁷ Protestant critiques on the Mass and Gerrit’s elucidation of the Mass, therefore, do not have the same point of departure. Protestants demanded to know where the theology of the Mass was explained in Scripture, but in this work of Van Der Goude, Scripture itself was fully present in the Mass. Lay people could ‘place themselves’ in the Gospel, and participate in the Passion of Christ every time they went to Mass.

In his attempt to split up the Mass in 33 different components and establish for each part a parallel with a Gospel story, not all these parallels are comparatively convincing. Some parts of the Mass had direct biblical analogies, such as the elevation of the Host itself. Yet by making these 33 components correspond with Gospel passages, he connected them symbolically to the entire lifespan of Christ. It starts already in the sacristy, where the vestment donned by the priest represents the angel Gabriel visiting Mary.⁶⁸ Following the reading of the epistles and the Credo announcement, the silent prayer over the Host and the priest’s subsequent washing of his hands, represents the 32 years before Christ’s public ministry about which the Gospels are silent, and his baptism in the river Jordan. After this, the second part of the Mass would start, corresponding with the moments leading up to the death of Christ. A prayer is provided, and Gerrit van der Goude wrote, ‘If you read those prayers, you will receive 46.000 years

⁶⁴ Ibidem, 112.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, 113.

⁶⁶ Ibidem, 115.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, 71.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, 121.

indulgence.’ This was exactly the kind of practice which Lucas van der Hey, a fellow Franciscan, criticized in his book studied in the next chapter, namely the bestowal of tens of thousands of years of indulgences for saying a simple prayer.

The next part of the Mass was enacted behind the rood screen, with curtains closed. ‘This proves that Christ ate the Pascal lamb with his disciples behind closed doors.’⁶⁹ The elevation of the Host and the chalice by the officiating priest symbols the raising of Christ on the cross, and the seven crosses which the priest subsequently made over the offerings parallels the seven last words on the cross.⁷⁰ This was followed by a silent prayer, during which the priest prayed for the souls in Purgatory, which refers to the ‘great silence between the last words and His death.’⁷¹ After Christ had died on the cross, Tradition said that he descended into hell, releasing the imprisoned patriarchs. During Mass, this moment was re-enacted by the priest by lowered the chalice after the consecration.⁷² A prayer for penitence followed, granting 80.000 years of indulgence. Finally, as the priests had drunk from the chalice, this empty chalice invoked the empty tomb. Subsequently, he would turn to the laity saying ‘Dominus Vobiscum’. This exclamation stood for Christ himself who, raised from the dead, appeared among his disciples and told them: Pax Vobiscum’.⁷³ The final part of the Mass, concluded with the priest saying ‘Ite missa est’, corresponded with the last commandment of Christ before his ascension: go in the world and preach the Gospel to all living creatures.’⁷⁴

This treatise on the Eucharist was not a response to the Reformation. Nevertheless, its continual re-printing shows that this book was for many Christians an important point of reference when they wanted to deepen their understanding of the Mass. As mentioned earlier, many Christians who were interested in Luther’s writings continued to go to Mass, as it was the central point of Christian devotion. This book by Gerrit van der Goude is a strong reminder that this Eucharistic culture was still very much alive during the sixteenth century, even when many elements of Catholicism came under intense scrutiny. Furthermore, it reminds us that historians should be careful in creating a dichotomy between ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ literature for this period. The same counts for the at times misleading dichotomy between ‘devotional’ and ‘doctrinal’ writings. Proper devotion required doctrinal instruction and vice versa, and books providing this instruction were abundant in the Low Countries throughout the sixteenth century.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, 147.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, 167.

⁷¹ Ibidem, 168

⁷² Ibidem, 173

⁷³ Ibidem, 187.

⁷⁴ Ibidem, 189.

Chapter two: The indulgence controversy of 1517 and the first years of the Reformation examined through the lens of the Catholic response.

The *Boexken van der Missen* discussed in the previous chapter was not a response to reformist thought, but in a study of the Catholic⁷⁵ literature of this period, it cannot be overlooked, as it continued to be reprinted until at least 1547, and the number of surviving exemplars is overwhelming for a book from this period. It was not a response to doctrinal attacks made on the Church, as its aim was to increase devotion, yet it did contain a significant amount of doctrinal information. This current chapter focuses on another work that, counter to the *Boexken van der Missen*, was specifically meant as a response to doctrinal attacks. The work in question, entitled *Van den aflaten* (Concerning indulgences), was issued in 1517 by the Franciscan author Lucas van der Hey. Although it shared the aim of increasing devotion, Van Der Hey entered a debate that would later be interpreted as one that would lay the foundation of the Reformation, namely the intense debates around the practice and theology of indulgences. In 1517, Martin Luther had published his *95 theses* in Wittenberg, criticizing the practice and theology of indulgences in the hope to spark a scholarly debate about it, although he was far from the only theologians writings critically on indulgences at this period. Because the indulgences received such criticism, many clerical writers felt forced to react and defend the position of the Church, and the work of Van Der Hey is an example of such a treatise.

It is not possible to pinpoint Van der Hey's target audience, but I regard a lay audience as very plausible, because he confronted criticism on indulgences, which were voiced by the laity. He wrote that, 'Evil Christian who speak about indulgences are saying that the Papists only concern is money, and that they gladly shave the poor people and take the money out of their purses.'⁷⁶ It was predominantly the urban laity who voiced these criticisms, as there was a widespread concern among the urban elite that their money would flow to Rome in the form of tithes and indulgences.⁷⁷ Because this work is a doctrinal instruction written in the vernacular on a debate which would kick-start the Reformation, it is a vivid illustration that historians have most likely been too eager in dismissing the Catholic response to the early Reformation as non-existent, or purposely bypassing the laity, at least for the Low Countries. For the German situation, the

⁷⁵ For this period, the distinction between 'Catholic' and 'Protestants' is an anachronistic one as there were not yet two distinct religious identities or groups. Catholic here is used in the sense that it refers to writers who associate themselves with the Roman ecclesiastical structure.

⁷⁶ Van Den Aflaten, 35.

⁷⁷ Reinhold Kiermayr, How Much Money was Actually in the Indulgence Chest? *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 17:3 (1986), 303-318, 305.

immediate and fierce response by theologians to the indulgence controversy has been studied in much more detail. Protestant historians have pointed towards the inability of these authors to adequately respond to the objections regarding indulgences. They would have failed to understand the depth of the arguments posed by Luther because they lacked a correct understanding of doctrinal developments that rendered them unable to counter the critique.⁷⁸

This thesis of doctrinal vagueness and thus the inability of the Catholic clergy to respond adequately was, perhaps surprisingly, also accepted by later nineteenth- and twentieth-century Catholic historians. Especially after Leo XIII had reaffirmed the teachings of Thomas Aquinas as the cornerstone of Catholic theology and scholarship in his bull *Aeterna Patris* in 1879, Catholic historians accepted the premise that the thirteenth century had been the highlight of Medieval theology. During the later Middle Ages, official theology would only have decreased in quality. The result was a theological vagueness and confusion at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Catholic historians were, therefore, not surprised that the Catholic opponents of critics Luther would have been unable to engage him with adequate doctrinal arguments.⁷⁹ Because these Catholic historians in question studied the sixteenth-century theologians in a post-Trent and Neo-Thomistic mindset, they projected anachronistic ideals of doctrinal clarity on these authors.

However, the point about theological vagueness was in some sense justified. In 1517, the theology regarding indulgences was in no way a fleshed-out theory, and even the theological faculty of Paris complained that it was too much a mechanical way of talking about achieving salvation.⁸⁰ No official dogmatic teaching existed on the subject. However, the practice of selling indulgences had already taken off and was hugely successful, because it got tied into a wider-ranging economy of salvation, which was a defining characteristic of late medieval society. Some scholars argue even that indulgences had lost all dogmatic and spiritual purposes as they had been formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas and had become a 'purely revenue generating institution'.⁸¹ This argument, however, does not take into account the many attempts by concerned fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Catholic authors to stress the need for dogmatic and spiritual reflection on the subject. This discrepancy between lack of theory and abundance of practice alarmed many theologians, and Martin Luther was just one of them.⁸²

⁷⁸ David V. N. Bagchi, *Luther's Earliest Opponents: Catholic Controversialists, 1518-1525* (Minneapolis, 1991), 9.

⁷⁹ Bagchi, *Luthers Earliest Opponents*, 11.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, 18.

⁸¹ Reinhold Kiermayr, 'How Much Money was Actually in the Indulgence Chest?' *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 17:3 (1986), 303-318, 304.

⁸² Bagchi, *Luthers Earliest Opponents*, 26.

There was no official doctrinal teaching on the subject, so a mendicant theologian like Luther was free to discuss such matters in the academic sphere. However, Luther's theses were quickly taken out of this Latin-spoken academic sphere and published in German. When that happened, Luther came to be seen as a danger which had to be curtailed, which explains the fierce response to his theses. What followed the publication of the theses was an all-out pamphlet war in which both 'traditional' Catholic authors and adherents of Luther's message were involved and that lasted until 1525. Around 60 authors defending the Catholic Church were involved, mostly German secular priests, but the mendicant orders wrote many pamphlets as well.⁸³ The Franciscans were, interestingly, the smallest group of these 'controversialists', as they were later called, but they still out-published the Dominican authors on this issue, who were larger in number. This can be explained by the fact that the Franciscans had already embraced the printing press and knew how to exploit its capabilities. The religious authorities reacted strongly and immediately. However, their writings are far outnumbered by the number of pamphlets published by Luther's early supporters. For every single book or pamphlet that their opponents wrote, they published five.⁸⁴

This should not be interpreted as evidence for the lack of skilled writers who could adequately respond to Luther. Most Catholic controversialists wrote only one work. One of the reasons for this was that their responses were both disliked by the Protestants as well as by the Roman Curia. The Curia was very suspicious of authors who published without its consent, and these early authors all published independently without demanding the permission of higher authorities. The Catholic controversialists would even receive the blame for the Reformation, as they would have stirred up the entire debate, which had started as a minor issue coming from a minor theologian in Germany. The Curia believed that the whole issue would have passed over if Catholic authors had not responded so fiercely.⁸⁵ The initial decentralised response, which mostly consisted of writings by individual clergymen, would change character radically during the 1520s. From then onwards, all publishers had to deal with censorship, sometimes hindering rather than help the Catholic cause, as Protestant books kept flushing into the country from Reformist publishing centres such as Emden that could work without such restraints.⁸⁶

⁸³ David V. N. Bagchi, 'Luther's Catholic opponents', in: Andrew Pettegree (red.) *The Reformation World* (London, 2000), 97-108, 99.

⁸⁴ Bagchi, 'Luther's Catholic opponents', 99.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 100.

⁸⁶ Guido Marnet, 'The Netherlands', in: David M. Whitford (red.) *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A guide to Research* (Kirkville, 2008), 119.

Scholars looking for a unified response to the threat of Protestantism in these early years claim that this did not exist, and this is true to some extent. The Catholic authors had very different strategies to respond to the Reformist threat.⁸⁷ Furthermore, many Catholic authors were much more in agreement with crucial points in Luther's *95 theses* than is generally assumed. Justification by faith alone was traditional Catholic teaching, which would be stressed again during the council of Trent. The Dominican theologian Johann Eck did not criticise Luther for taking this viewpoint in the academic debate. Instead, he criticised him for preaching this without nuance to a wider public, as he was afraid that they would take this as an excuse for immoral behaviour.⁸⁸ This is a common theme in the Catholic writings: Luther had the right to have an academic debate on the issue, but he had gone too far in making his views a matter of public debate. Furthermore, they all agreed as well that Luther had gone too far in denying that the pope had the authority to grant indulgences.⁸⁹

Although scholars have identified a lack of unified Catholic response, some have tried to identify common themes in the writings of the Catholics in the immediate aftermath of 1517. For example, John Frymire has claimed that the Catholics confronted the Lutheran writings only in Latin, and in these Latin responses, they primarily referred to authorities.⁹⁰ David Bagchi wrote that the Catholics adopted a 'deliberate non-popular and inaccessible' writing style. They were aware that it was forbidden to debate with heretics, so they were very hesitant in debating the reformers in public, both to avoid the condemnation of the papacy and to avoid the impression that the laity could 'make up its mind' about these matters independently.⁹¹ Frymire and Bagchi both studied the German case, which is outside the scope of this present study. For the Low Countries, Judith Pollmann made a similar claim, when she wrote, 'Until 1566, indigenous clerical writers, whilst increasingly active in developing and refining their polemics, wrote almost exclusively in Latin, for an audience of other priests and theologians.'⁹²

These generalizations do not seem to fit the situation in the Low Countries entirely, as Lucas van der Hey, the author central in the present chapter, discussed in accessible vernacular prose the theory and theology behind indulgences, and he revealed to his readers the arguments that were made against them. He was a Franciscan from the province of Holland, and his ministry

⁸⁷ Bagchi, *Luther's earliest opponents*, 22.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, 106.

⁸⁹ Bagchi, 'Luthers Catholic opponents', 101.

⁹⁰ John M. Frymire, *The Primacy of the Postils - Catholics, Protestants, and the Dissemination of Ideas in Early Modern Germany* (Leiden, 2009), 41.

⁹¹ Bagchi, 'Luther's Catholic opponents', 99.

