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CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

LAW AND RELIGION IN ALLIANCE: GUIDO DE BRES AND THE
RESTRICTION OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

ANTOINE THERON

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

MAY 2018

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For Nicoline

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PREFACE

I am thankful to several people who have contributed directly and indirectly to my doctoral journey of which this dissertation is the final mile.

At Calvin Seminary, I have much benefited from the teaching and guidance of fine scholars, of whom I can only mention a few. A special word of thanks to Dr. Lyle Bierma, who has always been the model teacher, researcher, and doctoral supervisor! Dr. Bierma truly exemplifies the graces of what Brooks Hollifield called America's "ètlemen theologians" of another era. It was also a privilege to study under Dr. Richard Muller for several years. Likewise, I had the benefit of studying under Dr. George Marsden, who supervised my dissertation's enjoyable detour into American history for a few months. It was a privilege and joy to study under Dr. John Bolt and to work under him for several summers editing Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics*. Those delightful months spent under Dr. Bolt's leadership poring over Bavinck's texts will long remain one of my fondest memories of Grand Rapids. Thanks, too, to Dr. Karin Maag from the Meeter Center for her assistance on matters peculiarly sixteenth century and French. Paul Fields was a regular source of help, and his sense of humor brightened many a long day. I am also thankful for Dr. Matt Tuininga and Dr. Erik de Boer for reading my dissertation.

Even before coming to Calvin Seminary, Dr. Joel Beeke encouraged me to do doctoral studies; without this, I would certainly not have done so. Dr. Beeke's own theological and ministerial work remains the standard to aim for! Dr. Gerald Bilkes introduced me to many treasures of biblical theology when he supervised my Th.M., and later reassured his troubled student that studying historical theology does not have to be a

(permanent) betrayal of biblical theology. Dr. James Grier nudged me toward doctoral studies during the two years before “The Olde Pilgrim,” as he often called himself, completed his earthly pilgrimage.

My dear wife, Nicoline, deserves my greatest respect. For a spouse to survive a Ph.D. must be like surviving the First World War: For those who have been there, a description of their ordeal is redundant; for those who have not, it is futile. I can only thank her, and God, for her constant loyalty, love, patience, and encouragement. I dedicate this study to her with all my love.

I am also deeply conscious that our heavenly Father has graciously granted me the time, the health, and the means to study. “He has not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.” – Psalm 103:10. *Soli Deo Gloria!*

ABSTRACT

This study investigates why the Dutch reformer Guido De Bres believed that the law should restrict religious liberty. In other words, why did De Bres believe that political rulers should not tolerate religious liberty? The answer developed in this dissertation is that De Bres's restrictive view of religious liberty was largely the result of his vision of an alliance between law and religion. De Bres's vision of an alliance between law and religion was his theological response to the acute challenge of his concrete historical (political, social) context. De Bres's vision offered a solution to the desperate plight of the Reformed in their political context in the Netherlands: an alliance between the Dutch Reformed churches and the Dutch nobles would protect the Reformed believers against the intense persecution by royal Catholicism. However, the theological and practical dimensions of De Bres's vision of an alliance coordinated the political protection of true religion with the political restriction of false religion. Thus, some of De Bres's political theological perspectives tended to tighten the connection between protection of true religion and the political restriction of false religion. Also, practically, in De Bres's quest for an alliance, circumstances like the inertia of the Dutch nobles and the competitive political dynamics of the confessional struggle encouraged De Bres to stress the need for political restriction of forms of religion like Anabaptism and especially Catholicism. Likewise, De Bres attempted to provide what the nobles expected the allied church leaders to deliver: enhancement of social order and the legitimization of political rule. The strategies by which he did so, however, reinforced the traditional view that rulers should use the power of the law to restrict false religion and idolatry.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Explaining De Bres's View of Religious Liberty

The leading Dutch reformer and martyr, Guido De Bres, believed that the law should restrict religious liberty, as appears from most of his writings throughout most of his life.¹ This raises the question, *why?* Phrased more narrowly: Why did De Bres believe that political rulers should not tolerate religious liberty? What were the historical and theological reasons why De Bres favored the political or legal compulsion of religion?

This is a significant question, because it addresses an apparent paradox in De Bres's view of religious liberty. On the face of it, the harshly persecuted Reformed in the southern Netherlands had everything to gain from religious liberty and legal toleration. If, as Andrew Pettegree puts it, the demand for toleration in the early modern period was always a "loser's creed," De Bres and his persecuted Reformed churches qualified as perfect candidates to desire toleration.² Yet although De Bres and the persecuted Reformed churches were inveterate "losers" in the early modern religious context, De

¹ This statement is somewhat qualified in chapter two.

² Andrew Pettegree, "The Politics of Toleration in the Dutch Republic," in *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*, ed. Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, Jonathan I. Israel, and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 198. Almost a century before Pettegree, Philipus Hoedemaker (who was in favor of what might be called a historical Reformed form of theocracy) criticized Abraham Kuyper's views by suggesting that it would be a "remarkable phenomenon" if the Reformed really favored state compulsion of religion in the way that scholars like Kuyper alleged they did, since they themselves were at risk of such compulsion. After all, other victims of persecution, the Anabaptists and various categories of alleged heretics, explicitly disputed the legitimacy of compulsion in religious matters. Phillipus Jacobus Hoedemaker, *Artikel XXXVI onzer Nederduitsche Geloofsbelijdenis tegenover Dr. A. Kuyper gehandhaafd* (Amsterdam: J.H. van Dam, 1901), 47.

Bres (except, as we shall see, in his earliest work) believed that the law should limit religious liberty. Why?

State of Research

No research exists that is dedicated to explaining why De Bres believed that the law should restrict religious liberty. There is, no doubt, wider research that is indirectly relevant to the question. For example, recent decades have produced important studies of toleration and religious liberty in early modern Western Europe.³ Several studies have focused on the Dutch experience more narrowly, but none have investigated De Bres's work.⁴ Conversely, there have been studies of De Bres's life and thought, but these

³ See e.g. Ole Peter Grell and Robert W. Scribner, *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines: Confession and Community in Utrecht 1578–1620* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2007); Cary Nederman, *Worlds of Difference: European Discourses of Toleration, c. 1100–c. 1550* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Perez Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500–1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009). Older studies that remain useful include Joseph Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation, 2 vols.* (London: Longmans, 1960); Henry Kamen, *The Rise of Toleration* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967); M. Searle Bates, *Religious Liberty: an Inquiry* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1972). Focusing on England but also addressing some general issues, is Wilbur K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England, 4 vols.* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1940), especially the first volume, Wilbur K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England, from the Beginning of the English Reformation to the Death of Queen Elizabeth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932).

⁴ See e.g. A. C. Duke, Judith Pollmann, and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Low Countries* (Farnham: Alastair, 2009); Ronnie Po-chia Hsia and Henk F. K. van Nierop, *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*; Jonathan I. Israel, Guillaume Henri Marie Posthumus Meyjes, and Christiane Berkvens-Stevelinck, *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 1997); Judith Pollmann, *Religious Choice in the Dutch Republic: The Reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius (1565–1641)* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999). Eminent older works include H. A. Enno van Gelder, *Getemperde vrijheid: Een verhandeling over de verhouding van Kerk en Staat in de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden en de vrijheid van meningsuiting in zake godsdienst, drukpers en onderwijs, gedurende de 17e eeuw* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1972) and Douglas Nobbs, *Theocracy and Toleration: A Study of Disputes in Dutch Calvinism from 1600 to 1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938). Most of these studies have focused on the seventeenth century rather than the sixteenth.

almost invariably offer only scant help due to their lack of attention to his view of religious liberty,⁵ or their limitation of such investigation to Article 36 of the *Belgic Confession*.⁶ Even when such studies of the *Belgic Confession* take note of De Bres's other writings, they are undertaken with the purpose of informing our understanding of the Confession rather than understanding De Bres's position and his reasons for it. This focus is understandable, considering the importance of the *Belgic Confession* for churches historically connected to the Reformation in the Netherlands.⁷ Nevertheless, it inhibits an understanding of the reasons for De Bres's position.

The current De Bres scholarship, overly focused on Art.36 of the *Belgic Confession* though it may be, still outlines basic options to explain De Bres's view. Three broad approaches to explaining De Bres's view of religious liberty in Art.36 of the *Belgic Confession* can be identified, which I shall term "rich continuity," "thin continuity," and "disjunction."

⁵ This includes such foundational studies as Daniel Ollier, *Guy de Brès: étude historique* (Paris: L'aigle, 1883); Lambrecht A. van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray zijn leven en werken: Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van het Zuid-Nederlandsche Protestantisme* (Zierikzee: Ochtman, 1884); and even the recent fine collection of essays, Emile Braekman and Erik de Boer, eds., *Guido de Bres: zijn leven, zijn belijden* (Utrecht: Kok, 2011).

⁶ An exception that goes wider than Art.36 is the short essay by Emile Braekman, "La pensée politique de Guy de Brès," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 115 (1969): 1–28.

⁷ The most helpful of these studies for purposes of understanding De Bres's position on toleration and religious liberty are Nicolaas Gootje's work on the *Belgic Confession* and Klaas van der Zwaag's doctoral dissertation on Art.36 of the Belgic Confession, which surely ranks as the foremost study of the most controversial clause of the Belgic Confession. See Nicolaas Hendrik Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession: Its History and Sources* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Klaas Van der Zwaag, *Onverkort of Gekortwiekt?: Artikel 36 van de Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis en de Spanning tussen Overheid en Religie: Een Systematisch-historische Interpretatie van een 'Omstreden' Geloofsartikel* (Heerenveen: Groen, 1999). Also useful is Cornelis Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer, Vol.3a. De Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis: Art.1–21 en 25–26* (Barendrecht: Drukkerij Barendrecht, 1955) and especially the second volume, Cornelius Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer, Vol.3b. De Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis: Art.22–24 en 27–37* (Barendrecht: Drukkerij Barendrecht, 1956). Vonk repeatedly stresses the need for an appreciation of De Bres's work that goes beyond the *Belgic Confession*.

The first approach, “rich continuity,” describes (and, very rarely, explains) De Bres’s thinking as being in full-bodied continuity with wider theological, philosophical and political thought, such as mainstream Reformed thought, or sixteenth century thought, or according to some scholars, even pre-sixteenth century medieval or late classical thought.⁸ De Bres’s conviction that government should use the compulsion of law in matters of religion was, according to some scholars, articulated by specific reformers like Calvin and Beza,⁹ or, according to others, characterized Reformation thought in general,

⁸ The list of scholars who saw a rich continuity between De Bres and contemporary or antecedent thinkers who held that it was government’s duty to use a degree of legal compulsion in certain matters of religion is very long. The most important of the older sources is the synodal advice report published by Herman Bavinck *et al*, *Advies in zake het Gravamen tegen Artikel XXXVI der Belijdenis* (Amsterdam: Boekhandel Höveker & Wormser, 1905). This material also appears as an attachment in *Acta der Generale Synode van De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, gehouden te Utrecht, van 22 Augustus tot 7 September 1905*. N.p., n.d., 273–315. Some examples of more recent scholarship are: Theodore L. Haitjema, *De Nieuwere Geschiedenis van Neerlands Kerk der Hervorming: Van Gereformeerde Kerkstaat tot Christus-belijdende Volkskerk ‘s-Gravenhage*: Boekencentrum, 1964; Arnold Van Ruler, *Religie en politiek* (Nijkerk: G.F. Callenbach, 1945); Willem Daniel Jonker, *Bevrydende waarheid: die karakter van die gereformeerde belydenis* (Wellington: Hugenate Uitgewers, 1994); Klaas Schilder, “Zelfstandig optreden in de Politiek? XIII.” *De Reformatie* 22 no 44 (9 Aug.1947); Klaas Schilder, *Christelijke religie: over de Nederlandse geloofsbelijdenis* (Kampen: Van den Berg), 1970, 117; Klaas Schilder “Zelfstandig optreden in de Politiek? XII.” *De Reformatie* 22 no. 43 (2 Aug.1947); Isaac Arend Diepenhorst, “Historisch-critische bijdrage tot de leer van den christelijke staat” (LL.D. diss., Free University of Amsterdam, 1943); Klaas Dijk, *Kerk en politiek* (Franeker: T. Wever, 1945), 38; J. G. Feenstra, *Onze geloofsbelijdenis* (Kampen: Kok, 1950), 470; Eugene Osterhaven, *Our Confession of Faith: A Study Manual on the Belgic Confession* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964); Cornelis van Dam, *God and Government: Biblical Principles for Today: An Introduction and Resource* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011); Andries D. R. Polman, *Onze Nederlandsche geloofsbelijdenis, verklaard uit het verleden, geconfronteerd met het heden, Vol.4* (Franeker: Wever, 1948); Andries D.R. Polman, *Woord en belijdenis: Eenvoudige verklaring van de Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis, Vol.2* (Franeker: Wever, 1957); Jacobus M. Vorster, “Godsdiensvryheid in ‘n toekomstige Suid-Afrika in die lig van artikel 36 van die Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis” *In die Skriflig* 27, no.3 (1993): 307–321; P. Fourie, “Godsdiensvryheid in die ban van NGB Art 36—seën of vloek?” *NGTT Nederduitse Gereformeerde Teologiese Tydskrif* 47 No 1 and 2 (March and June 2006): 158–172; Nico Vorster and J.H. van Wyk, “Kerk en Owerheid binne ’n regstaat. Die profetiese roeping van die kerk” *In die Skriflig* 34, no.1 (2000):109–134; Pieter Korteweg, *Guido de Brès (1522–1567)* (Barneveld: Koster, 2010), 251–2; Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 259.

⁹N.Y. Van Goor, *Het Geloof der Vaderen: De Belijdenis des Geloofs* (Groningen: Jan Haan, 1909), 326–336; H. Kakes, *De vaste grond: een toelichting op de Nederlandse geloofsbelijdenis* (Nederlandse Bond van Jongelingsverenigingen op Gereformeerde grondslag, 1956), 218; Diepenhorst, “Christelijke staat,” 293; Polman, *Woord en belijdenis, Vol.2*, 308–309 and Polman, *Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis, Vol.4*, 266–273; Van Dam, *God and Government*, 51.

or perhaps even the sixteenth century *Zeitgeist* more broadly.¹⁰ It might be tempting to describe this continuum of thinking as “intolerant,” but as one of the proponents of this approach, Van der Zwaag, cautions, to speak of “intolerance” with respect to the sixteenth century is an anachronism: the sixteenth century might be judged “intolerant” by twentieth century standards, but this judgment overlooks the importance of the church and religion in sixteenth century society.¹¹

Several scholars that follow this “rich continuity” approach also connect De Bres’s position with non-Reformed thought, especially Catholicism and Lutheranism, and with medieval sentiments. For example, A. J. Besselaar and Gerhard Rothuizen describe the historical understanding underlying Art.36 as unique to “a *corpus christianum* wherein church and state, sword and ban” were so tightly united as “to flow together,” which was a “medieval conception that the Reformation was starting to depart from.”¹² Others go back even further and emphasize continuity between De Bres’s position and the thinking of imperial Roman and pagan ideas that confronted the ancient Christian church.¹³ For

¹⁰ Jan C. H. De Pater, *Guido de Brès en de gereformeerde geloofsbelijdenis* ('s-Gravenhage: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1950); Jan C. H. De Pater, “De gereformeerde geloofsbelijdenis en de religievrede in de fase van het verzet tegen Spanje” *Anti-Revolutionaire Staatskunde* 14 (1940): 193–226; Jan C. H. De Pater, “De Godsdienstige Verdraagzaamheid bij Marnix van St.Aldegonde,” *Anti-Revolutionaire Staatskunde, Driemaandelijksch Orgaan*, 12 (1938): 1–2.

¹¹ Van der Zwaag, *Onverkort of gekortwiekt*, 72, 95.

¹² A.J. Besselaar, Gerhard T. Rothuizen, *et al.*, *Altijd bereid tot verantwoording: Kort commentaar op de Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis* (Aalten: De Graafschap, 1961), 97–8. More than half a century before Rothuizen, Abraham Kuyper famously linked Art.36 of the Belgic Confession with what he described as Calvinism’s historical excesses such as the burning of Servetus, which were “the fatal expression of a common error in the previous century, the result of a centuries old system which Calvinism found itself in, in which it was raised, and which it has not yet succeeding in freeing itself from.” Abraham Kuyper, *Het Calvinisme: zes Stone-lezingen in October 1898 te Princeton gehouden* (Amsterdam: Höveker & Wormser, 1898), 92. See also Abraham Kuyper, “Is dwaling strafbaar?” *De Standaard* 660–680 (25 May to 18 June, 1874); Abraham Kuyper, *Ons Program* (Amsterdam: J.H.Kruyt, 1879); Abraham Kuyper, “Machtigt de Heilige Schrift onze overheid om strafrechtelijk op te treden in zaken des geloofs?” *De Heraut* (6 Jan. to 4 May, 1884): 315–332.

¹³ J. van Lonkhuizen, *De blijvende schriftuurlijke grondgedachte van art. 36 onzer geloofsbelijdenis: de positieve taak der overheid ten opzichte van den godsdienst* (Franeker: Wever, 1939), 35. An important

example, Hendrikus Berkhof connects De Bres's vision with a long medieval and even ancient history which could not envision theocracy as including toleration.¹⁴

The second approach, "thin continuity," sees a less definite connection between De Bres's thinking on religious liberty and that of influential ideas before and during the sixteenth century. Scholars taking this view usually regard De Bres's views (specifically his views in the *Belgic Confession*) as not militating against the political toleration of religious liberty.¹⁵ They contend that De Bres's limitations of religious liberty were, properly considered, insignificant; therefore, his thinking can only be tenuously connected with mainstream sixteenth century thinking which, after all, promoted a heavy-handed form of religious compulsion. For example, Emile Braekman explains that, although De Bres held that political rulers have the duty to oppose false religion and abolish idolatry (notice the *continuity*), De Bres also showed an unusually open mind and conciliatory spirit for his time and was opposed to the killing of heretics (notice the *thin*

scholar who traces the view of the limitation of religious liberty that De Bres shared back to the ancient church is Johannes Verkuyl, *Enkele aspecten van het probleem der godsdienstvrijheid: in betrekking tot de plaats en arbeid van de christelijke kerken in Azië* (Amsterdam: Kok, 1948), 167–181.

¹⁴ Hendrikus Berkhof, *De kerk en de keizer: een studie over het ontstaan van de Byzantinistische en de theocratische staatsgedachte in de vierde eeuw* (Amsterdam: Holland, 1946), 163. Berkhof does not investigate the theology and origins of De Bres or the Belgic Confession as such, but situates Art.36 within a panoramic scope of theocratic thinking spanning the early church and the Middle Ages.

¹⁵ See e.g. Hugo Visscher, *De staatkundige beginselen der Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis: in hun schriftuurlijk karakter getoetst en gehandhaafd* (Huizen: J. Bout, 1939); D.C.S. van der Merwe, "Die Verandering van Arikel 36 van die Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis in Nederland in 1905: Progressie of Regressie," *In die Skriflig* 3 (1969): 3–45; Clarence Bouwman, *The Overflowing Riches of My God: Revisiting the Belgic Confession* (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 2008), 396–7; Cornelis van der Waal, "Kerk en owerhede in die drie formuliere van enigheid," *Studia Historiae Ecclesiae* 6 (1980): 124 – 144, especially on 134; Johan A. Heyns, *Inleiding tot die dogmatiek: aan die hand van die Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis* (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, 1992), 398–9; S. Van der Linde, "De Twee Gestalten van het Rijk: De Verhouding Kerk-Staat." In *Woord en werkelijkheid over de theocratie: een bundel opstellen in dankbare nagedachtenis aan Prof. Dr. A.A. van Ruler*, ed. B.Plaisier (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1973), 105–6.

continuity).¹⁶ Braekman admits, however, that this is a “fragile thesis” relying upon minimal proof.¹⁷

Like the first group of scholars, those in the second group who follow the “thin continuity” approach also think historical continuity helps explain De Bres’s position. However, they handle this continuity differently from those who identify a “rich continuity.” First, these scholars generally connect De Bres’s thinking *only* with the Reformed tradition and its influential reformers, like Calvin. Unlike the first group, they are wary of connecting De Bres’s thinking with non-Reformed thought or medieval ideas. Second, since these scholars assess De Bres as tolerant of religious liberty and would explain De Bres’s position by referring to continuity with reformers like Calvin, they obviously regard those predecessors as likewise tolerant. Third, many of these scholars rely less on continuity to understand De Bres than those following a “rich continuity” approach. Accordingly, they express a methodological preference for understanding De Bres’s texts more independently, and attach less interpretive weight than the first group to historical influences like wider Reformed thought.¹⁸

A third approach can be described as “disjunction” rather than continuity. Some scholars within this approach argue for incongruity and contradiction even within De Bres’s own thinking. There are, they contend, stark contradictions among De Bres’s

¹⁶ Braekman, “La pensée politique de Guy de Brès,” 19.

¹⁷ Braekman appreciates the sophistication of legal mechanisms even in the sixteenth century, and is careful not to suggest that De Bres was opposed to the use of force absolutely. But although Braekman leaves room to allow for the force of the law, he so stresses De Bres’s non-violence that it becomes unclear what sort of compulsive options De Bres *would* allow government to use in religious matters. Similar views have been expressed by Martin van Gelderen, *Op zoek naar de Republiek: politiek denken tijdens de Nederlandse Opstand (1555–1590)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1991), 30 and by Wouter L. Tukker, *Geloof en verwachting: verklaring van de Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis* (Kampen: De Groot Goudriaan, 1984), 206.

¹⁸ See e.g. Vischer, *Staatkundige beginselen der Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis*, 153–155.

various writings on the issue of the limitation of political toleration of religious liberty,¹⁹ and some assert that these profound contradictions cannot be harmonized.²⁰ Their explanations for De Bres's position (or, more accurately, positions!) vary, but they are inclined to recognize forces both of continuity and discontinuity: Calvin's ideas were formative, as was the spirit of the age,²¹ the disruption caused by Anabaptism,²² and tensions between De Bres and Geneva.²³ However, over these explanations of De Bres's reasoning hangs the cloud of disjunction, so that explanations of aspects of De Bres's

¹⁹ According to some scholars, De Bres in his other writings restricted legal toleration of religious liberty, but in Art.36 he did not. See e.g. Daniel. F. Muller, "Die roeping van die Suid-Afrikaanse owerhede binne 'n grondwetlike demokrasie in die lig van artikel 36 van die Nederlandse Geloofsbelydenis" (PhD diss., North West University, 2010), 154–5. Leonard Verduin reverses this, and proposes that forces of "magisterialization" in later versions of Art.36 overruled De Bres's influence. See Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), *The Anatomy of a Hybrid: A Study in Church-State Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), *That First Amendment and the Remnant* (Sarasota, FL: Christian Hymnary Publishers, 1998). Verduin's position is in some ways unique and elusive to categorize. According to Verduin, De Bres advocated legal toleration of diversity in religion. Verduin, *That First Amendment*, 277–8. Verduin argues that the 1561 version of Art.36 did not give government the task of the legal suppression of idolatry and false religion – in fact, De Bres was practically rejecting the *custos utriusque tabulae legis* formula of the Reformed creeds, i.e. the view that government was to act against offenses of both tables of the law. Verduin, *That First Amendment*, 380. Verduin's proposed reading of the (1561) Art.36 is purposive, because he argues it would be "seriously wrong" to interpret the *pour*-clauses (in the French text of Art.36) as epexegetical clauses reciting duties that belong to government. They are, on the contrary, intended as "result-asserting" clauses. That is, they "do not give further details as to the duty of the civil ruler" but instead "recite happenings that will take place if the civil ruler does his job correctly." Verduin, *That First Amendment*, 379.

²⁰ See Vonk *De Voorzeide Leer, Vol.3b*, 620. Vonk argues that in certain of De Bres's writings he maintained that governments must use the power of the sword to take an active part in removing idolatry and demolishing the kingdom of the Antichrist (p. 624, 635). These ideas, Vonk contends, are almost entirely absent from Art.36 of the Belgic Confession (p. 663). Even where Art.36 contains some of the "flavor and color" of the notion that government should with the force of the law act against false religion and idolatry, one should according to Vonk not confuse the "packaging" with the real substance. According to Vonk, some of De Bres's writings advocated a sort of legal toleration of religious liberty. Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer Vol.3b*, 620, 659.

²¹ Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer, Vol.3b*, 554–569, 623–6. According to Vonk, De Bres, like Calvin, still shared in the medieval spirit of "church fanaticism" (*kerkdrijverij*) that so characterized the Roman Catholic church (p.658). Vonk observes that De Bres, like every painter, was "after all, limited to the colors on his palette." Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer, Vol.3b*, 647.

²² Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer, Vol.3b*, 554, 640–1, 659. See the discussion of Vonk's remarks on Anabaptism below.

²³ Verduin, *That First Amendment*, 375, 377, 380.

view do not really advance our understanding of the reasons for De Bres's position *as a whole*.

Similarly to be classified under this approach of “disjunction” are those scholars who want to use Scripture as a lens for understanding De Bres's view of toleration, to the point of severing De Bres's writings from almost all continuity with his historical context. These scholars are avowedly disinterested in probing De Bres's historical intention and, hence, De Bres's historical reasons for his view of religious liberty.²⁴ For example, Detmer Deddens argues that De Bres's thought in the *Belgic Confession* has to be understood “in light of Scripture, and not in light of the intention of the author and his contemporaries.”²⁵ Deddens rejects what he calls the “historical interpretation method,” which treats documents like the *Belgic Confession* as “purely historical artifact.”²⁶ A primarily historical kind of method would be “pure scientific duress.”²⁷ What Deddens, Johan Francke, Jacob van Bruggen, and others wish to guard against is subjecting the

²⁴ For example, Johan Francke trivializes the historical dimension for explaining the meaning of Art.36 of the Confession. Francke writes that we are not concerned with “which understanding and interpretation was once given to a clause of the Confession, but whether the expression of the Confession is in agreement with God's Word, even if the Fathers understood and interpreted the expression in a way that now seems to us to be wrong.” Johan Francke, “Artikel 36 der Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis (Het Ambt der Overheid),” in *Congres van gereformeerden: 30 maart - 1 april 1948. Referaten-bundel*, ed. J. Meulink, S. Greijdanus and Johan Francke (Kampen: Secretariaat, 1948), 96. Likewise, Jacob van Bruggen does not consider the historical dimension of De Bres's intention important. When making sense of the meaning of Art.36, for example, the question is not “what this or that Reformed person once advocated, but whether the words that are here can, in light of Scripture, have a proper sense. And this they do have, if only one reads it the right way.” Jacob van Bruggen, *Het amen der kerk: de Nederlandse geloofsbelijdenis* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1964), 188–189.