⁹² Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 49

spanned a wide geographical area, ranging from Diest in the South, Leiderdorp in the West, and Emmerik in the East.⁹³ His book *Van den aflaten*, printed in Leiden, was the product of his long homiletic career, so we can assume that the doctrinal teaching present in the book had also been taught elsewhere. He claimed that his reason for his book was that in the same city, a sale of indulgences was being organised to aid the renovation of the Saint Peter Basilica in Rome.⁹⁴ This sale was most likely part of the campaign to raise money, following the proclamation of the Papal bull *Sacrosanctis*, issued in 1515. Being dependent on money raised by indulgences was in itself not exceptional, as many big institutions relied on this kind of income.⁹⁵ This time, however, an exceptional amount of money was needed, so a pan-European preaching campaign was established. This was the campaign that Van der Hey wanted to support by preaching and publishing, and it was also the campaign which would trigger Luther to write his theses.

The vernacular treatise on indulgences is 94 pages long, and it deals with many different aspects of indulgences. The first part is more theoretical in nature, explaining the scriptural basis and the theology of indulgences, and confronting directly the concerns posed by critics. Lucas mentioned that a scholarly debate was taking place around indulgences, but he did not mention the name of Luther, pointing out that it was probably a much wider debate than just a struggle of Luther against ‘the Church’. The second part of the book is more devotional in nature, but in that part Van der Hey also confronted apparently widespread criticism on indulgences, and tried to answer questions most likely raised in society. The third part is a prayer guide on the devotional attitude with which indulgences should be received.

Throughout the work, it is clear that Van der Hey was aware of the widespread popular objections against indulgences, but he was also critical himself of the practice, which had taken on enormous proportions. Van der Hey feared that the indulgence would become a caricature. This was mostly the fault of the clergy, and he did not avoid exhibiting a strong dose of anti-clericalism, complaining about clerical unprofessionalism. After a long chapter full of complaints, he wrote: ‘Oh child, they will receive such a strong damnation.’⁹⁶ The work is written in the form of a dialogue between a nun and a father, a well-established medieval literary form, which was initially aimed at the instruction of nuns, but which had found its way into the

⁹³ B.de Troeyer, OFM, *Bio-bibliographia franciscana neerlandica saeculi XVI, 1: Pars biographica* (Nieuwkoop, 1969), 25-26.

⁹⁴ Lucas van der Hey, *Van den Aflaten*, (Leiden, 1518), 2. Consultable online through the Early European Books collection. <<https://search.proquest.com/docview/2090306421?accountid=139415>>

⁹⁵ Macculloch, *The Reformation*, 117.

⁹⁶ Van der Hey, *Van den Aflaten*, 69.

literature of lay instruction.⁹⁷ Later Protestants authors used it as well to spread their message. A good example from the Low Countries is the *Twesprake tuschen een meester ende sijn disciple* (Dialogue between a master and his disciple) by the Spiritualist David Joris.⁹⁸

Van der Hey was far from being the only cleric writing an indulgence-treatise at this time. Johann Tetzel had also published a vernacular defence of the indulgence. In 1518, he had successfully defended his doctorate in theology with a refutation of Luther, and in addition to this he wrote a vernacular refutation of Luther's *Sermon on Indulgence and Grace*, relying mainly on the authority of the Church and Luther's mistake to attack it.⁹⁹ This great reliance on authority was the norm according to David Bagchi, who analysed several of these Catholic responses. He concluded that, firstly, the Catholic controversialists did not publish in the vernacular to keep the debate within narrow academic circles, and secondly, that they refuted first and foremost Luther's attack on the primacy of the pope in these matters.¹⁰⁰ The latter is quite understandable since the theology of indulgences was by no means a fully fleshed-out theory at the time, and many Catholic theologians also disagreed amongst themselves on the issue.

The book by Van der Hey, however, does not fit in these categories. He indeed reaffirmed the authority of the pope on matters of doctrine, as he wrote: 'I want to follow the opinion of the Doctors in the faith and the doctors in the theological laws, and the form that the pope has commonly used, as it is said that the Treasure of the Holy Church stems partly from the merits of the saints.'¹⁰¹ However, instead of just citing the established opinion of Church authorities, he continued by describing why they came to this position. Thereby, he made extensive use of other learned authorities, which are often mentioned by name. On the role of the saints in the indulgences, he cited the opinion of Peter de Palude, and even pointed to the theological passage where this could be found (In the fourth book of Palude's Sentences commentary, in the twentieth chapter), as if he wanted to encourage his reader to look it up himself.¹⁰² He wrote that it was De Palude's position that 'painful works' (pijnlike werck) are meritorious. Therefore, the saints have 'accomplished more than they are guilty' and they have 'suffered more than they deserve'.¹⁰³ This means that they have generated much more merit than they need

⁹⁷ Roest, 'Dutch Franciscans between Observance and Reformation', 422.

⁹⁸ David Joris, *twesprake tuschen een meester ende sijn disciple*, (Roctock, 1550).

⁹⁹ Bagchi, *Luthers's earliest opponents*, 41.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, 31.

¹⁰¹ Lucas van der Hey, *Van den Aflaten*, 20.

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, 20.

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*, 21.

themselves, and this superfluous merit can help ‘poor people’ (arme mensche) and contribute to the Treasure of the Holy Church.¹⁰⁴ This is a medieval concept concerning a storage of grace from which all indulgences are taken.

The debate to which Van der Hey contributed was not so much as to whether this concept is valid, but whether the saints are able to contribute to this Treasury. He argued that the saints have indeed a big role in this, because of the suffering they endured. By this suffering, they added so much merit to the Treasury of the Church that this can contribute to the salvation of other people, in the form of indulgences.¹⁰⁵ He made this claim to counter arguments stating that the suffering of God’s Son alone had generated enough merit, so that the saints were superfluous. This is a slightly different point than forwarded by Luther, so Van der Hey either targeted a different but very similar debate, or he had misunderstood what Luther had claimed. Van der Hey wrote: ‘There are Doctors that are also great in theology that say that the treasure of the Holy Church is not by the merits of the saints because they are rewarded above their merits, but the treasure of the Holy Church is filled only by the merits of the Son of God.’¹⁰⁶

Whether or not he targeted Luther directly, Luther had voiced similar points. Luther’s problem with the notion of the Treasury of the Church was the claim that the accomplishments of people (the Saints) supplemented the accomplishments of Christ. It stems out of his belief in the Justification by Faith, meaning that only faith could save humans. Christ made sinful people righteous, humans had nothing to do with it and could therefore by no means contribute to their own salvation. According to Luther, the claim behind the indulgence system, namely that the merits of the saints somehow complemented the merits of Christ was completely blasphemous.

Although it might be interesting to pinpoint exactly to which debate Van der Hey contributed, it is clear from Van der Hey’s position and from his book as a whole that there was a far wider societal discussion on indulgences than just stemming from Luther. For example, he wrote about the biblical foundation of indulgences. Many humanists frowned upon religious practices that in their eyes were not biblical, and indulgences were among their prime targets.¹⁰⁷ Van der Hey tried to prove that indulgences had, on the contrary, a strong foundation in Scripture. When the daughter asks why indulgences could not be found in the Old Testament, the father replies: ‘The priests before Christ could only heal people from the outside’.¹⁰⁸ As Christ was not yet

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem, 21.

¹⁰⁵ Lucas van der Hey, *Van den Aflaten*, 20.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Bert Roest, *Franciscans between observance and Reformation*, 422.

¹⁰⁸ Lucas van der Hey, *Van den Aflaten*, 20.

incarnated, crucified and resurrected, divine grace through indulgences could not be distributed. In the New Testament, Christ himself had founded the indulgence, as he made people healthy, 'in their soul as well as in their body.'¹⁰⁹ That Christ healed without obliging the sinners to do penitence was, according to the authorities cited by Van der Hey, the foundation of the indulgence. This grace was in turn maintained by the apostles and embedded in the Church.¹¹⁰

In his attempt to prove that this grace was transmitted through the Church in the form of indulgences, Van der Hey was aware of a dilemma. In the history of the Church, the distribution of indulgences was a recent phenomenon. Modern scholars are aware that the theory defended by Van der Hey only received official recognition during the second half of the 15th century. But Van der Hey himself was at least aware of the lack of early reports and writings about indulgences, as he wrote: 'We don't have public testimonies of indulgences before the time that Saint Gregory was pope.'¹¹¹ To be able to defend his claim of a continuous succession, he turned to some interesting historical theories. Firstly, the people before Gregory had not need indulgences as they: 'Were fully walking in the commandments'. However, people of later times were, 'sick and full of deficiencies.'¹¹² Secondly, he explained the lack of indulgences in subsequent periods by stating that a pope like Innocent III had written about them, but he had not been able to give indulgences in public, 'Because he was always in battle with evil emperors and tyrants.'¹¹³

Van der Hey relied in his reasoning on many authorities, but never omitted to expand and explain their points. One of the matters which he elaborated upon is the possible abuse of indulgences by the clergy, as he warned for the squander of indulgences and the possibility that they could become caricatures and thereby vulnerable to slander. He wrote mockingly about those people who 'stand in front of a statue and say five *Pater Nosters* and five *Ave Maria's* and thereby earn an indulgence of twenty thousand years.'¹¹⁴ He used *Absolutio Sacramentalis Confessionis* of Jean Gerson to state that this was ridiculous. The clergy had been appointed as stewards of the grace of God that could be transmitted through indulgences, but these had to be granted 'As a steward that spends the money of his master, so only in a reasonable way.'¹¹⁵ One of the reasons why he was so keen to safeguard the indulgences from such misuse was that the

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem, 25.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem, 25.

¹¹¹ Ibidem, 25.

¹¹² Ibidem, 28.

¹¹³ Ibidem, 28.

¹¹⁴ Ibidem, 36.

¹¹⁵ Ibidem, 37

reflection on indulgences had fallen behind the widespread practice. He condemned in harsh words priests who say: ‘To all who give a penny or a half for this church or house of God, I will grant an indulgence for all their sins.’¹¹⁶ This was hurtful and a wastage of the Treasury of the Holy Church. To further prove his points, he claimed that Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure and Cardinal Adriaen of Utrecht agreed with him.

Van der Hey’s book is on the whole very critical towards the clergy. It condemns priests who grant ridiculous indulgences for little good deeds or donations, but is even more fierce when describing the lacklustre spiritual attitude of the priests performing Mass. The daughter says that she is often very distracted in prayer, and the father responds that ‘You don’t need to concentrate the entire prayer, as long as you have voiced your intention towards God (..) It is no catastrophe that you don’t think about God at every piece of bread that you distribute.’¹¹⁷ Van der Hey had, however, much higher standards for the celebrating priest, referring to the ‘great peril of priests who just murmur the mass without attention (..) and of the many clerical people who don’t show respect towards God and just brabble and murmur their Liturgy of Hours.’¹¹⁸ The abuses signalled by Van der Hey should not be interpreted automatically as a sign of the decline of the medieval Church. The highly trained Franciscans often voiced criticisms towards much less-trained secular priests, and most of the anti-clericalism in the early sixteenth century did not come from ‘proto-Protestants’ but from Catholics from different orders discrediting each other, and the competition between the mendicants and the secular clergy was fierce.

So much as Van der Hey criticized other clergymen, so little did he discredit the pope and his ability to grant indulgences. It is clear that he was aware of the direct attacks that had been made on the papacy, since his text goes at great length to defend it. He writes, ‘The pope has no authority over people in Purgatory. He may, however, come to their aid and this is in the form of the indulgence.’¹¹⁹ He tried to prove this with a three-fold argument. Interestingly, his first point is literally a list of names of theologians who back his claim, namely Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Thomas Aquinas, Egidius Romanus, Durandus of St. Pourcain, Peter of Tarentasia, Richard of Middleton, Thomas of Strasbourg and ‘many others.’¹²⁰ Secondly, he argued that many popes had granted indulgences to aid people in Purgatory, such as Sixtus IV

¹¹⁶ Ibidem, 38.

¹¹⁷ Ibidem, 65.

¹¹⁸ Ibidem, 69.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem, 48.

¹²⁰ Ibidem, 48.

and Innocent VII. Thirdly, he cited an *exempla* in which a papal indulgence had led to an appearance of Mary, who took the soul of a person to Heaven. The issue why the pope could come to the aid of people in Purgatory is the only point where Van der Hey did not expand and explain the points made by previous theologians, and where he did not lay out the scriptural foundation of his argument. It reflects the shaky theological grounds of this point, as well as the novelty of the idea itself.

In this regard, the theory that Catholic authors could not defend their faith with clear doctrine, and therefore had to rely on the authority of the Church seems to be true. However, the bulk of the work of Van der Hey does not fit in this theory. Van der Hey defended the theory and practise of indulgences with many references to Scripture, and used the writings of great patristic and medieval theologians in his attempt to not only defend the practice, but to deepen the knowledge of his reader and thereby safeguard the indulgence from caricaturised forms. With almost every point he made, he tried to root it in Scripture and he used historical arguments to answer the claim that indulgences were not found in early documents. He was aware of excesses in the indulgence practise, and his writings aimed to strip the indulgence practise of those excesses, and to encourage his readers to take a more sober and more interiorized stance towards indulgences. His intended audience was not theologians but the laity, and he wrote in the vernacular. At least concerning this work, the conclusions by scholars that Catholic clerical authors wrote in a deliberate inaccessible writing style to keep the kind of debates debate out of the public sphere is inaccurate.