²⁵ Detmer Deddens, *Artikel 36 van de Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis: tekst en uitleg* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1949), 1, 37

²⁶ Deddens, *Artikel 36, 37*. This allows him to reject offhand the historical arguments of, for example, Bakhuizen van den Brink, with the remark that “this is the pronouncement of the historian, not the man who confesses his faith with the church of Christ with the words of the Belgic Confession.” Deddens, *Artikel 36, 39*.

²⁷ Deddens, *Artikel 36, 22*.

meaning of the *Belgic Confession* to uncertainty that is generated by historical research into De Bres's views.²⁸

Of these three approaches to understanding De Bres's view of religious liberty in Art.36, the first two, "rich continuity" and "thin continuity," offer useful insights for explaining De Bres's view as it is found also in his other works. Scholars following both these approaches share a preference for a kind of genetic explanation of De Bres's view in Art.36 of the *Belgic Confession* that is based on its continuity with wider thought.²⁹ Continuity with wider thought offers a serious strategy for explaining De Bres's view of religious liberty that goes beyond the *Belgic Confession*.

The third approach, "disjunction," is generally unsuitable as an approach to an integrated understanding of De Bres's wider thought, because it sees such integration as impossible – unless one supplements the approach with a historical narrative that attempts to make sense of the alleged incongruities and contradictions in De Bres's

²⁸ This motivates Deddens's contention that historical explanation has little role to play in illuminating De Bres's thought, and that interpretation should be "only bound to the letter of our Confession, understood in light of God's Word" (p. 38). The salutary effect of adopting this scriptural or exegetical approach would be that "the little boat of Art.36 is no longer bobbing up and down on the rough seas of interpretation of the [Reformed] fathers, but is securely anchored in the safe harbor where only the letter of the text – understood in light of God's Word – has binding authority." Deddens, *Artikel 36*, 1. Despite all their protestations, however, these scholars do not entirely refrain from entering the fray about the historical intentions of De Bres. When they do so, they understand De Bres as, overall, a proponent of religious liberty. Van Bruggen, for example, argued that the "dominant idea" of reformers like De Bres was "that the government should be tolerant." Van Bruggen, *Het amen der kerk*, 188. See also Francke, "Artikel 36 der Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis," 18; Deddens, *Artikel 36*, 40. They therefore think that Art.36 does not exclude political toleration of religious liberty, see e.g. Deddens *Artikel 36*, 21, 34.

²⁹ The second approach offers an interpretation of Art.36 that is open to criticism, and its depiction of an essentially tolerant Reformed tradition which supposedly explains De Bres's essentially tolerant thinking in Art.36 is hard to sustain historically. By contrast, the first approach gives a more satisfying interpretation of the nature and scope of De Bres's limitations of religious liberty in Art.36, and also gives a more convincing account of how Art.36 related to the broader Reformed position (which was similar) and beyond. For a more elaborate discussion, see chapters two and three.

thought.³⁰ The version of this approach that uses Scripture as a lens to understand De Bres's view is equally unsuitable to explain De Bres's wider thought. No doubt the exegetical infrastructure of De Bres's writings, particularly those in which texts of Scripture function centrally (like the *Belgic Confession*) can uncover valuable insights into his thought.³¹ But however important it is to understand De Bres's position in light of the network of exegetical conclusions which underlie his insights, and however much an exegetical approach is beneficial as a *partial* avenue of investigation of the reasons for De Bres's position, Scripture alone cannot explain De Bres's views. Even De Bres's *Confession* cannot be thus treated as a *sui generis* document and interpreted a-historically. Rather, De Bres's selection of biblical passages and use of biblical-theological strategies in his writings, including the *Belgic Confession*, call for additional explanation. A narrowly exegetical or scriptural approach would eventually undermine attempts at historically faithful explanation. To present De Bres's views in Art.36 as somewhat spontaneously springing from Scripture – like the mythical *Spartoi* of Thebes that sprang from the soil armed and ready for battle – risks misrepresenting De Bres's actual historical views, as well as the historical meaning of the *Belgic Confession*, in favor of some ecclesiastically preferred outcome.

³⁰ Leonard Verduin (discussed in a note above) suggests a historical narrative in the form of a kind of conspiracy of “magisterialization” that – for all its speculation – at least tries to make historical sense of the apparent contradictions.

³¹ One example where the exegetical and theological reasoning behind De Bres's restriction of religious liberty is briefly analyzed is the 1905 report of advice to synod. See Bavinck *et al*, *Advies*, 25–30. The value of the synodal committee's analysis for our purposes is hampered, however, by confining their focus to only a part of Art.36, the so-called “21 words,” while attempting to isolate, for ecclesiastical reasons, the remainder of Art.36 from their conclusions. See Bavinck *et al*, *Advies*, 5.

In summary, existing research has analyzed aspects of De Bres's thought but has neglected the reasons for his view of religious liberty. First, there exists no scholarly investigation into the reasons for De Bres's view that the law must limit religious liberty. This is a gap in the present scholarship which this dissertation aims to address. Second, existing De Bres research is only of limited use for such an investigation into the reasons for De Bres's view. Almost all the De Bres research that touches on the topic of religious liberty focuses exclusively upon the *Belgic Confession* and overlooks De Bres's other writings. Third, the narrow field of scholarship on Art.36 of the *Belgic Confession* takes three broad approaches to De Bres's view of the political restriction of religious liberty, and only two of these approaches are relevant for understanding De Bres's view as a whole. Both of these approaches appeal to continuity as explanation of De Bres, which is a useful starting place for explaining De Bres's general view, but needs to be supplemented, as a subsequent chapter will argue.

Argument of the Dissertation

The central thesis of this dissertation is that De Bres's view that the law should restrict religious liberty was largely the result of his vision of an alliance between law and religion. This vision represented a theological response to De Bres's historical context. From the late 1550's, De Bres began to envision an alliance between the Dutch nobles and the Dutch reformers for the protection of the Reformed believers in the Netherlands against persecution by royal Catholicism. However, the theological and practical dimensions of De Bres's vision of an alliance meant that he coordinated the political

protection of the Reformed religion with the political restriction of non-Reformed religion, notably Catholicism.

This thesis will be developed in the following way:

Chapter 2 identifies a radical shift in De Bres's writings between 1555 to 1565 regarding how he appreciated political government and religious liberty. In 1555, De Bres defended religious liberty and viewed political government negatively. From 1558 to 1565, however, one detects what might be called a "Constantinian shift" in De Bres's views. Increasingly, De Bres favored political compulsion of religion and viewed political government more optimistically.

Chapter 3 asks the question why this shift in De Bres's view of religious liberty and political government took place from 1558 to 1565. It argues that De Bres's continuity with mainstream Reformed and sixteenth century thought cannot adequately account for this shift. Continuity needs to be supplemented with additional historical and theological analysis and explanation. The political circumstances of the late 1550's and the 1560's, the time of the cause for De Bres's shift, need to be analyzed in order to explain why a new perspective began to make theological and political sense to him.

Chapter 4 suggests historical circumstances that likely encouraged De Bres to view political power more optimistically and to start envisioning a church-political alliance. Three such circumstances in the late 1550's and the early 1560's are identified: escalating persecution, alternative theoretical (constitutional) and practical models of church-political alliance in Geneva and France, and stirrings of resistance among the Dutch nobles from the late 1550's. That De Bres was envisioning an alliance is confirmed by his

practical involvement in Reformed efforts to establish an alliance with the Dutch nobles soon after his return from Geneva in 1559. The chapter also suggests that the dynamics of the church-political alliance that De Bres promoted can be better understood in light of so-called *confessionalization theory*.

Chapter 5 suggests the first two reasons why De Bres's vision of an alliance led him to coordinate the political restriction of (false) religion with the protection of (true) religion, which was what reformers like De Bres chiefly aimed for in a church-political alliance. The first reason was what might be called the "logic of confessionalization," the competitive and exclusionary dynamics of confessionalization. The second reason was the challenge which the reformers faced in overcoming the inertia of the Dutch nobles to protect the Protestants and resist King Philip II.

Chapter 6 discusses a third reason why De Bres's vision of a confessional alliance that would protect the Reformed religion involved the legal or political restriction of religion. In his attempt to assure the Dutch nobles of the Reformed churches' credentials as an alliance partner, De Bres maintained that social order depended upon the law's protection of true religion and suppression of heresy and idolatry. Consequently, social order required that the Reformed churches be protected by the ruler, and that the heresy of Anabaptism and the idolatry of Catholicism, both responsible for the social disorder in the Netherlands, be opposed.

Chapter 7 discusses some of the pivotal political theological convictions that operated in De Bres's vision of a confessional alliance as it investigates a fourth reason why De Bres's quest for a confessional alliance that would protect the Reformed religion also involved the legal or political restriction of religion. In his quest to promote and

defend a confessional alliance, De Bres attempted to theologially vouchsafe the legitimacy of the political order. In this process of stressing the theological legitimacy of the political order, however, De Bres's rhetoric portrayed heresy as dangerous to the body politic, and thus encouraged the legal restriction of religion that was considered heretical. In addition, his arguments for a divinely instituted political office that is holy, good, and legitimate entailed that the political office was divinely mandated to use the force of law against idolatry and false religion.

Chapter 8 offers a concluding summary and compares the picture presented by the findings of this dissertation with the picture presented by previous scholarship.

Methodology

Translation

Translations from French, German, and Latin are my own, unless the translation appears in a quotation by another author. When translating Bible passages cited by De Bres, I have used translations like the English Standard Version, sometimes adapting the English to reflect De Bres's language.

Definitions

Law, Politics

In this dissertation, the terms “law” and “politics” are not distinguished sharply in phrases like “political toleration,” and “legal toleration.” “Law” and related words like “legal” have in the twenty-first century Western context acquired a connotation of technicality and constitutionality; in the sixteenth century, both law and politics were more personal and often overlapped. The decrees of sixteenth century law-givers (especially rising absolute monarchs, like Philip II of Habsburg Spain) were “law” in a sense that no modern Western political leader's commands are now considered such. Likewise, the words “politics” and “political” in the twenty-first century connote expediency and non-legal maneuvering. These notions were not prominent for sixteenth century minds that combined a legal dimension with a classical sense of “political” as what pertains to the government of the *polis* – despite the rising popularity of Machiavelli already in that century.

Instead, the attempt is made to keep “law” and “politics” connected in their sixteenth century senses. For example, when I talk of De Bres’s approval of the “political compulsion of religion,” I am by no means suggesting that De Bres in any way approved of the non-legal and expedient or arbitrary use of political power to compel religion; “political” should retain its sixteenth century shades of law and legality. To speak of the “legal compulsion of religion” does not escape the problem of anachronism either, because, once again, “legal” for twenty-first century readers lacks the older nuances of power and rulership. Often, there is a personal element to the ruler’s duty in De Bres’s discussions of issues related to religious liberty; he does not discuss law abstractly. It often seemed closest to De Bres’s sense to talk of “political toleration” (although De Bres nowhere uses the term “toleration,” as discussed below), while remembering the dimension of law that was implied. To ease readers into De Bres’s converging notions of law and political rulership, I use the dual term “political or legal” toleration in this introductory chapter and usually talk of “political toleration” later.

The meanings of “law” and “politics” are similarly intended to converge in phrases that deal with an alliance of “law and religion” and a “church-political” alliance, which intend the same basic meaning. In the title of the dissertation, “law and religion in alliance,” I avoided the word “political” because I did not want to convey twentieth-century nuances of “politics.” Another option would have been “magistrate,” since “magistrate” and “political magistrate” are serviceable alternatives often used in Reformation scholarship; they are used occasionally in this dissertation, too. However, they do not offer an entirely elegant solution, either, because in the sixteenth century Dutch context “magistrate” sometimes suggests the local urban authorities, the urban

judges or the city government. The church-political alliance that this dissertation describes was more focused on the Dutch nobility, including the Dutch higher nobility.

Toleration

The term “toleration,” as used in this dissertation, has a slightly different meaning from the term “tolerance.” The dictionary meanings of the two words overlap, but scholars often distinguish between them.³² “Toleration” can have a more general sense (“the action or practice of tolerating or allowing what is not actually approved; forbearance, sufferance”), but it often has a more specific sense: “allowance (with or without limitations), by the ruling power, of the exercise of religion otherwise than in the form officially established or recognized.”³³ To make it clear that it is in this narrow sense that “toleration” is here used, I usually talk of “political toleration,” or sometimes “legal toleration.” What I am *not* intending by toleration is the meaning that would be foreign to the sixteenth century, as Bruce Gordon reminds us, the meaning of toleration in “a modern sense of openness to difference or . . . skepticism.”³⁴

³² The Oxford English Dictionary defines “tolerance” as “the action or practice of tolerating; toleration; the disposition to be patient with or indulgent to the opinions or practices of others; freedom from bigotry or undue severity in judging the conduct of others; forbearance; catholicity of spirit.” J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), s.v. “tolerance.” An extended theoretical distinction between “tolerance” and “toleration” is provided by Hans Oberdiek, *Tolerance: Between Forbearance and Acceptance* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 23–7.