But regardless of its clear aim to doctrinally equip his reader with a solid understanding of indulgences, to see a book like *Van den Aflaten* only from the perspective of doctrinal instruction would not do justice to its intention. Most of its content is still focused on praxis, as the theory served a better understanding of the indulgence, with the aim of increasing a person's devotion and spiritual life, just like the *Boexken van der Missen* had intended. Religious doctrinal teaching in the form of catechistic summaries of essential points of a religion is in part a development of the sixteenth century. The format of the catechism already existed in the fifteenth century, but these earlier catechisms never received the status that a catechism like the one from Luther would attain.¹²¹

The book by Van der Hey is an example of an in-between version of oral and written religious instruction. The dialogue format between the daughter and the father is comparable with later

¹²¹ Lee Palmer Wandel, *Reading Catechisms, Teaching Religion* Brill studies in Intellectual History, 250 (Leiden, 2016), 11.

catechisms, as these would also be written in question-and-answer format. However, these later catechisms had a different aim. Written dogmatic religious instruction as the cornerstone of a Christian confession would become one of the defining outcomes of the Reformation and the Counter Reformation, as this would become essential during the so-called confessionalization period. Prior to the sixteenth century the teaching of religious knowledge, even if it did contain a substantial body of doctrinal information, was mostly geared toward religious praxis, especially for the laity. A Christian's devotional life was centred around religious praxis, embodied in the liturgy and in the repetition of texts like the ten commandments, the *Pater Noster* and the *Creed*. The laity was being encouraged to know the different Deadly Sins, the Works of Mercy and the seven sacraments.¹²²

The notion that all one needed to know about Christianity was encapsulated in one concise book emerged in the sixteenth century. At the beginning of that century, the laity's supposed knowledge about indulgences was still understood in a distinct medieval way. This is clear when we take a look at another texts on indulgences, also written in the vernacular and printed in 1518. It was written by Robertus van Coelen and bears the name *Costelike scat der geesteliker rijckcoem* (Rich treasure of Spiritual Wealth). It serves as interesting material for comparison, because *Van den Aflaten* is published in the same year, on the same topic and in the same language. The differences and similarities can reveal, therefore, a great deal about the Catholic views on- and defence of the practice of indulgences. Van Coelen was the Abbot of the Benedictine monastery of Selwerd in Groningen. His book consists of 204 pages, and it is a collection of texts about different indulgences one could earn, like the ones a person could earn on pilgrimage to Rome, or the indulgences granted to a certain Rosary confraternity.¹²³ It is printed in Zutphen, as the printer himself acclaims on the last page of the book. 'Printed in Zutphen, by me, Thomas Peter of Breda.'¹²⁴

Van Coelen links his treatise on indulgences directly to supposed lay knowledge. 'For the sake of one's soul', he writes, 'One should know the ten commandments.' He also states that one is supposed to know the twelve principle articles of faith, which are summarized in the *Creed*. Furthermore, one should know the *Ave Maria* and the *Pater Noster*. Finally, one should believe that the pope and the bishops protect the 'simple people' against heresy and error.¹²⁵ During the

¹²² Palmer Wandel, *Reading Catechisms, Teaching Religion*, 11.

¹²³ Robertus van Coelen, *Die Costelike scat der geesteliken rijckdoem* (Zutphen, 1518), 3. Consultable online through Early European Books. < <https://search.proquest.com/docview/2090297521?accountid=139415>>

¹²⁴ *Ibidem*, 204.

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, 12.

rest of his treatise, he builds upon this knowledge by linking all his claims on indulgences to one of the articles of faith. However, he explicitly mentions that it was not required of the laity to have more knowledge than was provided in those texts mentioned above. He wrote, ‘Many other points that stem out of the XII articles of our faith are not needed to be known.’¹²⁶ He created an interesting opposition between ‘knowing’ and ‘believing’, since he also wrote that the sacraments flow out of these twelve articles. Indulgences were for him part of the sacraments, so, ‘therefore, all Christian people are obliged to believe in the Holy Indulgences.’¹²⁷

To prove that indulgences had a biblical foundation, he mentioned the same Gospel stories as Lucas van der Hey had done. Jesus had shown Petrus that he should be merciful by forgiving 77 times. Furthermore, He had said to Mary Magdalena: ‘Your sins are forgiven, go in peace’, and had pardoned the adulterous woman and had told the murderer on the cross: ‘You will be in Paradise with me today.’¹²⁸ For Van Coelen, this last story had a logical conclusion: ‘Today in Paradise means that you will be absolved from sins and pain. It is, therefore, clear from this example that people are obliged to believe in the Holy Indulgence. Jesus gave us the indulgence and has taught it to Peter.’¹²⁹

To explain what an indulgence is, he began by citing Thomas Aquinas. He had written that people are sinful, and therefore they are obliged to suffer until they receive absolution from the priest during confession. If a believer is truly penitent, he can turn his eternal suffering into temporal suffering, either here on earth or in Purgatory. This pain can be reduced by the indulgence, which is taken from the Treasury of the Holy Church. This treasure consists of merit gathered by Christ, Mary and the Saints.¹³⁰ Until this point, Van Coelen’s text demonstrates the same position as the work of Van der Hey. However, in their justification of why the saints also contribute to this treasury of merit, their works part ways. Van der Hey wrote at length why the suffering of the Saints was meritorious, and why the excessive merit that was the result of this could be helpful to ‘simple people’. Van Coelen’s work just states that, ‘It stems from an article from the Creed namely, ‘I believe in the communion of Saints.’¹³¹ And believing is enough for the laity, as he had mentioned earlier, an attitude very distinct from Van der Hey, who explained why the Church had come to certain points of doctrine. Another

¹²⁶ Ibidem, 13.

¹²⁷ Ibidem, 14.

¹²⁸ Ibidem, 16.

¹²⁹ Ibidem, 16.

¹³⁰ Ibidem, 18

¹³¹ Ibidem, 18.

interesting difference is their opinion of the role of the pope. Both authors agreed on the fact that the pope safeguarded this treasure of merit. However, it was a very important point for Van der Hey to stress that all that was taken from this treasury should be reasonable (Redelic).¹³² Van Coelen had very different ideas concerning the power of the pope, and simply because he was the safe-keeper of the treasury he could 'Take as much from it as pleases him and share as much with us as it pleases him.'¹³³

Van Coelen represented the attitude towards indulgences that Van der Hey had warned against. As stated above, Van der Hey lamented and cursed the priest who gave a full indulgence almost for free, just with a couple of prayers.¹³⁴ In the long list of different indulgences mentioned by Van Coelen, many indulgences are found that can be earned by prayers and are worth tens of thousands of years. He mentioned one indulgence founded by Innocent VIII and wrote how one could make it worth even more: 'by adding two 'Pater Noster's' and two 'Ave Maria's', this indulgence is doubled to at least 70 thousand years, some even 97 thousand years, some 112 thousand years and some even more.'¹³⁵ Both vernacular books stress the role of the pope and the Saints, but for Van Coelen stating that one should just believe in indulgences was sufficient.

It remains an open question as to whether Van der Hey responded directly to Luther's attack on indulgences. A fundamental difference lies in Luther's critique on the existence of the Treasury of the Church itself, a concept that Van der Hey never questioned. If Van der Hey knowingly confronted his colleague from Wittenberg, could it be that the knowledge he had from Luther stemmed mostly from polemics against him, which suggested that Luther criticized the saints and the role of the papacy? However, regardless to which debate Van Der Hey contributed, he did so in accessible, vernacular prose aimed at the laity, revealing in much detail the claims that were made against the theology of indulgences. Thereby, the content of this work challenges many notions about Catholic doctrinal instruction written for the laity in the early sixteenth century.

¹³² Lucas van der Hey, *Van den Aflaten*, 37.

¹³³ Van Coelen, *Die Costelicke scat*, 20.

¹³⁴ Lucas van der Hey, *Van den Aflaten* 36.

¹³⁵ Van Coelen, *Die Costelicke scat*, 132.

Chapter three: Shifting strategies in the Catholic camp. An examination of two anti-Lutheran books.

Book one: Johannes Eck and the power of Tradition as weapon against Lutheranism.

The positions of Martin Luther, who was still a relatively unknown figure in 1517, probably played only a limited role in Van der Hey's defence of indulgences. He responded to a lot more contemporary debates than just the debate following from Luther's publication of his *95 theses*, which means that the vernacular instruction of the laity on theological debates was a practise preceding the Reformation. However, ten years later, the Luther controversy had risen to such heights that many theologians felt forced to respond and they did so, fiercely, both in Latin and in the vernacular. The two books that are the focus of this chapter reveal a great deal about the changed circumstances of the 1520s which in turn influenced the clerical response to the Reformation.

The first is a book by Johannes Eck, a Dominican theologian and one of Luther's fiercest opponents. As we have seen, he was part of a group of so-called 'Catholic controversialists', who were observed with much suspicion by the papal curia, which in fact blamed them for escalating the Luther controversy, which could have remained a minor issue if they had not so fervently attacked his position. Hence, the Papal nuncio for Germany, Aleander, wrote that the whole Reformation was caused by 'two plagues: the tongues of the doctors and the hands of printers.'¹³⁶ Many Catholic clergymen agreed, since debating with a heretic would imply that the Catholic faith would be open for negotiation. They had to find a balance between refuting Luther academically and thereby justifying the official condemnation of the Church, and keeping the common people in the Catholic faith, by showing them why Luther was in error without eliciting their curiosity. After all, clergymen had already noticed that attacking Luther from the pulpit could also create an interest in his teachings. Over the course of the first thirteen years after 1517, this search for a viable strategy is traceable in the documents of various Catholic authors.

While it is certainly true that many clergymen were of the opinion that it was best to keep the laity 'in the dark' about Luther, as many historians have claimed, Catholic responses changed because of the shifting circumstances in the 1520's. The search for the best strategy to counter Luther is vividly illustrated by the publishing career of the German Dominican Johannes Eck.

¹³⁶ David Bagchi, *Luthers Earliest opponents*, 211.

At first, he did not consider publishing against Luther a proper strategy. When Luther first issued his *95 theses*, Eck sought to organize an official disputation against Luther, after which an authoritative condemnation from the universities could follow.¹³⁷ He was successful in doing so, and during the famous Leipzig disputation from 1519, Eck was able to corner Luther into admitting that the Council of Constance had erred. He made Luther admit that his attack on the authority of the pope was in line with the critiques of the condemned theologian Jan Hus. Luther thereby implied that Jan Hus had been right, and hence insinuated that the Council had wrongfully condemned Hus. The strategy of Johan Eck was a success. Because of this dispute, Pope Leo X condemned Luther in the papal bull *Exurge Domine*.

Johann Eck's strategy had thus been an overall success within an academic theological context. However, the publication and widespread distribution of Luther's *95 theses*, and subsequently his *Explanation of the 95 theses* forced Eck and his colleagues to face a new dilemma. Because Luther's writings were being disseminated at such a rapid pace, clerical spokesmen had to reconsider their strategies. When they chose to debate Luther's writings publicly, beyond the walls of the theology faculty, they would provide a heretic with a public voice. Furthermore, it would imply to the outside world that the Catholic faith was negotiable.¹³⁸ On the other hand, if they abstained from publishing an answer in the vernacular, this field would be left open to Luther and his supporters. That could result in a confusion among ordinary people regarding the status of Luther's writings in relation to proper Church teachings. This brought about a change in strategy that will be central in this and the following chapter. Instead of aiming to keep the controversy in the academic sphere, in the form of official debates and academic condemnations, which characterized the clerical stance in the early 1520's, Catholic controversialists started to also write vernacular refutations, in which they systematically refuted points of Lutheran doctrine. This does not mean that they wished to take the debate into the public sphere. Their new approach was born out of necessity, as writers such as Eck still aimed to debate Lutherans together with other theologians, and thereby condemn them. However, this aim did not exclude properly instructing the laity, as many historians have tended to assume.

Interestingly, Judith Pollmann acknowledges a great enthusiasm among clerics to fight Luther when discussing the stance of governments, who blamed the spread of Lutheran thought on the

¹³⁷ Ibidem, 200.

¹³⁸ Ibidem, 211.

zeal and determination of his clerical opponents.¹³⁹ She refers for instance to the burning of several of Eck's anti-Lutheran books in 1527, and interpreted this as a sign that priests who tried to refute Luther publicly were condemned. This book burning of an anti-Lutheran work was, according to her, 'Another reason why many Netherlandish priests remained reluctant to talk about heresy in any detail to their flock.'¹⁴⁰ By interpreting the stance of the ecclesiastical and secular government in this way, I think the overall effectiveness of these policies is overestimated. An official book burning meant that the destroyed work was probably circulating widely, otherwise it would not have been considered so dangerous by governments that considered it best to abstain from naming Luther. The fact that Eck's writings were apparently in circulation can just as well support the opposite conclusion, namely that his writings against Luther were eagerly translated and disseminated by clerics who considered it a good doctrinal refutation of Luther's positions.