³³ Simpson, *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “toleration.” This meaning is a modern one, the first appearance traced to 1609. This is clearly the narrow sense of the word used in phrases such as the “Act of Toleration” of 1689 by which the English Parliament granted freedom of worship to Nonconformist and Dissenting Protestants.

³⁴ Bruce Gordon, “To Kill a Heretic: Sebastian Castellio against John Calvin,” in *Censorship Moments Reading Texts in the History of Censorship and Freedom of Expression*, ed. Geoff Kemp (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 55.

It is important to note that toleration as a view about how the law of a political ruler should relate to specific religious views does not imply anything about the toleration, or tolerance, of divergent theological views. Theology, surely, must make truth claims. And truth claims are intolerant: every truth claim denies that certain competing claims are equally valid and correct – even when it purports to deny that absolute truth exists, or that the law of contradiction applies to theology, or (in total self-refutation) that any truth claim can be more valid and correct than any other.³⁵ Accordingly, the Reformed theologian Arnold van Ruler pointedly maintained that “truth is theocratic.”³⁶ Churches, therefore, cannot avoid intolerance in this sense. As the Italian theorist of liberalism, Guido de Ruggiero, explained, “intolerance is of the essence of every church,” because an intolerance of alternatives is “an immediate consequence of its faith that it possesses the only effective means for the salvation of the soul.”³⁷ Of course, the precise degree of intolerance would depend on the exact doctrinal position of a church and a “configuration of environmental factors.” According to Ruggiero, church commitment to confessional doctrines is not what the discussion about toleration should be about. Such “ecclesiastical intolerance” does not conflict with religious liberty, “provided that the individual subjects himself to the religious authority of his own volition and by an exercise of his liberty to choose.”³⁸

³⁵ For a broad discussion of this topic, see Donald A. Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012.)

³⁶ See Gerrit Klein and Dick Steenks, *De waarheid is theocratisch: bijdragen tot de waardering van de theologische nalatenschap van Arnold Albert van Ruler* (Baarn: Callenbach, 1995).

³⁷ Guido de Ruggiero, "Religious Freedom," in *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences. Vol.13*, ed. Edwin R. A Seligman and Alvin S. Johnson (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 239.

³⁸ Ruggiero, "Religious Freedom," 239. Presumably because in the West today churches, unlike states, cannot initiate systematic force against dissidents, the kind of pressure that ecclesiastical intolerance can bring to bear on individuals does not preclude religious liberty. Involvement with the state, however,

State

A term that is mostly avoided but that I sometimes had to use is “state.” Indeed it is, as Alessandro D’Entreves cautioned, a highly questionable assumption to think that we know what the abstract term “state” means.³⁹ The problem is not so much in how to arrive at a modern definition, although, as one scholar points out, the concept of the “state” is “undeniably messy.”⁴⁰ A modern definition, as good as any, is one along the lines proposed by Max Weber: “The state is a centralized, differentiated set of institutions enjoying a monopoly of the means of legitimate violence over a territorially demarcated area.”⁴¹ Rather, the challenge is to *not* think of this sort of state when talking about political rule in the sixteenth century Netherlands. Potentially less anachronistic and more conceptually helpful is a vaguer definition: The state is “a system of organized force.”⁴² But the challenge of conceptually bridging these centuries remains. It may simply be the case, as John Neville Figgis laments, that “the very term State is an anachronism.”⁴³

The word “state” is also one of the least standardized terms in discussions of De Bres’s thought about theology and political government. Some scholars have suggested

changes everything: “Religious liberty is violated by an ecclesiastical institution only when it attempts to enforce its intolerant prescriptions by invoking the sanctions of the civil power.” Ruggiero, “Religious Freedom,” 239.

³⁹ Alessandro Passerin d’Entrèves, *The Medieval Contribution to Political Thought: Thomas Aquinas, Marsilius of Padua, Richard Hooker* (New York: Humanities Press, 1959), 1.

⁴⁰ Michael Mann, “The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results,” *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie / Europäisches Archiv für Soziologie* 25, no. 2 (1984): 187.

⁴¹ Michael Mann, *States, War and Capitalism: Studies in Political Sociology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 74.

⁴² D’Entrèves, *Medieval Contribution to Political Thought*, 15.

⁴³ John Neville Figgis, *Political Thought from Gerson to Grotius, 1414–1625: Seven Studies* (New York: Harper, 1960), 14. At some point in the sixteenth century and for some reason, perhaps because of Machiavelli, Figgis speculates, the term state was substituted for terms like “commonwealth,” or *res publica* or republic.

various definitions, which are helpful, though not without room for criticism.⁴⁴ Guido de Bres does not use the word “state,” nor do most reformers, which is a good reason to try to avoid the term. But the difficulty of anachronism does not simply adhere to the term, it also applies to the *idea* of the state, and therefore to approximate synonyms like “commonwealth” (Fr. *republique*) that De Bres does use a few times. It may seem innocuous to move from De Bres’s comments about, for example, “kings, princes, and magistrates” to our modern state, as commentators on Art.36 of the *Belgic Confession* routinely do. But the modern state has grown in power and efficiency especially since the eighteenth century in ways that would have been hard to imagine in the sixteenth century. This difficulty is aggravated when medieval and ancient notions of politically organized society are added to the discussion. For this reason, D’Entreves has raised doubts about

the very possibility of bringing under the same heading such different notions as the Greek idea of πόλις or κοινωνία, the Roman conception of *respublica* and *imperium*, the medieval ideal of a *communitas communitatum*, the modern concept of a state.⁴⁵

The problem for an attempt like the present one is that, as D’Entreves notes, “We are confronted in the wide field of historical experience with the most varied and complex types of human associations.”⁴⁶ An obvious danger is that of invalid logic: we can infer invalid conclusions when “state” (or “commonwealth,” or “kingdom”) functions as an ambiguous middle term in our arguments. Yet this risk, it seems, is one that simply must

⁴⁴ Johannes Severijn, for example, equates it to “ordered political society. . . a concrete organization of society.” Johannes Severijn, “Artikel 36 der Ned. Geloofsbelijdenis. Overheid en Kerkdienst,” *Anti-Revolutionere Staatskunde* 1 (1924): 262, 263. Severijn’s definition appears too wide. Many churches, too – and not only the Catholic church – can be viewed as a concrete organization of society, even manifesting a polity; although they are of course not primarily political societies. Also, there are good reasons to more sharply distinguish between society, even organized society, and the state.

⁴⁵ D’Entreves, *Medieval Contribution to Political Thought*, 2.

⁴⁶ D’Entreves, *Medieval Contribution to Political Thought*, 2.

be taken – and in studying the reformers we have little choice but to follow their own example (whether Beza, Calvin, or De Bres) and compare at least *certain kinds* of apples with *certain kinds* of pears, i.e. those kinds of comprehensive institutions that demand political obligation.

Constantinian and Constantinianism

The notion of Constantinianism is prominent in the claim of chapter two. I use the term in a broad sense, not specifically tied to the person or policies of Constantine the Great, but to the pattern of state sponsored Christianity that emerged after the fourth century, and influenced much of Europe in the form of Christendom.⁴⁷ Debates over Constantine, for example over his “plain indications of un-Christian, even pagan, sympathies” need not concern us here.⁴⁸ Rather, the broader meaning here intended overlaps with a broad sense of “Christendom.”⁴⁹

In the paradigm of Constantinian Christianity, the Church was in an alliance with the empire or the state.⁵⁰ What is relevant for our purposes is that this paradigm soon involved two developments. The first was that the empire or state was theologically

⁴⁷ In some respects, later Constantinianism even departed from Constantine’s example. For instance, Constantine permitted pagans a measure of freedom which he denied Christian heretics. As Roland Bainton writes, “Constantine dealt gently with pagans, but harshly with Christian dissidents because he regarded them as obstinate violators of Christian concord when they refused to abide by the decisions of Christian majorities.” Roland Bainton’s introduction in Hermann Doerries, *Constantine the Great* (New York: Harper, 1972), x.

⁴⁸ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Age of Constantine the Great* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949), 301.

⁴⁹ See e.g. Arie L. de Bruijne, “Levend in Leviathan: Een Onderzoek naar de Theorie over ‘Christendom’ in de Politieke Theologie van Oliver O’Donovan” (PhD diss., University of Leiden, 2006), 21–23.

⁵⁰ See Bainton’s introduction in Doerries, *Constantine the Great*, x-xi. This alliance soon meant, even under Constantine, the forbidding of the assemblies of heretics, the confiscation of heretical books, and the confiscation of heretical houses of prayer. Doerries, *Constantine the Great*, 204.

admired: the institution was not merely useful, it was divinely desired, sacred, and holy. The second was that the church, as Hermann Doerries puts it, “permitted her claim to be the only custodian of the truth to be enforced by the state” – and “it was not long before she herself called for such constraint.”⁵¹ These two features, chapter two will argue, also characterized De Bres’s shift.

Additionally, the term “Constantinian” epitomizes De Bres’s shift to a mainstream Reformed position, both because De Bres himself began to appeal to the example of Constantine,⁵² and because Reformed contemporaries sometimes appealed to it when they defended the execution of Servetus against critics like Castellio in debates on religious liberty.⁵³

⁵¹ Doerries, *Constantine the Great*, 205. Thus, Doerries comments, the Constantinian church “not only gave in to state policy at this point but made it her own.” In other words, the church called upon the state to restrict the religious liberty of those who depart from Christian orthodoxy. As Augustine later explained the parable of the wedding feast, the state must “compel them to come in.”

⁵² See e.g. Guido de Bres, *Le Baston de la Foy Chrestienne propre pour rembarrer les ennemis de l’Evangile: par lequel on peut aussi cognoistre l’ancieneté de nostre foy et de la vraye Eglise: Recueilli de l’Ecriture sainte, et des livres des anciens docteurs de l’Eglise, et des conciles, et de plusieurs autres auteurs. Reveu et augmenté de nouveau* (Nicolas Barbier and Thomas Courteau, 1559), 342. This change is discussed in chapter two.

⁵³ For example, Calvin in one of his defences of Servetus’s execution against Castellio’s criticism refers to “those pious emperors, Constantine, Theodosius, Valentinian, Martianus, and others, who promulgated the strictest laws against idolators, apostates, heretics, and blasphemers.” Edouard Cunitz, Johann-Wilhelm Baum, and Eduard Wilhelm Eugen Reuss, eds., *Joannis Calvini Opera quae Supersunt Omnia, Vol. 15* (Brunswick: C.A. Schwetschke: 1876), 110. Additionally, according to Vonk, the government of Basel prohibited the publication of Castellio’s criticism of Calvin’s defence of the execution of Servetus, Castellio’s *Contra libellum Calvinii in quo ostendere conatur haereticos jure gladii coercendos esse*, by stating that Castellio “brought shame upon the entire Christian church and Constantine.” Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer, Vol.3a*, 240. See also Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer, Vol.3b*, 626–7.

Timeline

The following timeline is offered for the convenience of readers:⁵⁴

De Bres's life		General background	
1522 (est.)	Born in Mons (current Belgium).	1519	Emperor Charles V ruler of Spain, the Netherlands, Austria, and Naples.
		1523	First Protestant executed in Brussels.
		1536	William Tyndale executed in Brussels.
		1536	Calvin's <i>Institutes</i> .
		1541	
1547	Becomes a Protestant believer.	1547	Edward VI king in England.
1548	Flees to London.		
		1550	Charles V's "Edict of Blood" forbids heretical books and assisting heretics.
1552	Ministers in Lille.	1553	Servetus executed in Geneva.
1555	Publishes <i>Le Baston</i> .	1555	Underground Reformed Church in Antwerp. Peace of Augsburg. Philip II succeeds Charles V as ruler of the Netherlands.
1556	Flees to Frankfort.		
1556/1557 to early 1559	Studies in Lausanne and Geneva under Beza (Calvin?).	1558	Elizabeth queen in England.
1558	Publishes important new editions of <i>Le Baston</i>		
1559	Marries Catherin de Ramon.		
1559–1561	Ministers in Tournai, Lille, Valenciennes.	July 1561	William of Orange and Egmont complain to Philip

⁵⁴ This has been compiled from various sources, including Graham Darby, *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt*, ed. Graham Darby (London: Routledge, 2010), xiii – xxi; Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*; Braekman, *Guido de Bres: Zijn leven, zijn belijden*.

29 Sep.1561	Psalm-singing parades in Tournai.		about failure to consult them on important matters.
1/2 Nov. 1561	De Bres's Confession thrown over castle wall of Tournai.	Sep. 1561	Colloquy at Poissy in France.
10 Jan. 1562	De Bres's secret study discovered outside wall of Tournai.	1562	Formation of anti-Granvelle league.
1562 1562/3	De Bres in Amiens, Dieppe. Court preacher in Sedan for Henri-Mark Roberts, duke of Bouillon.		
1564	De Bres on diplomatic missions in Metz and Brussels.	Dec.1564	William of Orange pleads for freedom of conscience in Council of State.
1565	De Bres publishes La Racine .	July, Aug. 1565	Protestant nobles meet at Spa for strategy against persecution.
July 1566	Conference of nobles in Saint Trond. Synod Antwerp accepts Belg.Conf.	Dec. 1565	Compromise (covenant) of Nobles formed.
Aug. 1566	Ministers in Valenciennes.	5 April 1566	Lesser nobles petition Margaret of Parma.
Dec. 1566	Valenciennes besieged.	May 1566	"Hedge preaching" widespread.
Dec.1566 Jan.1567	De Bres writes pamphlets Declaration Sommaire and Remonstrance et Supplication .	Aug.1566	Iconoclasm.
23 March 1567	Valenciennes surrenders.	23–25 Aug.1566	Limited religious freedom negotiated by high nobles.
31 March 1567	De Bres arrested.	27 Dec.1566	Huguenot army slain at Watrelos.
31 May 1567	De Bres executed in Valenciennes.		
		August 1572	St. Bartholomew Day massacres in France

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| 9 June 1578 | William of Orange
proposes <i>religievrede</i>
(religious peace) to States
General |
| Jan.1579 | Union of Utrecht |
| Feb.1581 | William of Orange's
<i>Apologie</i> |
| 26 July 1581 | <i>Plakkaat van Verlatinghe</i>
("Act of Abjuration") |

CHAPTER 2

DE BRES'S CONSTANTINIAN SHIFT

This chapter identifies a radical shift in how De Bres assessed political government and religious liberty between 1555 and 1565. It will first describe De Bres's views of political government and religious liberty in his first treatise in 1555. Then, it will track the shift in his views evident in his subsequent works from 1558 to 1565. The next chapter will argue that understanding this shift helps to understand the reasons that shaped De Bres's view of religious liberty.

Trumpet Call for Religious Liberty: 1555

Most of what De Bres wrote that addresses the question of religious liberty is contained in three works. In chronological order these are *Baston* (first published 1555), the *Confession* (1561), and *Racine* (1565).¹ A careful comparison of these works in

¹ Guido de Bres, *Le Baston de la Foy Chrestienne. Livre tresutile à tous Chrestiens pour s'armer contre les ennemys de l'Evangile: et pour aussi cognoistre l'ancienneté de nostre sainte foy, et de la vraye Eglise. Recueilly et amasse des livres des anciens docteurs de l'Eglise et des Conciles, et de plusieurs autres Docteurs, les noms desquelz voyras en la page suivante* (Lyon: 1555); Guido de Bres, *Confession de foy faicte d'un commun accord par les fideles qui couersent es pays bas, lesquels desirent viure selon la purete de l'evangile de nostre seigneur Jesus Christ* (N.p., 1561); Guido de Bres, *La Racine, Source et Fondement des Anabaptistes ou Rebaptisez de Nostre Temps. Avec tresample refutation des arguments prinipaux par lesquels ils ont accoustumé de troubler l'Eglise de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ, et seduire les simples* (Rouen: Abel Clemence, 1565). Information on these editions are provided by Emile M. Braekman and Jean-François Gilmont, "Les écrits de Guy de Brès. Editions des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire du Protestantisme Belge* 5 No. 8 (1971): 265–75; Jean-François Gilmont, "Guy de Bres. Nouveau bilan bibliographique," *Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire du Protestantisme Belge* 7 No 2 (1977): 29–36; and Emile M. Braekman and Jean-François Gilmont, "Les éditions du 'Baston de la Foy Chrestienne,'" *Revue D'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 56 (1976): 315–45.

chronological sequence reveals that a remarkable shift took place in his views of religious liberty and political government.

In 1555, De Bres published his first treatise, his apologetic for the Reformed faith, *Baston de la foy chrestienne* (“staff [or “weapon”] of the Christian faith”).² This work provides a baseline for comparing his later views. *Baston* (1555) defended religious liberty and was skeptical about political government. As the next section will show, when compared to De Bres’s 1555 position, his later works (starting with the 1558 and 1559 editions of *Baston*) evidence a shift away from religious liberty.

De Bres’s Elusive Pre-1555 View

Before turning to *Baston* (1555) as the plumline for De Bres’s Constantinian shift on religious liberty, a possible objection must be considered. Is the proper starting point for investigating such a purported shift not, rather, De Bres’s even earlier thought? It is possible, after all, that De Bres held to an essentially Constantinian view of religious liberty long before 1555. In that case *Baston* (1555) would have been an aberration from his regular view, and purported shifts in subsequent editions of *Baston* and in De Bres’s other treatises would simply constitute a robust re-statement of his more consistent pre-1555 position.

As reasonable as such a starting point might appear, attempts to reconstruct De Bres’s pre-1555 thought are speculative. Of course, it is likely that De Bres contemplated

² *Baston* (1555). For the convenience of readers, after an initial citation, I omit De Bres’s name in subsequent citations of his works, such as *Baston*, *Confession*, and *Racine*.

matters of religious liberty and civil government long before his early thirties, when he wrote *Baston*.³ While De Bres converted to either Christianity or Protestantism in 1547 and fled to England in 1548 for his convictions,⁴ it stands to reason that by 1547 or, at the very latest, 1548, De Bres would have been compelled by the punishment of Protestants in the southern Netherlands in the 1530's and 1540's to think about how religion and civil government relate. Surely even the least theologically minded Dutch residents must have tried to make existential sense, and to some extent religious sense, of Emperor Charles V's forceful measures against non-conforming religious doctrine and worship. After all, it was in Brussels in the southern Netherlands that the first martyrs of the Protestant Reformation, Henricus Voes and Joannes van Essen, were burned at the stake on 1 July 1523. It was in Antwerp and The Hague that another two Protestants were executed in 1525.⁵ It was the Netherlands that endured a wave of executions and other punishments for heresy in the 1540's.⁶ Thus, in the 1520's, 1530's, and especially 1540's, a system of heresy persecutions was already developing in the Netherlands under Charles V. This system, continued and intensified by Charles's son Philip II after the former's abdication in 1555, has been described by Andrew Pettegree as a "campaign of repression unrivalled for its sustained ferocity."⁷ In light of such real-life brutalities, it seems likely that De Bres would have been forced to reflect on issues of religious liberty and the political compulsion of religion long before 1555.

³ De Bres was most likely born in 1522. See Emile Braekman, "De Jeugd van Een Bergenaar" in *Guido de Bres: Zijn leven, zijn belijden*, ed. Emile Braekman and Erik de Boer (Kampen: Kok, 2011), 36–7; Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 10.

⁴ See e.g. Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 12–3.

⁵ Paul Arblaster, *A History of the Low Countries* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 112.

⁶ Andrew Pettegree, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 174.

⁷ Pettegree, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century*, 174.

The difficulty, however, is that there is no reliable way to ascertain De Bres's earlier views. De Bres nowhere recorded them, and the religious scene in the southern Netherlands in the 1540's was simply too fluid to infer them from any of the competing streams of thought. In the Netherlands there was by this time much spiritual and theological flux. Various competing theologies were being advanced by the secret ministries of various "heretical" sects, conveniently labelled "Lutherans" (or, increasingly, "Anabaptists") by their Catholic opponents, but in fact comprising a disparate array of Lutherans, Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and (increasingly) Reformed or Calvinists. These non-Catholic theologies were reinforced by books secretly printed locally in Antwerp or Amsterdam, or smuggled in from cities as near as Rouen or Cologne or as far away as Lyon or Geneva.⁸ There was some fluidity between these disparate groups, possibly attributable to the long shadow of Erasmus in the Netherlands during this period, whose influence has also been traced to leading Anabaptist figures.⁹ Long after his death in 1536, Erasmus continued to influence even a large group of Catholics, who should not be classed with the more visibly separate sects mentioned above, but were of irenic persuasion and welcomed initiatives to reform the church – although even the spiritualist influences often gained influence and respectability within the Catholic Church.¹⁰ In fact, Benjamin Kaplan writes that Dutch Catholicism

⁸ On the importance of books printed in Antwerp for the Reformation in the Netherlands, see the remark in Horst Robert Balz *et al* (eds.), *Theologische Realenzyklopadie*, Vol.24 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 477.

⁹ Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Abraham Friesen, *Menno Simons: Dutch Reformer between Luther, Erasmus, and the Holy Spirit*. (n.p., 2015); Darren T. Williamson, "Erasmus of Rotterdam's Influence Upon Anabaptism: The Case of Balthasar Hubmaier" (PhD diss., Simon Fraser University, 2005).

¹⁰ Benjamin Kaplan, "Confessionalism and Popular Piety," *Fides et Historia*, 27, no. 2 (1995): 50.

(especially in regions like Friesland and Groningen, far removed from the ecclesiastical and political center) was “so fluid and open that people of the most disparate sentiments qualified as ‘good’ Catholics” until the 1550’s.¹¹ In these regions, it was by mid-century the norm for priests to be married, for some to preach the Gospel and use vernacular liturgies, and for some to offer communion in both wine and the host, all while remaining within the Catholic Church.¹² Similar practices were found among priests in Westphalia and elsewhere in the Netherlands.¹³ Theological labels at this time were flexible.

It is impossible to say how Guido De Bres’s early ideas about the relation between religious liberty and civil government would have been shaped by specific religious groups. Before his conversion in 1547, he might have been a reform-minded Catholic, perhaps of Erasmian humanist or even Lutheran or Anabaptist inclination.¹⁴ The picture of household piety that De Bres later painted of his early youth, as well as the Protestant sympathies of several of his siblings in later decades, suggest that his was not a doctrinaire Catholic family of a militant stripe that would have supported harsh policies against Protestants.

Similarly, religion in the southern Netherlands after 1547 was too much in flux and the local political dimensions of the international religious upheavals were too immense to safely speculate about De Bres’s views. Dutch inhabitants had to try and make sense of the claims of religions, churches, and civil polities within a confused historical context.

¹¹ Kaplan, “Confessionalism and Popular Piety,” 50.

¹² Kaplan, “Confessionalism and Popular Piety,” 49. Kaplan cites Albert F. Mellink, *Historisch bewogen: opstellen over de radicale reformatie in de 16e en 17e eeuw : opstellen, aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. A.F. Mellink* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhof, 1984), 16.

¹³ Kaplan, “Confessionalism and Popular Piety,” 50.

¹⁴ Leonard Verduin suggests that De Bres’s family might have been in contact with Waldensians. See Leonard Verduin, “Guido de Bres and the Anabaptists,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 35 (1961): 252.

The consequences of the break-up of medieval arrangements of power, and the resultant complexities in religious loyalties and politics, were still reverberating in the southern Netherlands with intensity.¹⁵ In such a complex landscape, the various streams of religious thinking were so crisscrossing that it would be conjectural to link De Bres to any branch and the ideas about religious liberty that might have been current in it.

De Bres's View in *Baston* (1555)

Consequently, it is only when turning to De Bres's writings that we find ourselves on sufficiently settled ground to start tracking his views. *Baston de la Foy Chrestienne*, then, must provide the starting point for our current investigation. This lengthy treatise (about 230 folio pages in the first edition) was written, or at least completed, after De Bres returned from England and while he was secretly ministering in the city of Lille from 1552.¹⁶ De Bres fled Lille the year after *Baston's* publication when persecution escalated. *Baston* was a popular book, and certainly the most popular of De Bres's works, as suggested by the large number of subsequent printings within the span of a few years.¹⁷ Between the years 1555 and 1601 the book was re-printed fifteen times.¹⁸ As will be

¹⁵ The resulting confusion, also with respect to issues such as religious liberty, has been well described by Joseph Lecler: "The break-up of medieval Christianity indeed created, in a singularly acute way, the problem of religious pluralism within the State. In the sixteenth century not only the Lutheran, Zwinglian, Calvinist, and Anglican denominations clashed, both with each other and with the Church of Rome, but sects and religious movements of an extreme character threatened in their turn the positions taken up by the Reformers. A whole complex world of Churches and sects claimed citizenship." Joseph Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation, Vol.1* (New York: Association Press, 1960), vi-vii.

¹⁶ On the date and location of the various editions of *Baston de la Foy Chrestienne* see Braekman and Gilmont, "Les écrits de Guy de Brès," 266–68; Gilmont, "Guy de Bres. Nouveau bilan bibliographique," 30; and especially Braekman and Gilmont, "Les éditions du 'Baston de la Foy Chrestienne,'" 315–45.

¹⁷ It was reprinted in 1558, 1559, 1560, 1561, 1562, 1563, 1565, and after De Bres's death in 1577. See Braekman and Gilmont, "Les éditions du 'Baston de la Foy Chrestienne,'" 323–40.