Throughout the sixteenth century, translated refutations were part of the rich reading landscape of the Low Countries. For the later sixteenth century, this is a more acknowledged phenomenon. Historians have argued that only after the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church was capable of providing a vigorous and doctrinal defence of the Catholic faith in the vernacular.¹⁴¹ An example of such a bestseller, written several decades after Eck's book and thus outside the scope of this thesis, was Nicolas Grenier's *La Bouclier de la Foy*, published first in French and in 1551 also in Dutch. It was an immediate success, and reprints were made in 1566, two in 1568 and a final print in 1581.¹⁴² This means it enjoyed a widespread popularity, catering to the interest of the laity in works of doctrinal instruction, as the title clearly indicates: 'The shield of faith, taken from the Holy Scriptures and from the Holy Fathers and the oldest doctors of the Holy Church.'¹⁴³ In her discussion of the work, Pollmann repeats a comment by the translator, Claes Zeghers, who stated that the book should be used as a shield rather than a sword. He had written that 'ordinary male or female persons should not learn with or from this book how to dispute, struggle, quarrel and fight against the heretics and Lutherans, their enemies, since they are prohibited from doing so by the Mandate of His Imperial Majesty.'¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 51.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 51.

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 46.

¹⁴² Andrew Pettegree, *Netherlandish Books*, 602.

¹⁴³ Original Dutch title: *Den bueckelere des gheloofs, genomen vvt die heylige Schrifuere, ende vvt die heylige Vaders, ende alder oudste Doctoren der Heyliger Kercken*

¹⁴⁴ Claes Grenier, *Den Bueckelere des gheloofs*, trans. Claes Zeghers (Antwerp, 1566); Nicholas Grenier, *Le Bouclier de la Foy*, (Antwerp, 1549); Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 52.

Pollmann takes this comment at face-value and uses it as evidence for the idea that the clergy continued to keep the anti-Lutheran discussions within small and academic boundaries.¹⁴⁵ It is a surprising use of Grenier's work, as the bulk of the book is a large vernacular refutation of Reformist thought. In fact, Pollmann only cites the title of the work and the above-mentioned comments of the translator to 'prove' that Dutch authors did not publish themselves, and to claim that the clergy did not want to keep the laity overly well-informed about the doctrinal issues that were at stake. Furthermore, deployment of the comment from Zeghers that the book only should provide a shield rather than a sword, in order to prove that the official stance of the clergy was to keep the laity far from the reformist struggle and therefore keep them deliberately uninformed, gets undermined further when one considers other publications by Nicolas Grenier, which were also translated by Zeghers. One of these works was called the *The sword of Faith, to protect the Christian Church against the enemies of the truth*.¹⁴⁶ It was published in 1568 and aimed to spread, among other things, the teachings of the Council of Trent. This is an indication of how much the Franciscan order was involved in pastoral activities and in the production of polemical writings issued in the Low Countries in the wake of this council.

In the introduction to this latter work, Zeghers wrote that the aim of this book is to show the reader that they should not 'doubt the decisions of the General Council, and neither many other things that you will find in this book, which will provide the material that Christians will need because of the present time.'¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, it was written to be, 'Preached and read throughout the Netherlands', which is in indication that books like these were not only read privately, but that the preaching clergy used them in their homilies, or help them prepare for their homiletic encounters. That is important when one tries to evaluate the spread and impact of such refutations. Preaching and sermon collections from this period are an understudied phenomenon for the Low Countries, partly because it is difficult to find out what was exactly preached on the pulpit. Latin sermon collections exist, but these were first and foremost collections of model sermons for fellow homiletic practitioners, mostly printed outside the Low Countries in places such as Cologne.¹⁴⁸ *The Sword of Faith* gives an indication that these Latin collections were not the only source for actual preaching.

¹⁴⁵ Ibidem, 51.

¹⁴⁶ Nicolas Grenier, *Het sweert des gheloofs, om te beschermen die Christen Kercke tegen die vijanden des waerheys*, trans. Claes Zeghers, (Antwerp, 1568).

¹⁴⁷ Claes Grenier, *Het Sweert des gheloofs*, 12.

¹⁴⁸ Roest, 'Franciscan Religious Instruction in the Low Countries', 293.

Since Grenier's works were published in the second half of the sixteenth century, they will not be studied in detail. More interesting for the religious dynamics of the first half of the sixteenth century is the massive dissemination of the writings of Johannes Eck. No less than 26 of his works have been printed in the Low Countries, and they were mostly refutations of reformers such as Luther and Zwingli. The Latin works are more numerous than the Dutch translations of those works, and printers kept publishing new editions of his books throughout the period between 1527 and 1562.¹⁴⁹ As we have seen with the book of Grenier, the fact that most of the published versions were in different languages than Dutch does not imply that the content did not reach the laity. The extraordinary number of Latin versions of this work implies that it was incredibly popular among theologians and (mendicant) preachers, as well as educated laypersons. As we will see with in the discussion of one of the translated versions, it provided preachers with a strong scriptural-based refutation of the Reformed attacks on the Church.

The work of Eck that will be studied here is a Dutch translation from 1527 of an originally Latin refutation of Lutheranism called *Hier beghint een corte declaracie ende antwoert met bewisinghe der heyliger schriftueren teghen zommighe articulen der Lutheranen* (Here starts a short declaration and answer with proof of Holy Scripture against some articles of the Lutherans).¹⁵⁰ It was printed in Delft by Cornelis Hendriks, and was specifically aimed at instructing laypeople, as Eck explained himself in his afterword: 'We have made this for the simple, and for those who worry about many things but who have no time to read the great books.'¹⁵¹ Lay persons were also encouraged to carry this book with them all the time, as the translator wrote in the introduction: 'It is called *Enchiridon*, which means handbook in Greek, because every person should carry it with him.'¹⁵² This is a revealing remark. Did the translator aimed to equip the laity with a handbook that he or she can consult when confronted with Reformist critiques in their daily lives? It could be bought in Amsterdam from 'Master Luyt, warden of the Old Church.'¹⁵³ This shows how much such books could circulate: Written in Germany, translated and printed in Delft and sold in Amsterdam.

The book consists of 27 chapters, and each of them is devoted to one theme, such as Mass, Purgatory, the material wealth of the Church, and justification, all of which had come under attack by Luther. Every chapter has the same outline, as it opens with a doctrinal statement,

¹⁴⁹ Pettergree, *Netherlandish Books*, 479-481.

¹⁵⁰ Johannes Eck, *Hier beghint een corte declaracie ende antwoert met bewisinghe der heyliger schriftueren teghen zommighe articulen der Lutheranen* (Delft, 1527).

¹⁵¹ Eck, *Hier beghint een corte declaracie*, 185.

¹⁵² *Ibidem*, 7.

¹⁵³ *Ibidem*, 2.

which is then traced through Scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers. After these statements, the author engages with multiple Lutheran criticisms, introducing them as follows: ‘against this, the heretics argue’, which could go up to eight points.¹⁵⁴ He subsequently refutes them with reference to Scripture, Church councils, Tradition, and the Church fathers. By doing so, he implicitly rejected the Lutheran notion of *sola Scriptura*, which stressed that Scripture was the only legitimate source for Christian practise. Furthermore, Eck kept stressing the link with Lutheranism and earlier forms of heresy, as he wrote in his introduction: ‘The filth of old heresies is sprayed again on the field of the Holy Church and has deceived thousands of people.’¹⁵⁵ More specifically, Luther would have dug open the pit of Wycliff, Hus and the Albigensians.¹⁵⁶

As such, he was in line with the wider Catholic understanding of the new heresy, and his reaction to it was shared by many churchmen. At the Council of Sens from 1528, Luther’s teaching on justification, and most of all the emphasis of the impotence of the human will to achieve salvation was understood and condemned as a modern form of Manicheism.¹⁵⁷ There are more similarities between Ecks’s work and this council, namely the agenda and the list of debated issues. The council discussed sixteen points, such as the sacrifice of the Mass, the unity and infallibility of the Church, the Seven Sacraments and, ‘things believed which are not in Scripture’. The list shows a remarkable similarity with what would be debated at Trent a generation later.¹⁵⁸ Eck’s 27 chapters cover all the issues dealt with at Sens, and they provide answers in the same fashion: there is no compromise possible on a single issue. One might expect from a Catholic writer not to digress too much from the theology of the Mass, but even on issues such as the wealth of the Church, Eck dismissed all criticisms as heresies and explains the present situation as justified by Scripture. He wrote that Joshua had divided the land among the priests, and that in the Old Testament, priests received a tenth of the harvest. Furthermore, had not even Christ appointed a procurator to take care of money?¹⁵⁹ The Acts of the Apostles told that the first Christians had sold everything they had and laid the money at the feet of the apostles, which made it perfectly reasonable that the Church owned many things.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Hier tegen argueren de ketteren. Ibidem, 154.

¹⁵⁵ Ibidem, 6.

¹⁵⁶ Ibidem, 18.

¹⁵⁷ John W. O’Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council*, (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 66.

¹⁵⁸ O’Malley, *Trent*, 66.

¹⁵⁹ Eck, *Hier beghint een corte declaracie*, 161

¹⁶⁰ Ibidem, 162.

This uncompromising defence of the Church, amid widespread criticism of ecclesiastical wealth and abuses of clerical privileges was quite distinct from the attitude exhibited by the anonymous author of the anti-Lutheran book written in 1528 central in the next chapter. The difference reveals the diversity of stances towards Lutheranism in the late 1520s, as the anonymous author wrote, ‘That they bring up the abuses that are in the Church, I say they are not in the Church but in its head and its members, and principally in its head. I don’t defend them but pray to our Lord that He will give the grace to correct our heads and members.’¹⁶¹ Other Catholics considered it the best strategy to search for a compromise with the Lutherans. Hence, the Dominican theologian Cajetan wrote in a memo for Clement VII that the laity should be given the Eucharistic cup, that fasting should not be obligatory, and even that priests should be allowed to marry, all proposals to close the gap between Lutherans and the Church. He was not the only theologian seeking a compromise to close the emerged theological divide, and it is good to keep in mind that during this early phase of the Reformation, the permanent split in the Church was by no means anticipated by any major party. This split would only become a certainty in the wake of the Council of Trent.¹⁶²

In the 1520s, the large disagreements were expected to be dealt with and solved, but not all Catholic writers agreed on how this should come about. Cajetan sought a form of compromise, and the anonymous author of *Een Redelic Bewijs*, which will be discussed in the next chapter, considered some criticisms as being legitimate. The majority, however, including Eck and the bishops at Sens, defended the Church and its practises without giving any hints that there was room for discussion or concessions.¹⁶³ Protestantism was a temporary flare-up of age-old heresies, for which the only remedy was to trample it with the power of Tradition, the Church Fathers and the established interpretation of Scripture. It was already too late to enact this only in an academic setting. Therefore, Eck translated this stance to a work which could show the laity this power of Tradition over circulating heresies.

Out of the 27 topics covered in the work as it was issued in the 1527 Dutch translation, five will be studied in more detail; the Church and its power, the papacy, the sacrifice of the Mass, the relation between faith and good works, and finally the cult of saints. Furthermore, the last chapters deal with the issue whether one should discuss with heretics. Historians have put great emphasis on this warning, but often omit to explain why the clergy warned against this. Since

¹⁶¹ Anonymous, *een redelic bewijs*, 78.

¹⁶²O’Malley, *Trent*, 67.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, 67.

this warning against debating is used as evidence that the clergy failed to give adequate instruction to the laity, this chapter on debating heretics at the end of a work that was in itself full of arguments and counterarguments might give us more helpful clues why lay persons were discouraged to enter in religious debates themselves.

The first chapter deals with the Church and opens with a proposition, namely that the Church is the Body of Christ, the Bride of Christ and the Kingdom of Heaven. The letter to the Ephesians would prove this: ‘You have made him head over all the Church, which is His Body and His fullness.’¹⁶⁴ Eck cited the story in Matthew of the king who sent out his workers to fetch the invitees of the banquet, to illustrate how many allusions to the Church as the Kingdom of God there were in the New Testament. ‘If the Kingdom of God is in the Church, how can only errors and sin have ruled for a thousand years? (..) The Lutherans believe that nothing happened in the thousand years before their idol Luther.’¹⁶⁵

The second proposition deals with the guidance of the Church by the Holy Spirit, which was promised to it in the Gospel. This guidance of the Holy Spirit is a common theme in the justification of why the Church had the power to make laws and set rules. In the Gospel of John, Christ told the disciples that he had ‘still much to say to you, but you will not be able to carry it now, but when the Spirit of truth will descend on you, He will reveal all to you’, and in Matthew, Jesus told the disciples that ‘He will be with them until the end of the world.’¹⁶⁶ As this Church is one unity under the guidance of the Spirit, likewise there is unity in the Church. Eck eagerly exploited the divisions among the Protestants to show that the Spirit was clearly not present among them, for ‘they argue all the time and speak contrary to each other, Caroladius against Agranus, Luther against Zwingli.’¹⁶⁷

After these scriptural propositions, several counter-arguments voiced by Lutherans are dealt with, in this case the claim that Scripture is the only true authority for Christian regulations. The given response deals mostly with the inconsistency of the Lutheran position that the Scripture is the highest authority. ‘Jesus has not written a book, nor did he command that. He did not say ‘Go and write but go and preach the Gospel to all creatures. The book of Christ is not written with ink but with the Spirit of the Living God.’¹⁶⁸ Luther based his attack on the Church on the Gospels and the Letters of Paul. However, this position was hypocritical and

¹⁶⁴ Eck, *Hier beghint een corte declaracie*, 13

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 16

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, 17.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 18.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 20.

false according to Eck. He seemed to have been very aware that in the daily lives of his readers, it was an often-heard argument, and he provided them with a ready counter question: ‘Thus one should say against this: how else do you know that the Gospels and the letters of Paul are part of Scripture if the Church would not have told you so? Why do you believe the Gospel of Mark who did not see Christ, but not the Gospel of Nicodemus, who heard and saw him? (..) What else are you doing, other than humbly profess that authority of the Church that had the power to judge Scripture.’¹⁶⁹

In addition, Eck pointed towards the inconsistency in the Lutheran position regarding religious practices. ‘The Church has Sunday ordained as Sabbath day without reference in Scripture (..) Jesus told his disciples to baptize in the name of the Trinity, but in the Acts of the Apostles, we read that they baptise in the name of Jesus. Has the early Church erred? The early Church also taught that one should abstain from eating meat that was offered to idols. See what power the Church has over Scripture?’¹⁷⁰ Although he did not encourage the laity to argue, he was aware that discussions were taking place and gave his reader tailored answers in the form of counter questions, which aimed at revealing inconsistencies in the arguments of the reformers.

Several chapters later he deals with the papacy, and he opens it by citing scriptural passages to legitimize the institution, for example, the story in which Jesus told Peter that he is the rock on which His Church would be build, and that Peter would receive the keys of Heaven.¹⁷¹ ‘That he was given by these words the authority over the Church profess the Holy Fathers Ciprianus, Origen, Jerome, Ambrose, Chrysostomos, Hilary and many others.’¹⁷² This power was given to him after the Resurrection, when Jesus asked him if he loved Him. Once he affirmed this, Jesus said ‘Feed my sheep’, which ‘means governing in scriptural terms’, Eck quickly added. To affirm this statement, he cited passages from the Old Testament.¹⁷³ Further proofs of Peter’s privileged position were given in Luke 22 and Matthew 27, in which Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith should not diminish, so that he may strengthen his brothers. In John 21, it was only Peter who went to Christ walking on water, a clear sign of his unique position.¹⁷⁴

These scriptural propositions are followed by a list of Lutheran counter arguments. Firstly, Jesus would not have given the authority to him as a person. Secondly, it is bad that the Church was built upon a human being, as the gates of Hell would still have power over him, which was

¹⁶⁹ Ibidem, 20.

¹⁷⁰ Ibidem, 23.

¹⁷¹ Biblical reference from Matthew: 17; Ibidem, 36.

¹⁷² Ibidem, 37

¹⁷³ Ezekiel 34, Jesaja 44 and 50, Jeremia 11 and 22.

¹⁷⁴ Ibidem, 38.

proven by the girl who tested him after Jesus was arrested. The only true foundation was Christ, not Peter. Finally, how should Peter be the foundation when Christ had said to him: ‘stand behind me, Satan!’¹⁷⁵ Eck refutes these points systematically. ‘We confess with Augustine that Peter carries the Church as a person, like the Emperor carries Germany as a person.’¹⁷⁶ The gates of Hell don’t affect him, since when he was tempted, the Church was yet to be founded on him, which happened only after the resurrection. Unlike most chapters, he continued with another series of Luther’s arguments, such as the claim that Peter had no power over other apostles, as they had sent him to Samaria. Furthermore, Peter had never used his power in the way that contemporary popes did. Finally, the pope never actually had universal power, since many Christian in the East did not fall under his jurisdiction, as was proven by Pope Victor who tried to excommunicate all Eastern Christians, an act forbidden by the bishop of Lyon.¹⁷⁷ As is often the case in this book, Eck used every opportunity to bring Luther in line with older heresies. ‘The one who is sent is worth less than the one who sends? The Arians speak in those terms!’¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, Peter had already great powers in the early Church, as was revealed in his ability to sentence a person to death in the Acts of the Apostles.¹⁷⁹

Another chapter deals with faith and works. Luther had famously declared works redundant, because one should live and be saved by faith alone. This decree seemed to have resonated with contemporaries who, for example, denounced the practise of indulgences, as this came very close to buying one’s way into heaven instead of relying on God’s grace. However, not only Lutherans tackled with the issue, as the Council of Trent made abundantly clear that works alone can never save a soul. The council declared: ‘If anyone says that man is justified before God by his own works (whether done through the teaching of human nature or the law) without the grace of God through Jesus Christ, let him be anathema.’¹⁸⁰ Works were, however, important in Catholic theology. Although one could not be saved through works alone, the opposite viewpoint, namely that man was saved by faith alone, was not supported by Scripture either, according to Eck: ‘That faith is not sufficient without work, and that those works mean something by the grace of God who makes those works pleasing to him, can be abundantly proven from Scripture.’¹⁸¹ To support this view, he summed up many biblical verses, such as

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem, 46.

¹⁷⁶ Ibidem, 47.

¹⁷⁷ Ibidem, 51.

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem, 53.

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem, 54.

¹⁸⁰ J. Waterworth, *The Council of Trent: The canons and decrees of the sacred and oecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Dolman, 1848), 44.

¹⁸¹ Eck, *Hier beghint een corte declaracie*, 70.

the Letter to the Corinthians, in which Paul wrote that ‘Everyone shall receive according to his works.’ In the Apocalypse it was written: His works shall follow him.’¹⁸² The first letter of Peter stated: ‘be diligent, that you through your works your calling and election might be assured.’¹⁸³ Furthermore, Paul had written to the Hebrews: ‘God is not so unjust that he might forget the works and your labour that you have undertaken out of love.’¹⁸⁴ Finally, James had written in his letter: ‘Faith without works is dead.’¹⁸⁵

As in every chapter, the viewpoints of the ‘heretics’ are offered. For example, that a ‘righteous man lives from faith and not from works’, or, as is written in Matthew 5: ‘Faith has made you well.’ In the Gospel of John, it was written: ‘Those who believe in the Son of God will not be condemned.’¹⁸⁶ Furthermore, the ‘heretics’ would argue that love itself is a fruit from faith, and therefore, faith is enough.’¹⁸⁷ Eck countered these points by writing: ‘We believe that a righteous man lives from faith. However, that heretic says: *only* from faith, and there he is wrong, for this is written nowhere in Scripture (..) If works are for hypocrites, why did Jesus say in Matthew 5, ‘Let your light shine for the people, so that they may see your good works and thereby praise your Father who is in heaven.’¹⁸⁸

The fourteenth chapter of the book deals with saints, since the salvific role of these intercessors had come severely under attack by Luther. Eck aimed to prove that man should honour saints, and stated that he could prove this, ‘with Scripture, with reason, with the authority of the saints and with the traditions of the Church.’¹⁸⁹ The Old Testament had already many passages about saints, for example in Genesis, when Jacob spoke about saints as ‘the friends of God. One should pray for them in order for them to pray for us’, and he continued with a long list of passages referring to saints.¹⁹⁰ Secondly, Jesus himself prayed for us, and the living are praying for each other. ‘Then why could the dead not pray for us, who are pure of heart and perfected in love?’¹⁹¹ Thirdly, Eck cited Bernard of Clairvaux, who had written extensively about heretics in his own age, thereby providing another opportunity to align Lutheranism with them. Bernard had written: ‘They mock us for desiring help from the saints. They want to undermine the help

¹⁸² Reference from: Corinthians 1:3.

¹⁸³ Ibidem, 70.

¹⁸⁴ Ibidem, 70

¹⁸⁵ Ibidem, 70.

¹⁸⁶ Ibidem, 72

¹⁸⁷ Ibidem, 72.

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem, 73.

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem, 113.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem, 113

¹⁹¹ Ibidem, 117.

of the living towards the dead and rob the living from the help of the saints.’¹⁹² Eck also cited Jerome, who had written: ‘The saints have prayed for us in their lives, how worthier are their prayers now, since they are crowned in victory.’ The fourth and final reason he gave for believing in saints, was the fact that the Church and the Fathers of the Church had believed in saints, and their belief was confirmed by an ongoing stream of miracles.’¹⁹³

The ‘heretics’ argued against this, wrote Eck, by claiming that Christians should only invoke Christ and God, which was sufficient. After all, Christ had spoken, ‘If you ask for something in my name, I will give it to you’, and Paul had written to Timothy, ‘There is a mediator between God and the people: Christ’ (..) ‘Why then do you want to make many mediators in the form of Saints?’¹⁹⁴ Eck then set out to prove that the Lutheran position is deceptive and false; ‘for they take every intercession away: the intercession of Christ and the intercession of the living and the dead. (..) One should indeed pray in the name of Christ, but through the saints we pray in the name of Christ.’ Furthermore, he cited another role traditionally fulfilled by the Saints. ‘It pleases me that people aim for the fountain of all Grace, but who is more competent to lead us than the Saints, for our God is a quenching fire, and we shall fear it to draw near to Him, that we may not perish in his sight as wax melting in front of a fire. We seek, therefore, intercessors.’¹⁹⁵

His sixteenth chapter is devoted to the defence of the Mass as being a sacrifice, as this sacrificial character of the Eucharist was denied by Luther and his followers. In his defence of the Church’s position, Eck used several strategies. Firstly, the precursors to the Mass as sacrifice taken from the Old Testament are cited, like the Malachius who had written: ‘In all places will be offered a pure sacrifice in my name.’ Luther was wrong by stating that this offer was only to be fulfilled by Christ, since Malachius had written that in all places sacrifices will take place.¹⁹⁶ Secondly, he tried to show why the *sola scriptura* principle misses the point, by showing how the theology of the Mass is firmly grounded in the ancient Church Fathers. ‘Chrystosomos said that the Mass is a sacrifice, and so did Augustine, Ambrose, Gregory and many others.’¹⁹⁷ By using the weight of such ecclesiastical giants, he tried to discredit Luther, and portray him as an insignificant and inconsistent theologian who alone tried to argue against

¹⁹² Ibidem, 117.

¹⁹³ Ibidem, 117.

¹⁹⁴ Ibidem, 120.

¹⁹⁵ Ibidem, 121.

¹⁹⁶ Ibidem, 130.

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem, 130.

the entire Church and its ancient history. He wrote: ‘All Latin, Greeks, Chaldeans and even heretics have held this position, except these new dogmatists.’¹⁹⁸

Subsequently, the arguments against the Church’s position are disclosed. First of all, a daily sacrifice would not be necessary, for Christ has already fulfilled the only required one, as was written in the letter to the Hebrews: ‘He has fulfilled a sacrifice that has sanctified us for all eternity.’¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, according to the ‘heretics’ the Mass is not a sacrifice but a reminder of the covenant, for Christ had said: this is the chalice of the new covenant, in my blood. It was, lastly, not a sacrifice but a memorial, as Christ had not said: ‘sacrifice this’, but ‘do this in memory of me.’²⁰⁰ The ‘answer of the Christians’, as Eck put it, ‘to these allegations’, was that it is proper to speak of two sacrifices. The first was His body which Christ sacrificed on the cross, and since he died once, it was offered only once. The second sacrifice was a ‘memorial sacrifice’, in which the priest in the name of the Church presents God the sacrifice which took place on the cross. Therefore, He is sacrificed daily in the Sacrament, even though He is sacrificed once on the cross.²⁰¹ ‘See how we are offering daily a sacrifice which is only once sacrificed?’²⁰² Finally, one cannot say that it is no sacrifice but only a covenant. Christ had spoken of His blood as a new covenant to confirm the New Testament, just like Moses had used the blood of calves to confirm the Old Testament in Exodus 25.²⁰³

To conclude the analysis of this translated book of Johannes Eck, I will focus on its last chapter, since this deals with the issue whether one should debate with a heretic. The answer is clear: the laity should abstain from such discussions, and the reason for this is in line with Eck’s understanding and framing of Lutheranism throughout the book and throughout his debating career. For him, Lutheranism was just the most recent eruption of the same heretical movement that the Church had already condemned multiple times. ‘They renew the heresy which is often condemned, from Arius, Manicheus, Vigilantus, Eutices, Felix, Waldes, Johannes Wycliff, Jan Hus and others.’²⁰⁴ In the final chapter of the book, Eck gave his reasons for condemning Lutheranism so strongly, as it would lead to a slippery slope that would make the Church itself more vulnerable, and Tradition would seem to be negotiable. He wrote: ‘Our ancestors, under guidance of the Holy Spirit, have proclaimed the truth during councils. Those matters are no

¹⁹⁸ Ibidem, 131.

¹⁹⁹ Ibidem, 131

²⁰⁰ Ibidem, 131.

²⁰¹ Ibidem, 133.

²⁰² Ibidem, 134

²⁰³ Ibidem, 135.

²⁰⁴ Ibidem, 182.

longer under debate and should not be scrutinized again, so that evil people will find no reason to fight what once has been decided.’ Furthermore, he claimed that the Lutherans are deceivers, for they ‘dare not to dispute with educated men, but with simple folk who lack the capability to judge such big mysteries. (..) They go to the laity and inflame them with hate for the clergy.’²⁰⁵ This will lead only to shame when they will find out that Christian doubt all things that have been decided by their fathers over 1400 years.’ Therefore, the laity should leave such disputations to ‘capable judges’, by which he meant undoubtedly himself, so that the heretics can be condemned.