¹⁸ De Bres, *Het Wapen van het Christelijk Geloof*, 9.

surveyed in the next section, the revisions of 1558 and 1559 include several small but significant changes on the issues of religious liberty and political government.¹⁹

Baston (1555) defends religious liberty against political compulsion and, related to this, views civil government gloomily and without any redeeming features. Although much of the book has only an incidental bearing on the issue of religious liberty, the question comes into sharp focus in a few sections. The most relevant are the book's long preface (which is the most extended argument in *Baston* by De Bres that is not concerned with a detailed theological topic), the penultimate chapter (especially), and the final chapter. The contents of these last two chapters are suggested by their titles: "Why one cannot constrain a person to believe by force"²⁰ and "That the magistrates who persecute the believers under the guise of religion will be punished with eternal punishments."²¹

¹⁹ A differentiation between the 1558, 1559, and 1560 editions is made by Wim Moehn in Wim Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders. Guido De Bres's (ca. 1522–1567) theologische scholing in de vroegmoderne tijd. Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van bijzonder hoogleraar Geschiedenis van het gereformeerd protestantisme vanwege de Gereformeerde Bond in de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland aan de Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, vestiging Amsterdam*. (Amsterdam: Protestantse Theologische Universiteit, 2016), 8–9. See also *Guy de Bres: pages choisies*, ed. Emile M. Braekman (Brussels: Société Calviniste de Belgique, 1967), 7ff. Differences between the 1559 and 1560 printings confirm that these printings constitute different editions. For example, the chapter sequence in the two versions is different. In the 1559 edition, the chapter on religious compulsion is the third last chapter, *Baston* (1559), 322, followed by the one on persecuting magistrates and a final chapter on the civil magistrate and its powers. The 1560 edition follows exactly the chapter sequence of the 1558 edition: The chapter on religious compulsion still precedes the one on persecuting magistrates, but they both appear between the chapter on the assemblies of believers and the chapter on marriage. In the 1560 edition (like the 1555 and 1558 editions) there is no chapter on the civil magistrate and its powers. Other differences exist. For example, the title of the chapter on religious compulsion is different in *Baston* (1559), 322 and *Baston* (1560), 395. However, these textual differences appear inconsequential. The 1560 edition appears anomalous, as its printer's emblem (a lampstand and seven candles) with a quotation from John 1 ("the light shines in the darkness"), which is different from the Nicolas and Corteau editions, suggests. Unlike the editions of 1555, 1558, and 1559, the printer is not mentioned. The 1561 and subsequent editions follow the 1559 edition. Once again, essential bibliographical background is provided by Braekman and Gilmont, "Les éditions du 'Baston de la Foy Chrestienne,'" 315–345.

²⁰ *Baston* (1555), 185.

²¹ *Baston* (1555), 198.

Before looking at De Bres's resonant protest against political compulsion of religion in *Baston* (1555), a preliminary issue needs to be discussed: how does one interpret the the *genre* to which *Baston* belongs? The book was composed as an anthology or *florilegium*, a popular literary form by the sixteenth century.²² *Baston* was a carefully selected anthology of citations from the church fathers, Scripture, and some medieval sources, laced together with De Bres's own comments. De Bres would likely have compiled *Baston* using existing *florilegia* such as that of Herman Bodius.²³ The sources cited by De Bres do not function in the same way in each of the book's chapters. For example, the chapters on merit and good works, as well as on baptism, contain De Bres's own theological exposition. Others, like the final chapters, contain mostly citations from the church fathers or Scripture, which are woven together by De Bres's comments and interpretation.

The interpretative question that arises from *Baston's* nature of a *florilegium* is the following: should one consider the selected citations in *Baston* to be De Bres's personal position? For instance, when De Bres cites the church father Lactantius, should the sentiments expressed (at least for the purpose for which De Bres cites him) also be attributed to De Bres?

The default answer should be, "yes," for at least three reasons. First, the aim of *Baston* was to show precisely that there *was* an agreement between reformers like De Bres and the church fathers. *Baston*, as its subtitle declared, intended to equip its readers

²² See e.g. Anthony N.S. Lane, "Justification in Sixteenth-century Patristic Anthologies," in *Auctoritas Patrum: Contributions on the Reception of the Church Fathers in the 15th and 16th Century*, ed. Leif Grane, Alfred Schindler, and Markus Wriedt (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1993).

²³ Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 10; Erik A. de Boer, "De katholieke ecclesiologie van de Confessio Belgica in het licht van Le baston de la foy," *Theologia Reformata* 55 (2012): 267–268.

to repulse their enemies and to “know the ancientness of our faith.” In other words, *Baston*’s basic apologetic strategy was to show that the beliefs of Protestant-minded believers and those of the church fathers were identical. Second, De Bres picked his citations strategically, always with an eye to demonstrating the doctrine of the chapter. The book contains no examples of a citation that contradicts Protestant beliefs or De Bres’s opinions, as far as these can be gathered from his other books. Finally, De Bres was convinced that the tapestry of opinions he had woven together in *Baston* was sufficient to earn him judicial condemnation from the Catholic authorities as an “evil heretic . . . to be burned alive to ashes.”²⁴ Clearly in his own mind his own opinions were sufficiently identifiable in the citations of the church fathers, at least beyond a reasonable doubt to secure his conviction in possible legal proceedings. This is how recent interpreters have understood De Bres’s practice of patristic citation in *Baston*, as evident by scholars Wim Moehn and Nicolaas Gootjes categorizing the work as an account or expression of De Bres’s *own* faith.²⁵

Defence of Religious Liberty

Baston’s (1555) positive assessment of religious liberty, or negative assessment of the political compulsion of religious liberty, can be summarized in three points. First, De Bres’s basic approach is indirect and centers on the proper understanding of terms like “heresy,” “true church,” and “ancient faith.” *Baston* denies that the Protestants in the Netherlands are “heretics” in the proper sense of the word. This controversy over terms

²⁴ *Baston* (1555), viii r.

²⁵ Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 5; Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession*, 29.

like “heresy,” “true church,” and “ancient faith” is already hinted at by *Baston*’s subtitle: “by which one can know the ancientness of our faith and of the true church.” It is also a recurrent theme of *Baston* and features prominently in the preface.²⁶

De Bres does not deny that something called heresy exists. In fact, he himself has no difficulty identifying some who fit the category, and refers, for example, to the “heretical Anabaptists” against whom the Reformed battle daily.²⁷ But holding the Reformed believers for heretics, De Bres argues, is based on lies and deception. The powerful Catholic Church leaders who persecute the Reformed as heretics are “boasting imposters” who falsely wear “the name and title of the ancient Church and of the ancient doctors.”²⁸ Under “the guise of ancientness and of ancient doctors,” the Catholic Church would persecute those “who would not accept and do not wish to maintain” its religious inventions, “crying after them ‘Into the fire! Into the fire with the evil heretics! They reject the doctrine of the Fathers!’”²⁹

But far from being real heretics and rejecters of the church fathers, those who hold to Protestant doctrines are “daily struggling to maintain the true and pure Christian doctrine of the ancient and true Church of God.”³⁰ *Baston*, as an anthology of the writings of the church fathers, was intended to prove exactly this:

If I want to offer the present book (in which there is nothing from
myself, but everything from the ancients) as confession of my faith to

²⁶ The preface is titled “to the Church of God which is in Lille. Guido desires grace and peace and compassion of God, by Jesus Christ our Lord, and a continual perseverance in the knowledge of the holy gospel of the Son of God. Amen.” *Baston* (1555), iv r. De Bres marks the first pages (*recto* and *verso*) of the table of contents and preface “☞1,” the second “☞2,” etc. Instead of the pointed hand symbol, italic numerals will here be used to refer to these pages.

²⁷ *Baston* (1555), xiii v.

²⁸ *Baston* (1555), iv r.

²⁹ *Baston* (1555), vi r.

³⁰ *Baston* (1555), iv r.

the enemies of the Fathers, I do not doubt that I would then be an evil heretic and sentenced to be burned alive to ashes. Now, my brothers, see and judge honestly before God and according to your conscience whether they or we are enemies of the Fathers.”³¹

De Bres is here contending that the evidence in *Baston* reveals that those truly opposed to the church fathers are none else than the Catholic persecutors themselves!

The charge that the Protestants are guilty of “heresy” and of rejection of the ancient doctrines of the church fathers is so utterly without foundation, that the church fathers would be the first to be condemned by the Catholic leaders of heresy, if they were still alive.³² In a pun on the title of Catholic apologist Nicolas Grenier’s book *Le Bouclier* (“the shield”), De Bres quips that “they who make shields of their books would be the first to kill them.”³³ Likewise, the charge of “heresy” against De Bres’s readers by “those who claim to honor the Fathers” was spurious:

When you have read the doctrine of the Fathers, as it is contained in this book, consider then whether you can openly confess and maintain it against those who claim to honor the Fathers, without endangering your lives.³⁴

For De Bres, the answer to this rhetorical question was clear. He therefore admonishes his readers, “I pray you, brothers, not to be afraid to give your bodies and lives for such a just, holy, and good doctrine. Let us rejoice in the fact that we are holding to the true, ancient doctrine of the prophets, apostles, and teachers of the church.”³⁵

³¹ *Baston* (1555), viii r.

³² *Baston* (1555), viii r.

³³ *Baston* (1555), viii r. The fact that De Bres is responding to Grenier is an important consideration when interpreting *Baston*, as will be noted shortly.

³⁴ *Baston* (1555), ix r. De Bres numbers page ix, *recto*, “*”, page x, *recto* “*2,” etc. Instead, I am simply continuing the italic numbering.

³⁵ *Baston* (1555), ix r.

The basic failure of the persecutors, then, is their confusion, deception, and hypocrisy in condemning their Protestant critics of heresy. The persecutors declare the true faith heresy, while everywhere Catholicism, the real heresy, is widely esteemed as the ancient Christian doctrine. This presses De Bres to lament, “Alas, my God, what blindness has befallen the world that it thinks that they are the heretics who hold to the true, ancient doctrine!”³⁶ If only the so-called heretics were given a fair opportunity, they could demonstrate their innocence. As one patristic citation formulates the challenges, “Let them arm themselves, and refute these arguments of ours if they are able; let them meet us hand to hand, and examine every point.”³⁷ In the preface, too, De Bres writes, “I wish they would at least permit a public examination of our doctrine, side by side with theirs, before all the world, so that everybody can know who are the despisers and enemies of the Fathers.”³⁸ De Bres’s point is that the Protestants’ belief is Christian, Scriptural, and in accordance with the Fathers, and that any honest examination would bear this out. Condemning them for heresy is unjust, because heresy should be judged by Scripture. The injustice of their persecution is what makes the Reformed long for “the righteous Judge, who will judge the world, not according to the doctrines of men, but according to his holy Word.”³⁹

Second, *Baston* protests against religious compulsion by repeatedly objecting to the cruelty of the Protestants’ persecutors. De Bres reminds the persecutors that there is “a great difference between cruelty and piety,” and that “truth cannot be conjoined with

³⁶ *Baston* (1555), ix v.

³⁷ *Baston* (1555), 185 r. This is a citation from Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 5.20.

³⁸ *Baston* (1555), vii v.

³⁹ *Baston* (1555), vi v.

force, or justice with cruelty.”⁴⁰ He bewails that those persecuted for heresy are “marked out as sheep for the slaughter,” and are “scorned, mocked, beaten, banished and hunted from city to city,” despised as “the vilest and stinkiest garbage in the world, that is trampled by the feet of worldlings.”⁴¹ The persecutors are quick to burn their victims alive and reduce them entirely to ashes and shed blood in great abundance.⁴² They are also inventive in devising “all sort of tortures and punishments.”⁴³ Those whom they afflict suffer from hunger and thirst, are cast into dungeons with venomous animals,⁴⁴ or are left to huddle like beasts on a bit of straw after their arms and legs have been broken by instruments of torture.⁴⁵

Sometimes De Bres even portrays the cruelty of the persecution with dramatic flair. He paints a scene where inquisitors are stylishly dressed, having just returned from banquets and parties, “bellies full of wine and gravy” and faces “heated by wine as if by a fire.”⁴⁶ These comfortable revelers, partly to entertain themselves, then interrogate the “poor believers,” who are fetched “from a loathsome, dark, and foul-smelling hole.” Having thus contrasted the comfort of the persecutors and the misery of the persecuted, De Bres describes the encounter:

Men then bring the poor children of God, bound and chained, and with a face totally pale against the faces heated by wine and sauce. The first greeting they give them is, ‘Come, wicked heretic. Step forward, you wicked seducer of the people, you demoniac.’ The victims barely have

⁴⁰ *Baston* (1555), 189 r.

⁴¹ *Baston* (1555), vi v.

⁴² *Baston* (1555), viii r - v.

⁴³ *Baston* (1555), ix r.

⁴⁴ *Baston* (1555), ix v.

⁴⁵ *Baston* (1555), ix v.

⁴⁶ *Baston* (1555), x r.

an opportunity to defend themselves before their interrogators scream, ‘Into the fire! Into the fire with the evil heretics!’⁴⁷

Such depictions dramatize De Bres’s complaint that the Protestants are proceeded against with “rage and fury,” and that “liberty to speak is denied us” to the extent that “the tongues of those who would speak are cut out and afterwards they are cast into the fire.”⁴⁸ They also reinforce De Bres’s portrayal of the Protestant “heretics” as the true sheep of Christ who are constantly in danger of being “devoured by all these beasts.”⁴⁹ Indeed, in the face of the cruel power of the heresy hunters, the only comfort for the miserable victims is the knowledge that “the tyrannical persecutors” can do the body no greater harm than to wound and kill it “like a wolf or a robber in the bush.”⁵⁰

Patristic invectives against the cruelty of the persecutors of the third and fourth century church complement De Bres’s own denouncement of cruelty. For example, the beginning of the chapter “No person should be compelled to believe by force” quotes from Lactantius’s *Divine Institutes*:

Oh, marvelous and blind foolishness! . . . Against every law of humanity, against all divine law, they are ripped to pieces. . . [The persecutors] inflict on the bodies of the innocent such things, as neither the cruelest robbers, nor the most enraged enemies, nor the most inhuman barbarians have ever performed.⁵¹

De Bres is showing that the cruelty of the persecutors is itself the greatest breach of justice. Regardless of the merits of the heresy charges – which, as we have seen, De Bres

⁴⁷ *Baston* (1555), x r.

⁴⁸ *Baston* (1555), x v.

⁴⁹ *Baston* (1555), xiii v.

⁵⁰ *Baston* (1555), xi v.

⁵¹ *Baston* (1555), 185 r.

also denies – the savagery of the persecuting authorities is unjust, inhuman, and against God’s law.⁵²

Third, *Baston* (1555) protests against religious compulsion by arguing that force and violence is inherently incompatible with the nature of the Christian religion. An entire chapter of *Baston* is dedicated to developing the notion that (as the title reads) “no person should be compelled to believe by force.”⁵³ The main patristic work cited by De Bres to prove that faith cannot be constrained is Lactantius’s *Divine Institutes*.⁵⁴ This already characterizes *Baston* (1555) as a trumpet call for religious liberty. The medievalist Brian Tierney describes Lactantius’s formulation as the most eloquent of the early Christian expressions of “the case for religious liberty.”⁵⁵ Other scholars describe Lactantius’s work as a “violent reaction against the Roman establishment and its value-system” in the context of the power of the Roman Empire threatening the early church.⁵⁶ In *Baston*, the patristic invective becomes a violent reaction against the royal Spanish establishment and its Catholic value system.

De Bres cites a number of sentences from Lactantius that deny that the infliction of cruel punishment and executions can ever be sanctified by its religious purpose. Rather, “those who kill their own souls and the souls of others, should understand that they have

⁵² *Baston* (1555), 185 r.

⁵³ *Baston* (1555), 185 r.

⁵⁴ *Baston* cites several paragraphs from Book 5, chapter 20 and 21, one paragraph from chapter 22, and again several paragraphs from chapter 23. Also cited is one paragraph from Hillary and from Jerome.

⁵⁵ Brian Tierney “Religious Rights: An historical perspective,” in *Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Religious Perspectives*, ed. Witte, John, and Johan David Van der Vyver (The Hague: M. Nijhoff Publishers, 1996), 19.

⁵⁶ Anthony Bowen, and Peter Garnsey, eds., *Lactantius: Divine Institutes* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 48.

committed an unforgivable crime.”⁵⁷ To kill people who disagree about religious matters is an evil that cannot be given the name of good. It is as unreasonable to attempt to make it a virtue as it is to “call the day night, and the night day, and the sun darkness.”⁵⁸ To defend religion by violence confuses goodness and wickedness:

Religion ought to be defended, not by putting to death, but by suffering oneself to be killed; not by cruelty, but by patience, not by wickedness, but by faith. Because killing and exercising cruelty is wickedness and belongs to the wicked; but to suffer death and to have patience and faith, belongs to the good.⁵⁹

Thus religion, suffering, patience, faith, and goodness, *Baston* emphasizes, are the polar opposites of killing, cruelty, and wickedness. These are contradictory dispositions. What *Baston* is emphasizing is that when defending and advancing religion, force, compulsion, and violence are impossible to square with truth, faith, and moral goodness.

Another reason why compulsion is inherently incompatible with religion is the essential nature of religion. True religion is essentially *free*, hence force and violence, because they contradict the free character of heart religion, cannot accomplish anything. They cannot prevent and suppress religion because the more the Christian religion is oppressed, the more it will grow and increase.⁶⁰ Neither can compulsion produce true religion. Therefore, “it is of no use to employ force or proceed by injuries, since religion cannot be constrained.”⁶¹ Moreover, religious performance without faith and devotion are

⁵⁷ *Baston* (1555), 185 r.

⁵⁸ *Baston* (1555), 185 v.

⁵⁹ *Baston* (1555), 189 r. Note that there is a mistake in the 1555 printed edition’s page numbering, and that 189 follows after 186 v.

⁶⁰ *Baston* (1555), 185 v.

⁶¹ *Baston* (1555), 186 r.

unprofitable to God.⁶² Compelled religion cannot please God, because “that which a man does by compulsion is no sacrifice, inasmuch as it is not done voluntarily and from the heart, it is a detestable thing.”⁶³ Thus those who would defend religion through shedding of blood, through torments and cruelty, can only succeed in polluting and defiling it, “for nothing is more voluntary, unforced, and free, than religion.”⁶⁴

Compulsion is also inherently incompatible with religion because true religion is essentially *reasonable*. Religion is about the truth, and “truth cannot be joined with force.”⁶⁵ Belief in the truth can only be produced by words, sermons, disputations, prayers and exhortations.⁶⁶ In matters of religion, opponents should rather “proceed by fair words, than by blows, to win over the person’s will.”⁶⁷ Therefore, those who have any confidence in the truth should “open their mouth and speak, and have the courage to dispute with us.”⁶⁸

By emphasizing how compulsion is in several ways inherently incompatible with the Christian religion, the first edition of *Baston* raised objections that strike at the heart of conceiving of civil government as a God-given instrument to regulate and compel faith, doctrine and worship. *Baston* (1555)’s message favors religious liberty and opposes

⁶² *Baston* (1555), 186 v.

⁶³ *Baston* (1555), 190 r.

⁶⁴ *Baston* (1555), 189 r.

⁶⁵ *Baston* (1555), 189 r.

⁶⁶ *Baston* (1555), 185 v.

⁶⁷ *Baston* (1555), 186 v.

⁶⁸ *Baston* (1555), 186 v.

compulsion, although this message is conveyed as much by sentiment and passion as by explicit argument.⁶⁹

Skeptical View of Political Government

The 1555 edition of *Baston* also distrusted political government, especially because of rulers' role in religious persecution.

Foreshadowing the book's overall tone of aloofness toward rulers, the dedicatory letter was not addressed to any political dignitary, as was customary at the time, but was merely addressed to God's church who are struggling to "maintain and guard the true and pure Christian doctrine of the ancient and true church of God."⁷⁰ Soon, *Baston* (1555) made clear that the secular authorities deserved blame for the heresy persecutions. While the intellectual and theological errors against which *Baston* aimed to arm the believer were those of the Catholic churchmen, the princes, judges, and magistrates claimed theological justification for using physical force against the Protestant "heretics." The preface of the book repeatedly addresses princes, judges, and magistrates or "you who judge the nations" directly.⁷¹

The preface portrays the rulers' fault as basically twofold: they were not administering true justice, because they were misinformed and therefore wrongfully

⁶⁹ It is pre-eminently based on *Baston* (1555) that Braekman characterizes the political thinking of Guido de Bres as irenic in spirit, closer to the mindset of Erasmus than of Calvin and Beza. Emile M. Braekman, "La pensée politique de Guy de Brès," *Bulletin De La Société De L'Histoire Du Protestantisme Français* (1903-) 115 (1969): 15, 17, 18. Braekman's contrast between De Bres *versus* Calvin and Beza is accurate if one limits one's investigation to the 1555 edition. Whereas in 1555 De Bres's thinking ran against the grain of the restriction of religious liberty, this anti-compulsion import is fudged in *Baston*'s 1558 and 1559 editions, never to reappear in De Bres's subsequent writings, as will be seen in the remainder of this chapter.

⁷⁰ *Baston* (1555), iv r.

⁷¹ E.g. *Baston* (1555), ix r., ix v., x v., xi r.

condemning Protestants of the crime of heresy; and they were failing to stand up to manipulative clerical leaders who inveigled them into serving their own purposes. Both of these charges can be seen in, for example, De Bres's accusation in the preface that the secular rulers were acting as the executioners or "hangmen" of Catholic coteries:

And as for you, oh princes, judges, and magistrates, in whose hands this book might fall. I desire and require of you, in the name of the living God, and of his son Jesus Christ our Lord, who has shed all his blood on the cross for the love of us, that you exercise right judgment upon the poor believers, of whom your prisons are at this moment full because of the fury of these worshippers of the fathers: Stop being the hangmen of this wicked vermin.⁷²

According to De Bres, the princes, judges, and magistrates were *not* exercising right judgment by their proceedings against so-called "heretics," and the reason was because they were doing the dirty work of the Catholic leaders.⁷³

Thus, according to De Bres, the magistrates were being hoodwinked about religious matters, and it is not surprising that they were misinformed about Protestant beliefs and ignorant of how they harmonized with Scripture and the church fathers. As a result, they unjustly sentenced those they condemned as heretical, as De Bres complains:

My lords, judges and magistrates, who hold a public office: From now on, realize what you are doing when you condemn them to death. You cannot condemn them to death without condemning all the good and ancient Fathers with them.⁷⁴

⁷² *Baston* (1555), ix r.

⁷³ This charge echoes an earlier charge by another famous martyr of the southern Netherlands, William Tyndale: "The Emperor and kings are nothing nowadays but even hangmen unto the Pope and bishops, to kill whosoever they condemn, without any more ado, as Pilate was unto the scribes and Pharisees and the high bishops, to hang Christ." William Tyndale, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, ed. David Daniell (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 98. See also the references to Tyndale in chapters five and six.

⁷⁴ *Baston* (1555), x v.

Because Protestant doctrine was essentially that of the church fathers, maintained De Bres, the rulers were wrong to consider it heretical. The political governments' ignorance was keenly culpable, because it amounted to an assault on the Son of God:

You who judge the nations, consider carefully what you are doing. Because you are not only striking us, but also the Son of God, who said to us: 'Those who touch you, touch the apple of my eye.' This was shown to Paul when he persecuted the poor believers and the Lord called to him from heaven, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' He did not persecute him in his person, but he persecuted his members, who are all the believers who believe in Him.⁷⁵

The example of Paul reminded De Bres's readers that militant zeal for God is a poor measure of orthodoxy or heresy. Heresy and orthodoxy must be measured by the Word of God. Additionally, by recalling Paul's persecution of the believers, De Bres reinforced the involvement of the clerical leaders. As De Bres's readers would have been aware, it was when Paul conspired with the high priest to arrest the followers of Christ that he was "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord."⁷⁶ *Bastion* repeatedly associates the civil government's culpability in serving the designs of the Catholic ecclesiastical elite with the Jewish persecution of the early Christians.⁷⁷ This is why De Bres, even when faulting the rulers for doing the dirty work of others, reserved his most vitriolic language for the "wicked vermin" who were influencing these rulers.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Bastion* (1555), xi r.

⁷⁶ Acts 9:1–2.

⁷⁷ For example, Guido quotes Chrysostomos that "the Jews were constantly venerating the deceased saints while despising the saints who were presently alive." *Bastion* (1555), 202 r. In the 1558 and subsequent editions, De Bres adds the sentence: "Such are also the persecutors of the church in our days." Evidently De Bres considered the Catholic "venerators of the deceased saints" no less the persecutors of the faithful believers than the civil powers.

⁷⁸ *Bastion* (1555), ix r.

The problem was that the political rulers not only *allowed themselves* to be duped, but consciously encouraged the deception. The gullible high political rulers gave the deceitful Catholic clerics a ready audience, despite their palpable lies and self-contradictions. The devious clerics received support from “kings, emperors, princes, and magistrates” and were “welcome guests in their courts.”⁷⁹ The political rulers listened to their perversions of Scripture “as if to a demigod.”⁸⁰ Such sycophancy was disgraceful to the civil authorities, De Bres protested: “Surely it is a dishonest thing that has no place in human affairs, that kings, emperors, princes, and magistrates are turned into hangmen for greedy devourers and mendicants.”⁸¹ Once again, the civil magistrates are blamed for degrading their office.

Yet it was not only by acting as hangmen for the Catholics that the magistrates deserved suspicion. Their recourse to violence was fundamentally opposed to Christianity itself. *Baston* (1555)’s negative attitude toward the magistrates derived from what we have identified as one of its central contentions about religious liberty: force is inherently incompatible with religion. *Baston* exhibits a serene and unsubtle condemnation of all violent compulsion as sinful and even anti-Christian. A pithy sentence by Jerome is used to drive this idea home: “The persecuted one follows Christ; the persecutor follows Antichrist.”⁸² De Bres’s implication is clear: the Reformed (who are persecuted) are the

⁷⁹ *Baston* (1555), vii r.

⁸⁰ *Baston* (1555), vii r.

⁸¹ *Baston* (1555), ix v. “Greedy devourers” and “mendicants” probably refer to mendicant Catholic orders like the Dominicans, Fransiscans, and Augustinians. The unpopularity of these orders among the economically active laity in the southern Netherlands must have added pungency to the suggestion that political rulers were stooping to be abused by various Catholic interest groups for their own purposes.

⁸² *Baston* (1555), 189 v.

followers of Christ; the persecuting rulers and their Catholic advisors are followers of the Antichrist.

This suggestive association of the political rulers with the Antichrist is backed up exegetically by a citation from the commentary on Revelation 13 by Rupert, the abbot of Deutz: “Here is the sign by which you can know those who belong to God, though they live among the malicious: The malicious are those who kill and throw into prison; those who are of God have not done so and do not do so.”⁸³ This corroborates the logical inference De Bres is suggesting: Those who persecute the Reformed are following the Antichrist. No doubt De Bres thought the commentary by Rupert (who was a respected late eleventh and early twelfth century Benedictine theologian) provided exegetical support for this inference.⁸⁴ In Rupert’s commentary, the Antichrist makes his appearance in history through agents of spiritual hypocrisy and spiritual decay, in

⁸³ *Baston* (1555), 189 v. A sixteenth century edition, but later than De Bres could have used, is Rupertus Tuitiensis, *Commentarius in Apocalypsim Ioannis, Libri duodecim* (Louvain: Servatius Sassenus, 1563), 127. (Note that in this printing, this page number is incorrectly printed as 129.) A modern edition is Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina*, Vol. 169 (Paris, 1854), cols. 827–1214.