Eck’s strategy had, ultimately, remained the same throughout the 1520’s. Capable judges should condemn heretics, which would then result in a proper sentence. However, the circumstances had changed. The writings of Luther had reached a wide lay audience, and Eck sought to shield them from these ideas by providing them with a proper guidance on dogmatical matters, and gave them answers to frequently discussed questions regarding Church and doctrine. His strategy in this book was threefold: showing point by point that the Church and its practises were fully in line with Scripture, countering each time the arguments of the Lutherans on the topic in question. He then went on to show why these arguments were false and hypocritical. Finally, he placed Luther, whose teachings he had already disqualified, in opposition to established Church Fathers. Doctrine was not up for debate.

Revealing Lutheran arguments to the laity was a necessary evil. Eck was probably aware that the arguments that he showed were not completely new to his public. Eck did not seek a compromise, counter to the aforementioned theologian Thomas Cajetan. Compromise meant that doctrine was negotiable, which was a slippery slope. The power of 1400 years of Tradition was enough to quell the crisis, Eck seemed to conclude. In the early years of the Reformation, the clergy indeed sought to keep the debate within narrow academic boundaries. However, by stressing this point, modern scholars have wrongfully assumed that the clergy thereby purposely ignored the laity. The analysis of this book by Johannes Eck indeed points towards an attitude that the debate should ideally take place among trained theologians, in order for Luther to be condemned. However, it also reveals a great concern for the laity. Eck was aware that books had penetrated society, and book burnings would not suffice. He concluded that the laity could not be ignored but should be thoroughly informed about doctrinal issues and the danger of the new heresy.

²⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, 183.

Book two: ‘Write against it, also in Dutch (..) to make the people once more come to the right faith.’ An anonymous 1528 doctrinal instruction to counter Lutheran critique.

We have seen that small reading groups gathered to discuss religious matters and read religious books together. This phenomenon stems from a late-medieval practise, mostly associated with confraternities in urban settings. It is hard to find out what they exactly were reading, although popular genres in the fifteenth century were devotional books such as *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and saint’s lives, and it was a common practise to read those in small groups.²⁰⁶ However, historians of the Reformation are commonly unaware of this late medieval practise and interpret these reading groups as a sixteenth century novelty, linking it therefore with the dawn of the Reformation. For that reason, it is often assumed that these sixteenth-century reading groups were reading evangelical literature. For example, Guido Marnef wrote that: ‘at these small gatherings, usually attended by ten to twenty people, Bible passages were read and discussed and dissident religious ideas were voiced.’²⁰⁷ He introduces these groups as if they were a completely new phenomenon, which ‘did not replace but rather supplement the traditional parish service.’²⁰⁸

Although there is little evidence to make claims about what exactly these groups were reading, the authorities at that time also made the link between these lay groups and reformist thought. Therefore, they did a lot to hamper their activities with several prohibitions.²⁰⁹ These concerns, whether they were fuelled by justified or unjustified fears of Reformist thought, even led to the formal ban on religious gatherings outside the parish church. Although one must be careful to automatically link such groups with the Reformation, they were probably not immune to the religious concerns of the day. Reformist works did circulate, and these must have reached groups like these, consisting of persons who took their religion seriously, and who were eager to participate in discussions about religious matters. A rare glimpse into this is provided by a book written as a reaction to a work read by such a group of critical parishioners. The book in question was written in Dutch and published in 1527 by the Antwerp printer Willem Vorsterman. This printer had also printed several Bibles on the basis of Luther’s translation,

²⁰⁶ Sabrina Corbellini, ‘Beyond Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy’, in: Sabrina Corbellini (ed.), *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages. Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit, and Awakening the Passion* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), 33-53, 43.

²⁰⁷ Guido Marnef, ‘The Netherlands’, 345.

²⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, 345.

²⁰⁹ Duke, ‘Moulded by repression’, 87.

but was at the same time printing with papal authorization, making him an attractive publisher for both reformist and Catholic audiences.²¹⁰

The author of the work, entitled *Een redelijck bewijs* (A Reasonable Proof) attempted to postulate an answer to the content of a Lutheran book that some people in his parish had ‘Read together during a meeting.’²¹¹ Someone from his parish had brought the book to his attention, and he deemed it necessary to formulate a response. The resulting book is an eloquent example of how a Catholic author tried to discredit Lutheranism, and to show the truth of the Catholic Church. The work is not afraid to show the Lutheran critiques, and even cites Luther’s work. The author tried to show the errors and paradoxes of the Lutheran ideas forwarded in the book, and provided the reader with a strong scriptural defence of the position of the Church, not unlike the work of Eck discussed earlier.

The reformist work refuted in the book was apparently written in the Dutch language, but was itself a translation from a German text, probably from Luther himself.²¹² For each of his chapters, the author of *Een redelijck bewijs* took several pages from the Lutheran book and cited its contents, after which he refuted systematically the points that were made. By citing long passages of the Reformist book, our author took a different approach than Eck, who listed reformist criticisms one by one without showing their sources. The author of *Een redelijck bewijs* furthermore refuted the Lutheran points in question less systematically, and often digressed during his refutations to criticise and condemn the whole movement of ‘Lutheranism’, as well as Luther himself, whom he often referred to as the ‘pope of Wittenberg’.²¹³ Thereby, *Een redelijck bewijs* is more focused on the person of Luther and the character of Lutherans than the work by Eck analysed above, whose approach was more theological and doctrinal in nature. The anonymous author of *Een redelijck bewijs* started with explaining why his book was so urgently needed. As said before, official and unofficial book burnings had occurred frequently during the 1520’s, but by 1527, our author had seen that these had limited effects, since ‘These devilish books spread among the people are more harmful than Latin works (..) they are reprinted so often that there is no point in burning them.’²¹⁴ Book

²¹⁰ A selected bibliography of the works printed by Willem Vorsterman: Amerigo Vespucci, *Mundus Novus* (Antwerp, 1514) Bethlem, *Een devote meditacie op die passie ons liefs Heeren Jesu Christi*, (Antwerp, 1540); Bernardus van Clairvaux, *Een suyverlijck boecxken* (Antwerp, 1537).

²¹¹ Anonymous, *Een redelijck bewijs en[de] verwinninghe der dolinghen ghesayt door een feninich boecxken toeghescreuen ses prochianen der Luterscher secten, den welcken doer de[n] authoer des boeckxs nauolghende redelijc en[de] scriftuerlijck gheantwoort wort, welck boeck oock wel gheeramineert is van diuersche gheleerde mannen ende meesters inder godheyt*, (Antwerp, 1527), 1.

²¹² Anonymous, *Een redelijck bewijs*, 72.

²¹³ *Ibidem*, 96.

²¹⁴ *Ibidem*, 1.

burnings had clearly not stopped the massive spread of Lutheran works, and this led him to a new strategy: ‘Write against it, also in Dutch (..) to make the people once more come to the right faith.’²¹⁵ This reaction to the widespread distribution of Lutheran books reveals a very different strategy than historians have credited Catholic clerical authors for. They did more than just publish ‘devotional’ books in the hope that these works would ‘make evil books redundant.’²¹⁶

In this present analysis, I will firstly focus on the Lutheran criticisms quoted by our anonymous reviewer. Then I will analyse how he refuted these criticisms, and did so not only by explaining the theology and history of the practices of the Church, and why these were fully justified, but also by attacking the Lutheran points themselves, by trying to show that the Lutherans often held contradictory opinions. In this process of disproving Lutheran thought and discrediting Lutheran leaders, our author frequently used scriptural passages cited by Lutherans to attack Lutheranism itself. Finally, this analysis will focus on how he discredited the Lutherans and in particular Luther himself, by arguing that Luther’s new theology and his attacks on the Church essentially amounted to a plot to bring down Christianity and to ‘Prepare the way for Mohammed, just as John the Baptist had prepared the way for Christ.’²¹⁷ The final goal of bringing Mohammed to the papal throne was to cover up a filthy and sinful lifestyle, which Luther and the lustful monks which he had lured out of their monasteries aspired to live. In the end, our author explained the justification by faith alone principle as a cover up tactic to hide grievous sins, as he wrote: ‘they seek nothing else than the freedom of the flesh.’²¹⁸ This *ad-hominem* approach shows that different clerical authors could have very different ideas about what was the best strategy to stop the spread of Lutheranism.

The work of our anonymous author was clearly written for a lay audience. In some passages, the intended reader is addressed directly, for example by stating ‘You men, love your wives as Christ loves his Church.’²¹⁹ It is written from the perspective of a Catholic community observing some parishioners flirting with Lutheranism, and the author urged this community to stay in the Church and not to contest its teachings, as these parishioners were doing. However, these parishioners were not fully blamed for their actions and their reading, for they were the victims of Luther’s deception. The explicit aim of the book was to show why Luther was wrong,

²¹⁵ Ibidem, 2.

²¹⁶ As stated before, this is the position of Judith Pollmann, ‘Countering the Reformation in France and the Netherlands: Clerical Leadership and Catholic Violence 1560-1585’, *Past & Present*, 190 (2006), 83-120, 99.

²¹⁷ Anonymous, *Een redelijck bewijs*, 132.

²¹⁸ Ibidem, 19.

²¹⁹ Ibidem, 10.

thereby hoping that the parishioners would come back to the right faith: ‘Once I have shown how they have erred in this chapter, they will drop the rest as well.’²²⁰

The main argument of the Lutheran work attacked by our author, was that the Church had no right to dictate rules and commandments outside the word of God included in Scripture. The quoted passages from his Lutheran source deal primarily with commandments and practices that the Church, according to the Reformers, had unlawfully ordered without them being grounded in Scripture. In one of those passages is written: ‘The papists invent to their liking commandments not mentioned in Scripture and make rules that according to them are equal to the Word of God.’²²¹ The Church had no right to do so because, ‘Jesus had closed the Gospel with His death.’²²² The parishioners had also claimed, possibly verbally, that the Papists bended the Gospels according to their own liking. It is an indication that the Catholic author was dealing not just with written Lutheran works. He made a distinction between what he had heard from the parishioners and what was written in the Lutheran text that had come to his attention. Could our author be a parish priest faced with assertive parishioners, who were aware of Lutheran-inspired criticism and confronted their priest with it?

It is clear that our author had much experience discussing Lutheran-minded parishioners, as he wrote: ‘Believe me, I have known many Lutherans and I still know many.’ A rare insight into the debates that were taking place in the parishes is given when he writes, ‘If somebody preaches against Luther or his companions, the first thing we hear is ‘Wait there, you don’t understand the spirit of Luther’s teaching.’²²³ However, our author not only had experience with preaching against Lutheranism, but he also demonstrated the desire to know what drew people to the new teachings. He wrote that during a discussion that took place at a dinner table, he once asked: ‘What virtues have you seen in Lutheranism that attracted you?’²²⁴ He displayed a great knowledge of Lutheranism and their critiques of the Church, gathered through reading Lutheran works and by following discussions that took place in his immediate surroundings, possibly his own parish. He needed this knowledge to formulate his orthodox answer to it, showing why Lutherans were not only in doctrinal error, but that their points, according to him, were contradictory and voiced by hypocrites.

²²⁰ Ibidem, 2.

²²¹ Ibidem, 43.

²²² Ibidem, 50.

²²³ Ibidem, 137.

²²⁴ Ibidem, 130.

Before he could explain why the Church was legitimized in its teachings and commandments, our author first needed to explain what the Church was, and why the established ecclesiastical hierarchy was fully in line with Scripture. ‘In the Church at the time of Christ’, he wrote, ‘there was already a hierarchy. The apostles had consecrated deacons, priests and bishops’, to which he added, ‘This is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Who does not believe this, does not believe Scripture.’²²⁵ If the Church hierarchy was already in place at the time of the apostles, he asked, how much more is this now needed when there are ‘More Christians than there are stars?’²²⁶ The pope is the head of this hierarchy, because Christ himself had founded His Church on Peter. Christ is often compared to a carpenter, who is ‘strong enough to sustain the head of His Church, even when this head is often sick.’²²⁷

The defence of the institution of the papacy does not rest on the personality of individual popes but on the institution founded in Scripture. Thus, he could bypass the attacks on the lives and action of individual popes. To prove that the papacy was founded in Scripture, and was therefore legitimate, the author named many authorities who had written that the pope was the successor of Peter; ‘St. Jerome taught us so in Greek, Hebrew and Latin, together with Basil, Chrysostom, Origen, Athanasius, Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine, and many others.’²²⁸ Christ the Carpenter had from the beginning founded the hierarchy of the Church with different orders and grades, as to make it correspond with the order of all natural things, in order for it to exist until the end of time. That the Church had lasted so long was for the author a sign that this hierarchy was justified, and the succession of Peter had lasted until ‘this very day, and no heretic, tyrant or hellish power has ever conquered it.’²²⁹

He was aware that this list of names from patristic authorities would not convince Lutherans, so in his defence he incorporated Reformist criticism in a mocking manner. He wrote: ‘Here, the Lutherans will shout, ‘Scripture! Scripture! Those doctors were human beings and we don’t believe them, since they have erred already.’²³⁰ To which he responded that Luther was also a human being, and wrote that it often astonished him what the Lutherans made of their idol Luther, who wants people to believe ‘without reason and without Scripture and wants to draw people to him with shouting and roaring.’²³¹ Our author attempted to counter the argument that

²²⁵ Ibidem, 83.

²²⁶ Ibidem, 9.

²²⁷ Ibidem, 21.

²²⁸ Ibidem, 20.

²²⁹ Ibidem, 21.

²³⁰ Ibidem, 23.

²³¹ Ibidem, 24

the Church and its teachings were not based on Scripture, by claiming that Luther's position itself had no scriptural foundation: 'He wants to interpret Scripture to the very letter (..) why then does he not take both the Scriptures that are in favour as well as those that are contrary to his position? How does he want to understand Scripture in another way than that Jesus spoke to Peter; you are a rock, and on this rock, I want to build a Church and I will give you the Keys of the Kingdom of God. If you bind something on earth, it will be bound in Heaven.'²³²

The Lutheran objections to the Papal institution extend beyond Scripture. One of them was the claim that Peter had not used his power in the way the pope is using his power in the present day, an argument that was put forward in Eck's work as well. Interestingly, our author did not defend the use of Papal power in his own times: 'I don't defend the pope when he takes more power than he should.' This position resonates late medieval and contemporary debates in Catholic circles concerning conciliarism and the power general councils should have. During the fifteenth century, the bishops at the Councils of Constance and Basel had tried to give the council of bishops more power, thereby curbing the power of the pope and the danger of more schisms. Our author reflected on such conciliarist tendencies and apparently did not completely oppose reformatory criticism of abuses by contemporary leaders of the Church. He wrote, 'That they bring up the abuses that are in the Church, I say they are not in the Church but in its head and its members, and principally in its head. I don't defend them but pray to our Lord that He will give the grace to correct our heads and members.'²³³ How different from the way in which Eck had responded to such criticisms. In Eck's writings, there had been no room for criticisms on the Church. Instead, Eck responded on this point by citing a list of scriptural references to claim that the power of contemporary popes was fully justified.²³⁴

The greatest objection to the Church voiced in the Lutheran work discussed by our anonymous author, was that it had created rules and institutions that had no foundation in Scripture. This Lutheran objection was based on the Old Testament, in which Moses had said that 'Nothing should be added, and nothing shall be taken away from the words that I speak.'²³⁵ However, our author claimed that Moses had not forbidden to add how one should fulfil the commandments. 'It is not adding to the law, but strengthening and perfecting it.'²³⁶ Jesus himself had also not come to add anything to the law, but to fulfil it. The Church devised rules

²³² Ibidem, 24.

²³³ Ibidem, 78.

²³⁴ Eck, *Hier beghint een corte declaracie*, 54.

²³⁵ Anonymous, *Een redelijck bewijs*, 36.

²³⁶ Ibidem, 36.

in a similar way, as its regulations helped people to fulfil the scriptural commandments.²³⁷ The author stated, therefore, that the Lutheran accusation was ‘a lie, so well-known that it is hardly worth to answer it. (..) It is a general rule in the Church that all rules, customs and laws which are contrary to Scripture are of no value and will be undone.’²³⁸

One of the motto’s which Lutherans apparently ‘Take in their mouth and write on the walls’, as the author cited it, was ‘the word of God stands forever.’ ‘These were nice words’, he wrote, ‘since St. Peter had written them.’ The Lutherans who used it to defy Catholic practises, however, did not understand their implications. ‘There is a distinction between the eternal word or the eternal Gospel and the written word or written Gospel.’²³⁹ With their motto, the Lutherans had interpreted this passage wrongly, since St. Peter had written about the eternal Gospel, not the written Gospel. The eternal word was ‘poured in the intellect of the soul when it was created in the image of God and was never fully darkened by the sin of Adam.’²⁴⁰

Long before the law and the Gospels were written, people had already lived according to the Word of God, Who had written His natural law (*natuurlijkje wet*) in their hearts. Paul had written that even some heathens did what the law teaches. They had seen the hand of God in their world and understood that there was a God who should be venerated, and His laws were to be obeyed.²⁴¹ ‘The written Bible is not the only word of God, since this is affected by many other histories. It is primarily a revelation of the eternal word of God.’²⁴² It is of great interest that the author was aware of the inconsistencies and incompleteness of the Bible. He wrote that St. Paul had probably ordered much more regulations and had set up more commandments than only those collected in the Bible. ‘Paul preached for twelve years and wrote only a few letters. He also wanted that people follow the rules that were not written down but which they had seen.’²⁴³ Furthermore, Augustine had written that the original text of the Old Testament was lost.²⁴⁴ The principle of *sola Scriptura*, by which Luther had claimed that the written word amounted to the only authority for a Christian life was, therefore, flawed.

After explaining the flaws of the Lutheran theory and the theory of the eternal Gospel, our author expounded to the reader why the Church could legitimately set rules and regulation for Christians. ‘Human beings, in their maliciousness, don’t follow the Gospel and are inclined to

²³⁷ Ibidem, 39.

²³⁸ Ibidem, 30.

²³⁹ Ibidem, 32.

²⁴⁰ Ibidem, 32.

²⁴¹ Ibidem, 33.

²⁴² Ibidem, 35.

²⁴³ Ibidem, 100.

²⁴⁴ Ibidem, 100.

evil deeds. The Church has offered them commandments to draw them to the Gospel. Who is so flawed that they could say this is against the Gospel?’²⁴⁵ Earlier in his work, he had already explained why a Church needed leaders and why this was based on biblical foundations. He asked: ‘How do you rule without obedience? Are leaders not allowed to forbid and command? (..) These commandments are only given to follow the eternal Gospel, which is: Love God and your neighbour as yourselves.’²⁴⁶

The author was aware of the many changes to practice and doctrine, but changes in practices did not change their legitimacy. He wrote that times change, and so it was necessary for the Church to change as well. This principle was already visible in the Bible itself, for instance when Paul had spoken in Athens. He did not say that Jesus was God and Man, but had said that he was a ‘great man’, which implied that theology changed over time. Peter had also said about Jesus that he was a ‘man praised by God, not that he was Jesus the Son of God.’²⁴⁷ The same applies for rules and regulations. The Council of the apostles had stated that one should not eat meat that was offered to the idols, a rule that was inspired by the Holy Spirit. However, this rule was later abolished. ‘If Paul had witnessed changes in his own life, how much more did change within the Church since then?’²⁴⁸ He ironically addressed the Reformers by asking them: ‘Ask Paul why he, who was a human, made commandments which are not found in one of the four Gospels!’²⁴⁹

Apart from the changes discernible in Scripture itself, our author pointed to the many changes that had happened since the time of Jesus, like the commandment to obey the Sabbath and Easter. However, he wrote, we do not celebrate the Jewish Sabbath and we have another date on which we celebrate Easter. If the Church is not allowed to order new things, Christianity is doomed, since Christ had said that one can only attain eternal life by following the commandments, and much has changed since the times of the apostles.²⁵⁰ Thus, change has to be legitimate, and the sole inspirer of these new commandments is the Holy Spirit, which Jesus had promised to send to his disciples when he had said: ‘I have many things to tell you, but you would not understand that now. Therefore, I will send you the Holy Spirit.’²⁵¹ That was the reason the apostles were legitimized to create commandments, and that was the reason why the

²⁴⁵ Ibidem, 42.

²⁴⁶ Ibidem, 44.

²⁴⁷ Ibidem, 121.

²⁴⁸ Ibidem, 49.

²⁴⁹ Ibidem, 50.

²⁵⁰ Ibidem, 82.

²⁵¹ Ibidem, 51.

Church could do so as well. The position of the parishioners, who apparently had told our author that Christ had closed the Gospel by his death, were therefore mistaken, and their criticisms were unbiblical.

Apart from misinterpreting Scripture, they were even more foolish to base their offensive against a Church based on scriptural foundations. After all, Scripture itself had received its canonization from the Holy Church and derived its authority from of the ordeals of the Church.²⁵² How then, the author asked, can they fight the Church with these same Scriptures? Furthermore, he pointed to the inconsistency in the Lutheran treatment of Scripture, by stating that if the Lutherans found passages or books in Scripture that did not fit their errors, they simply rejected them. He alluded here to the rejection by Luther of the deuterocanonical books, and by the very act of their rejection of these books, the author was able to place them in line with other heretics, such as the Manicheans, who had rejected the Old Law, ‘Because it did not fit their heresy.’²⁵³ He ended his refutation with the same objection the Lutherans had voiced against the Church; ‘In Deuteronomy 30 and in Proverbs is stated that one cannot add or remove anything from the Bible. So, what about those who eliminate entire books from Scripture. Is that not taking away from the Word?’²⁵⁴ Again, he used criticisms voiced by the Lutherans to defy their own position.

The next reformist claim addressed in *Een redelijck bewijs* was the idea that Jesus had closed the Gospel by his death. Therefore, all day-to-day practises of the Church not explicitly mentioned in Scripture were supposedly flawed. Our author opened this chapter by citing a long passage from the parishioner’s book, of which the following citation is a central part: ‘Do people want altars, water, salt, candles, palms, blessing herbs, baptism church-bells, restraint from meat cheese and eggs on certain days, honouring this or that Saint, fasting and being without a housewife? The Holy Spirit has led the disciples in truth but has not taught them these things. They have to be lies, because if they were true, Christ did not keep his word.’²⁵⁵ In his answer, our author tried to systematically refute these points, by showing that all these practises were both legitimate and founded by the apostles. Interestingly, he did not take the Bible as the sole source for the actions of the apostles. This is in line with his earlier argumentation that the commandments which were ordered by the apostles were far more numerous than those mentioned in the Bible, since that was an incomplete collection. Referring to a medieval debate

²⁵² Ibidem, 59.

²⁵³ Ibidem, 60.

²⁵⁴ Ibidem, 62.

²⁵⁵ Ibidem, 86.

on this issue, which was thoroughly discussed by Franciscan theologians such as Bonaventure and Scotus, our anonymous author wrote that the apostles had introduced additional customs and regulations for which the Catholic Tradition should be consulted.²⁵⁶ The Church was the transmitter of this knowledge, since it claimed that the Church was justified in its teachings through the authority of Apostolic succession.

After citing the Lutheran position, it is refuted systematically. Concerning the blessing and anointing our author wrote, ‘The apostles anointed the sick with oil that was undoubtedly blessed oil, otherwise there would be no difference between oil and oil. (..) The apostles and disciples have commanded to anoint churches, this we read often in the legends.’²⁵⁷ Concerning fasting, he pointed to Jesus himself, who had fasted 40 days in the desert and taught several ways of fasting. Furthermore, Paul had fasted and recommended the practice. Christ and Paul had both also stated that corporal purity was to be praised higher than the marital status, thus objecting to the Lutheran attempt to discredit the value of monastic life and clerical celibacy.²⁵⁸ In his defence of various liturgical traditions, like soul masses and the liturgy of hours, he wrote that Jesus and Paul had both said that one should pray without end. But, taking the human condition into account, this was impossible. Therefore, he wrote, the Church, inspired by the Holy Spirit, had established the seven hours of prayer.²⁵⁹

The Lutheran attack on masses for the souls of the dead was closely linked to their denial of the existence of Purgatory. As we have seen in the discussion of the work of Lucas van der Hey, in 1517 Luther had not yet claimed that Purgatory did not exist. However, in the Lutheran work from 1527 that was the object of our author’s refutation, Luther’s subsequent denial of Purgatory was well-documented, and as such well-known by Catholic clerical authors. Our author directly referred to his parishioners in discussing this topic, writing that they ‘lied that Purgatory did not exist.’²⁶⁰ His refutation of this claim is less elaborate than his defence of the legitimacy of the Tradition and the papacy, but he maintained that he had good reasons for omitting such elaboration. After all: ‘many books have been written about Purgatory against Luther and his companions.’²⁶¹ Whether he meant the mostly Latin refutations written by ‘Catholic controversialists’, or other works disseminated in the Low Countries is not clear. His

²⁵⁶ Charles Zuckerman, ‘The Relationship of Theories of Universals to Theories of Church Government in the Middle Ages: A Critique of Previous Views’, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 36:4 (1975), 579-594, 582.

²⁵⁷ Anonymous, *Een redelijck bewijs*, 86.

²⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 94.

²⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 96.

²⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 97.

²⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 98.

envisaged audience consisted of lay people, and by claiming that there were already enough refutations of Luther's denial of Purgatory in circulation, he seemingly referred to works available to the laity. This remark might therefore be revealing for our assessment of the number of vernacular refutations of Lutheran thought available to the Dutch laity.

Nevertheless, he defended Purgatory by stating that the apostles had prayed for the souls of those who had died.²⁶² Furthermore, he claimed that 'Many of the greatest lights in the Church have kept the practice, like Dionysius, Tertullian, Origen, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, Athanasius, Ambrose and Gregory. (...) Shall we then solely believe Luther, who writes against Purgatory?'²⁶³ This argument has much in common with Eck's characterization of Luther as an insignificant author who, by his own writings, believed that he could re-invent Christianity and thereby reject 1400 years of theology. Furthermore, Luther was not only in disagreement with tradition itself, the author of this refutation wrote, but also with the teachings of the apostles, whether these teachings were in the Bible or not. 'Chrysostom and Tertullian taught that praying for the deceased souls is an ordination by the apostles and a custom of their time.'²⁶⁴ He finished his chapter on Purgatory with a citation that captures the very centre of this disagreement between the Catholics and Lutherans: 'What kind of argument is it to say that there is no Purgatory because it is not openly declared in Scripture? Will they, by carrying an open Bible to us, undo something the Church has learned and kept for 1500 years?'²⁶⁵

However, displaying the criticisms and refuting them was not the only strategy our author applied in his attempt to show that Lutheranism was false and dangerous. In the last part of this content-analysis, I will focus on the direct attacks he made on the person of Luther and 'his church' (although the existence of such a 'church', especially in the Low Countries, was most likely a supposition stemming out of a fear). These direct attacks, made throughout *Een redelijck bewijs*, can be subsumed under three main themes. First of all, the work attacks the sinful morality of Luther and his followers, because of which Luther had devised his 'freedom' doctrine, namely to cover up their sins. Second, it refers to the internal divisions within reformatory circles that had already risen during the 1520s, and which were an easy target for clerical authors. Finally, the work insinuated that Luther aimed to welcome the Ottoman Turks to Europe to overthrow the papacy.

²⁶² Ibidem, 98.

²⁶³ Ibidem, 99.

²⁶⁴ Ibidem, 100.

²⁶⁵ Ibidem, 101.

For our author, it was preposterous to think that God had truly inspired Luther, because both his teaching and his actions were severely unchristian. He blamed Luther for not following Jesus' commandments, as He had urged his followers to be gentle, while Luther's works were 'full of mockery and harsh judgements'.²⁶⁶ The author reminded his readers that Luther, during his trial in Augsburg, had sworn to follow and honour the Church and had even written a humble letter to the pope. However, after he had been excommunicated, Satan had taken control over him. 'He writes now that his teachings are heavenly and that he possesses the spirit of God who has revealed Scripture to him. Not even Augustine would make such claims, which makes it clear that his teachings are inspired by an evil spirit.'²⁶⁷

Another Lutheran idea which our author fiercely attacked was that justification came through faith alone, which meant that good deeds were not a necessary precondition for human salvation. This doctrine was explained by many clerical authors as a 'carte blanche' for sinful behaviour. In our author's opinion, Luther's behaviour fulfilled what Judas the Apostle had written in his epistle about certain people who, 'Are so evil that they extend God's grace to the carnal inclination of man.'²⁶⁸ That explained to him why so many people had followed Luther: 'As we see the many monks, nun and priests, who earlier had occupied themselves with prayer and praised and loved God. Now they visit whores, drink, party and gamble.'²⁶⁹ They were all misled and tempted by Luther, who was primarily interested in carnal matters and 'serves his own belly instead of Christ.' Furthermore, he was, since he had left the monastery, preoccupied with matters of the world, 'like how he should please his whores'. Luther had tempted monks 'Away from the way of penitence and has them drawn out of the monasteries to pursue whores.'²⁷⁰ It was a common topos in Catholic polemical writings to state that the leaders of the Reformist movement were run-away monks and nuns. Judith Pollmann wrote that these personal attacks on leaders of the Reformation were commonplace, but she portrayed them as a sign of weakness of Catholic polemicists, who apparently were unable to formulate a proper doctrinal defence, and had therefore to rely on such *ad-hominem* attacks.²⁷¹ The 1527 work discussed here shows that such attacks were not solely a sign of weakness: they emerged in the context of a complex and multi-layered attack on the Lutherans and their doctrines. Moreover,

²⁶⁶ Ibidem, 3.

²⁶⁷ Ibidem, 13.

²⁶⁸ Ibidem, 54.

²⁶⁹ Ibidem, 54.

²⁷⁰ Ibidem, 56.

²⁷¹ Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands*, 50.

Reformist controversialist made us of comparable *ad-hominem* attacks, which scholars have not interpreted as a sign of weakness on their part.

Luther and his followers are portrayed as not following reason or intellect, but passions like lust. Furthermore, *Een redelijck bewijs* makes out that the parishioners spoke out of passion rather than from their intellect.²⁷² Luther's attack on the papacy is framed in these terms as well. 'You see how much effort he makes to make Rome fall because he is so angry at the pope.'²⁷³ Luther would have denied the existence of Purgatory for the same reason.²⁷⁴ His final goal was to devastate the court and the city of Rome out of hatred. To prove this, the author referred a work by Luther himself, which could be an interesting indication for the extent to which Catholics were familiar with Luther's writings: 'He wrote in a German book that, if the pope had let him alone, he would have left the pope's chair alone, which he now aims to abolish when possible.'²⁷⁵

Because the reformist church (Luther is described as the 'pope of Wittenbergh) was founded on flesh to pursue the will of the flesh, our author was not surprised that this church was so divided. 'Look at Luther's church. It is divided and factitious. Luther writes against Carolosladius, he against Luther, Zwingli against Oecolampadius, Balthasar against Zwingli. Some deny baptism, the other wants to innovate it, some write against statues and some defend them. One believes in the sacrament of bread, the other in its accident, for the next it is just a sign and for some none of this. This is the 'sustainable' church of Wittenberg.'²⁷⁶ Pointing towards the internal divisions of one's opponent is an old rhetorical trick, going back to writers such as Cicero, and the author eagerly deployed its strengths to portray the Lutheran church as inherently divided because of one clear reason: it was not founded on the Holy Spirit but on the flesh. The divisions among the reformers had started right at the beginning of their agitation and it was thankful material to show that the whole movement was illegitimate and working against the Holy Spirit.

Even worse than the factitious character of this church of Luther was its inherent sinful nature, since its adherents were mostly, 'runaway monks and nuns, thieves, criminals and brothel owners.'²⁷⁷ To portray the Lutherans like this gave the author of *Een redelijck bewijs* another opportunity to deny the credibility of the Reformation. 'We have always, since the beginning

²⁷² Anonymous, *Een redelijck bewijs*, 52.

²⁷³ *Ibidem*, 28.

²⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 97.

²⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, 97.

²⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 17.

²⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 129.

of the world, seen that all changes, renewals and reformations were not promulgated by words alone but with recourse to a higher way of life, with signs and miracles. This banned head of that church who wants to change everything does not show in his life a pure, Christian, sober, amicable, and humble heart. (...) He lives a filthy life and his disciples are not any better.’²⁷⁸

The author, furthermore, portrayed Luther’s aims to destroy the papacy as being closely connected to the rising threat of the Ottoman Turks. He wrote, ‘What else can we conclude than that Luther is a forerunner of Mohammed. (...) They will say, ‘Welcome, dear law of Mohammed. We have long waited for you and called for you. We have undone our Christianity before you came, and your way is prepared. Because of you, we can freely cover our sinful lifestyle. We had spoken of Christ, but no one has obscured him more and made him forgotten. We have ordered new laws in Christ’s name, but never was there any law which broke away more from Christ and which was united with your law than these. Come freely, your chair is prepared.’²⁷⁹

This framing clarifies something about the Catholic perception of the Ottomans, and in any case this author saw the Islamic law as impure and as a justification for sinful behaviour. Because he had framed the Lutheran position of *sola Gratia* as justifying sin, because of the freedom it would allow, he could draw parallels with the Ottomans. This framing was not only possible because he could compare the ‘sinful law’ of the Ottomans with the desire for a sinful law by the Lutherans. Luther had written in his *Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses* that he had meant with his fifth thesis that the pope could only remove those penalties that he himself had imposed. Therefore, the authority of the pope did not include things like natural disasters, murders, and invasions of Turks and Tartars. To call for war against the Turks on the basis of papal authority was therefore unlawful and against God, because Luther had interpreted the Turkish rise as a divine punishment. This was (deliberately) misunderstood by many of his critics, who thought or chose to interpret that Luther meant that it was sinful to resist the Turkish invasion.²⁸⁰

This misunderstanding was employed in the present book to antagonize Luther. Luther would have aimed to destroy the papacy by posing no opposition against the Turks, and would make people too weak to be able to do so: ‘Don’t we see the Lutheran rejoicing because of the demise

²⁷⁸ Ibidem, 129.

²⁷⁹ Ibidem, 135. Mohammed is translated from Machomet.

²⁸⁰ Footnote nr. 35 on the letter to Johann Rinck (1530), in: Desiderius Erasmus, *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 2204-2356 (August 1529-July 1530)* Translated by Alexander Dalzell, with annotations from James M. Estes (Toronto, 2015), 232.

of the papacy and the victory of the Turks?’²⁸¹ Luther had furthermore written that everybody should obey their superiors, even when their commandments were unreasonable. Luther had indeed explained Paul’s letter to the Romans along those lines. However, this could be misunderstood as well. The author wrote that many Lutherans were calling ‘We have to surrender ourselves to the tyranny of the Turks!’²⁸² Whether or not he had heard Lutherans saying this, he was able to frame the Lutheran position as a deliberate weakening of Christendom, and as a plot by Luther to ‘prepare the way for Mohammed’.²⁸³

Like the work by Eck, this book reveals that clerical authors were not afraid to expose Luther’s criticisms to a lay audience, in fear that they might ‘make up their mind themselves’.²⁸⁴ The fact that our author literally cited parts of a Lutheran book in this text meant for a lay audience testifies to this. Furthermore, he provided a doctrinal answer to show that the position of the Church was fully in line with Christian Scripture, unlike the unjustified Lutheran doctrines. He referred continuously to Scripture and showed in the margins the biblical sections where these references could be found, encouraging the readers to check it themselves. This should make historians of the Reformation cautious to establish too-rigid distinctions between Lutheran and Catholic preaching and writing. Both Catholic and Protestant authors based themselves on Scripture and considered it important that the faith of the laity was grounded in Scripture as well. It signals a trend in Christendom in the wider sense, and not only in the Reformist camp.

²⁸¹ Anonymous, *Een redelijck bewijs*, 29.

²⁸² *Ibidem*, 79.

²⁸³ *Ibidem*, 132.

²⁸⁴ Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 51.

Conclusion

At the turn of the sixteenth century, the Low Countries had a rich and vibrant religious culture in which reading played an essential role. The laity was very engaged with religious matters and its salvation, which was part of the reason why the indulgence economy had grown to such great proportions. The theological reflection on indulgences lagged behind the practice, and this had alarmed theologians such as Luther, but he was far from the only one. As the work of Lucas van der Hey demonstrates, both in wider Christian society and in circles of theologians, many questions had arisen regarding indulgences. Although Van Der Hey tried to safeguard them from abuse and excess, and aimed to root the practice in both Tradition and Scripture, the debate took a decisive turn when Luther's *95 theses* got published. The debate came to centre on the authority of the pope, and in the early 1520's, a pamphlet war commenced between the so-called 'Catholic controversialists' and the Lutherans, who kept publishing new writings from emerging Reformist centres such as Wittenberg. Those writings also penetrated the Low Countries and found a warm reception in literate circles who were engaged with the religious matters of the day.

In Dutch historiography, much focus has been directed to this initial reception of Lutheranism, linking it with 'Erasmian' thought and a humanistic mindset of the laity, which would have made them receptive to criticism on the Church. However, according to many historical narratives, this initial warm response was suppressed by an increasingly violent inquisition and Habsburg repression. The same historical narratives have linked this repression, which would have increased over time, and would have created more and more resentment, with the outburst of the iconoclasm of the year 1566 several decades down the line. Although more recent historians have modified the longstanding view that the late-medieval Church was somehow in decay, the blame for the iconoclasm and the supposedly rapid dissemination of Protestant thought is still often laid at the feet of the clergy, which had failed to respond adequately to the crisis. These clergymen would have preferred to keep the confrontation with Lutheranism in small academic circles, fearing that the laity would somehow 'get ideas' from staunch anti-Lutheran preaching, and as such failed to counter the Reformist message.

In this thesis, several works of clerical authors have been studied that reveal another side of early sixteenth-century Catholicism. Different orders already had much experience with the printing press before the Luther-crisis began, and they were ready to deploy it in defence of the Church. Although writers such as Eck indeed preferred to keep the discussion within academic

circles, changing circumstances forced him to write anti-Lutheran tracts aimed at a wider audience. His writings got quickly translated into Dutch, and these works show that he was not afraid to reveal many Lutheran arguments to the laity, quite the contrary. His strategy was to show that the Church's teaching were fully biblical, contrary to the Lutheran position, which based itself on false teachings that were not in line with Scripture. Furthermore, he tried to frame Luther as the next manifestation of heretical thought and aligned him with earlier heresies. The anonymous author of the book *Een redelijck bewijs* had similar strategies but focused more on the unchristian character of Luther and his deceived followers. Framing Lutheranism and the *sola-gratia* principle as a cover-up strategy of a sinful lifestyle of runaway monks, his approach was more *ad-hominem* than Eck's. Nevertheless, he cited long passages of a Lutheran work, after which he tried to reveal the inconsistency of its arguments. This reveals that Catholic authors occupied themselves much more with 'othering' the Protestants than authors like Judith Pollmann have given them credit for. However, these two works were only a small part of the rich Catholic book production in the sixteenth century. Books like the *Boexken der Missen* continued to be a best-seller, which shows that the laity had an ongoing enthusiasm to live a sacramental Catholic life, even though many were critical of the practices of the Church. As Koen Goudriaan has argued, the eventual split of the Church was by no means foreseeable in the early sixteenth century.

The works studied in this dissertation are just a few among the many books published by sixteenth-century Catholic authors. Among them are works which are more devotional in nature, but many are full of doctrinal instruction. This was not a new phenomenon after the start of the Reformation, and many authors were ready and willing to tackle this new heresy. I hope the preliminary conclusions of this thesis will inspire historians to investigate these writings, in order to enrich our understanding of the religious dynamics in the Low Countries prior to the Dutch revolt.

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