⁸⁴ For a very brief depiction of Rupert’s approach to Revelation, see George H. Williams, *Wilderness and paradise in Christian thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 57, and Rodney Lawrence Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days: The Theme of “Two Witnesses” in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 31. See also Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 43. A discussion of Rupert’s theology generally is John H. Van Engen, *Rupert of Deutz* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). This is not to suggest that De Bres was skilled as an exegete to draw upon patristics or medieval sources. In fact, *Baston* was essentially a compilation by De Bres from secondary sources available in French, as has been argued by De Boer, “Guy de Bres’s ‘Le Baston de la Foy Chrestienne.’ From Personal Notebook to Patristic Anthology (1555–1565),” *Zwingliana* 40 (2013): 82 and Wim H. Moehn, “Guido de Bres in de kaart gekeken. De bronnen van Le Baston de la Foy Chrestienne als bouwstenen voor de reconstructie van zijn theologische Bibliotheek,” in *Godsvrucht in geschiedenis. Bundel ter gelegenheid van het afscheid van prof.dr. F. van der Pol als hoogleraar aan de Theologische Universiteit Kampen*, ed. E.A. de Boer and H.J. Boiten (Heerenveen: Groen, 2015), 302–3. But even so, the fact that De Bres chose to cite Rupert’s exegesis from whatever source book he was working from is significant. As I have argued above, the purpose for which De Bres reproduced citations in *Baston* allow us to presume that they reflect De Bres’s personal position.

addition to a final eschatological personal appearance.⁸⁵ Revelation 13 provided a perspective from which to survey the nature of political rule which was untypical for a Reformed expositor; however, *Baston* viewed the persecuting political rulers through this eschatological lens rather than through the standard Reformed litany of Bible passages.⁸⁶ Through the lens of Revelation 13, the beast of Revelation, Antichrist, is identified not only with the Catholic Church, but also with the political powers.⁸⁷

Embracing Constantine: 1558 to 1565

We have seen that De Bres's *Baston* in 1555 sounded a trumpet call for religious liberty, at least in emotional import if not in consistent and explicit argument, and sounded a condemnation, although softer, of political government. These views of religious liberty and political government were abandoned from 1558 until 1565.

In this period, De Bres's thinking shifted significantly away from religious liberty and toward a positive view of political government. The major distance of this shift was covered in the years 1558 and 1559. By the time of *Baston* (1559), De Bres had embraced both a degree of political restriction of religion and an optimistic appreciation of political

⁸⁵ Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Day*, 31. Likewise, Rupert maintained, the two faithful witnesses of chapter 11 of the book of Revelation are visible in the "witnesses who have shed or will shed their blood in persecution, fighting for the integrity of the faith." Rupertus, *In Apocalypsim Ioannis*, quoted in Petersen, *Preaching in the Last Days*, 31.

⁸⁶ By contrast, *Baston* mentions such favorite Reformed passages on political matters as Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 only in the margin and without real exegetical development. See *Baston* (1555), ix v.

⁸⁷ Even when De Bres in subsequent years became disinclined to associate political government with the Antichrist, for some reason subsequent editions of *Baston* retained the citation by Rupert of Deutz. See e.g. *Baston* (1559), 329; *Baston* (1565), 510.

government. He solidified his new, more Constantinian, position in his two other important works, his *Confession* of 1561 and *Racine* of 1565.

***Baston* (1558 and 1559)**

A comparison of *Baston*'s 1555 edition with the next two editions, 1558 and especially 1559, reveals a decisive shift toward what might be called – following De Bres's commendation in 1559 of Constantine as a role model – a more Constantinian view of religious liberty and political government.⁸⁸

Restricting Religious Liberty

In 1558 and 1559, Guido De Bres made several small changes to the 1555 edition of *Baston* that favored the political limitation of religious liberty. The changes in the 1558 edition were less significant than those of 1559, but they already indicated a decisive change of direction away from *Baston* (1555)'s general protest against compulsion of religion.⁸⁹ One such change in *Baston* (1558) was the addition of two paragraphs to the 1555 edition's penultimate chapter, entitled, "No person should be compelled to believe by force."⁹⁰ As we have already seen, this chapter contained the fulcrum of the 1555 edition's defense of religious liberty. The added paragraphs are in the form of a mooted "objection" and "response."

⁸⁸ The term "Constantinian" is here used in a broad and popular sense, as described in the introduction.

⁸⁹ Two slightly different editions were published in 1558, but the differences relate to minor changes in citations on the chapter on the church, and we need not here distinguish between the editions. See e.g. Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 8.

⁹⁰ *Baston* (1558), 393.

First, an “objection” is stated, no doubt invoked by the penultimate chapter’s spirited defense of religious liberty:

Objection:

It is written in Deuteronomy chapter 13 that the prophet or dreamer of dreams should be put to death. The emperor Justinian also declared expressly (as we have said) that they should be punished with corporal punishments and confiscation of their property, who think out vain words to the perdition of the simple, and who forbid reading the sacred scriptures in the common language.⁹¹

In effect, De Bres was here mooting two objections. The first was the clear Old Testament directives given to the Israelites requiring the punishment of religious offenses. Of these, Deuteronomy 13 was perhaps the *locus classicus* of Bible passages used by both Catholics and Reformed to call for the punishment of religious crimes by the political authorities, like heresy.⁹² Another objection was that the Roman law tradition in Europe, increasingly prestigious in the sixteenth century, had long accepted the principle of religious compulsion.

In a paragraph titled “response,” De Bres reassures his readers on both accounts by making a distinction:

There are two sorts of false prophets. The one kind simply teach what they have dreamed, without any tumult and sedition. It is of such that Jesus Christ and Paul speak when they command that one should leave them alone and just avoid them. The other are those led not only by a spirit of lying, but also in madness mixed with ambition and rashness, upsetting everything, and raising seditions and scandals in the church.

⁹¹ *Baston* (1558), 393.

⁹² See e.g. John Calvin, *Sermons de M. Jean Calvin sur le v. livre de Moyse nommé Deuteronomie* (Geneva: Thomas Courteau, 1567), 504–527.

Such ones should be exterminated and put to death, for the sake of public order and the general peace of the church.⁹³

De Bres's answer, in other words, is that the harshest penalty is reserved only for the disruptive kind of heretics. It is not those "false prophets" who merely teach false doctrine ("led . . . by a spirit of lying") that should be executed, but only those who are troublesome and cause seditions and scandals in the church.

This response somewhat trivializes the religious dimension of dissenting doctrine, shifting attention to the public effects of the false teachings. The test is no longer merely the theological unorthodoxy of a doctrine, but wider considerations. It is not the quiet dissenters that need to be executed, but the wild-eyed rebels against order and authority. Such a distinction no doubt provided De Bres with room to maneuver: he could object to the persecution of the Reformed, since they, he claimed, held no threat to the public order. At the same time, he could affirm both the lasting duty imposed by Deuteronomy 13 and the basic soundness of Roman law's suppression of heresy with its roots that stretched back to late antiquity.

By making this distinction, however, De Bres was also effectively conceding the legitimacy of the restriction of religious liberty by political rulers. Although the policy of persecution now pivoted on more pragmatic considerations and reasons of state, these considerations were to guide the ruler's response not to political unrest as such, but to religious dissent within the context of church teaching. This could potentially create room for political toleration of the Reformed religion, but it could also cut the other way.⁹⁴ As

⁹³ *Baston* (1558), 393.

⁹⁴ Appealing to political criteria, Catholic opponents constantly charged the Reformed in northern France and in the southern Netherlands with undermining the social and political cohesion of the state and endangering the public order and political stability. Thus the Catholic apologist Grenier devoted a chapter

Duke points out, “Catholic rulers and their legally-trained advisers, brought up on the adage ‘one faith, one king, one law’, equated Protestantism with rebellion; heresy represented an immediate political, as well as spiritual, danger, which had to be eradicated promptly.”⁹⁵

One might speculate that the intended result of De Bres’s introduction of non-doctrinal criteria such as “sedition” and “public order” to inform distinctions about punishable false religion was to undermine the qualification of the Catholic Church to adjudicate on false religion. In other words, De Bres was starting to frame religious offenses (the somewhat loose categories of heresy, blasphemy, idolatry, or “false prophesy,” as *Baston* here calls it) as offenses to be adjudicated exclusively by the civil government, i.e. the *secular* power. This trend of jurisdictional narrowing, which was even more pronounced in the next (1559) edition of *Baston*, indicates the concession which De Bres was apparently willing to make for the sake of political protection, a quest that will be discussed at greater length in chapter four. In other words, De Bres was willing to submit the Reformed churches to a degree of political regulation of religion, provided the political rulers would rebuff the Catholic claim to be the sole arbiters of what should be prosecuted as heresy or false religion.

The 1559 edition of *Baston* went further than the 1558 edition in approving the political government’s restriction of religious liberty, and the changes were more

to argue that “heretics,” by whom he meant Protestants, “because of the great danger that they pose to the Christian commonwealth on account of their errors, should not be tolerated, but punished and repressed by the rigor and severity of the law.” Grenier, *L’Espee de la Foy* (Paris: Guillaume Cavellat, 1557), 307 v. – 311 v. See also the chapter “That the heretics should be punished and persecuted by the Christian princes and by the secular courts” in Grenier, *Le Bouclier de la foy*, 1548, 597–601.

⁹⁵ Duke, Alastair, Judith Pollmann, and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Low Countries* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 115.

numerous and more significant than those in the 1558 edition. The first significant change was the modification of the title of the chapter on religious compulsion. In the 1555 and 1558 editions, the title was, “That nobody ought to be compelled by force to believe.” In 1559, a concessive clause was now added: “however, convicted heretics should be punished by the magistrate.”⁹⁶ A more far-reaching qualification can scarcely be imagined, even if the concession did not, strictly speaking, contradict the original title, since not even the Catholic prosecution of heretics in the Netherlands would have claimed to aspire to “force them to believe.” The 1559 addition hoisted a new flag over the chapter that had formed the bulwark of the defense of religious liberty in the 1555 edition. Whereas the substantive change made to the chapter in 1558 was more obscure, buried in the chapter’s text, it now received prominence. The new title made clear that *Baston* recommended a degree of political restriction of religious liberty.⁹⁷

A second change in *Baston* (1559) was equally sweeping. The final chapter in the 1555 and 1558 editions bore the title, “How the magistrates who persecute the believers under pretense of religion will be tormented with eternal pains.”⁹⁸ In addition to other changes to the chapter that evidence De Bres’s growing reliance on the role of civil government in religious affairs, a short section was in 1559 inserted at the end of this chapter under the heading, “Despite what has already been said, the heretics should be

⁹⁶ Lit. “however, this does not mean that convinced heretics should not be punished by the magistrate.” *Baston* (1559), 322; *Baston* (1561), 322; *Baston* (1565), 500.

⁹⁷ The very next edition, *Baston* (1560), briefly reverted to the unrevised 1558 wording, before incorporating the 1559 changes. *Baston* (1560), 395. However, as mentioned above, the 1560 edition appears an anomalous reversion to the 1558 version.

⁹⁸ *Baston* (1555), 198; *Baston* (1558), 323. The chapter order was changed in the “reviewed and augmented” 1558 edition, where this chapter (p.394) is followed by the chapter on marriage (p.402), vows (p.409), fasting (p.415), honoring the saints (p.428), images (p.442) and purgatory.

punished by the civil magistrate, even with death, if the case requires.”⁹⁹ De Bres then proceeded to present three pages of argument on why the civil magistrate should punish false religion and idolatry, thus departing in the final chapter, too, from his erstwhile vigorous defense of religious liberty. In previous editions, as the former chapter title indicated, this chapter corroborated *Baston*’s preceding chapter’s critique of religious compulsion by warning magistrates of God’s punishment for the ruler’s role in using their powers to persecute believers. The 1559 insertion qualified this.

The new section inserted into the final chapter began by quoting two Old Testament texts requiring the execution of idolaters and false prophets: Exodus 22:20 and Deuteronomy 13.¹⁰⁰ These passages were routinely applied by sixteenth century Catholics and reformers alike to that nebulous category of sins, heresy. “Heresy,” De Bres reasons, is simply a form of idolatry:

What immediately follows in the same chapter [i.e. Deut.13] regarding the brother, the son, or the daughter or wife, amounts to the same. If anyone objects that it is explicitly idolatry that is spoken of here, the reply is that they are idolaters who do not know God as He wants to be known by his Word. Such are the heretics, in other words, those who are persuaded by a single word of God [i.e., by a single Bible verse or passage] to obstinately and maliciously maintain a doctrine contrary to the pure truth of God.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *Baston* (1559), 339.

¹⁰⁰ “Exodus 22:20: Whoever sacrifices to other gods, other than God alone, should be killed. Deut.13:1–3: If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. Deut.13:5: And this prophet or dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has taught defection from the Lord, and so forth. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.” *Baston* (1559), 339–340. (Adapted from the English Standard Version to more closely reflect De Bres’s language.)

¹⁰¹ *Baston* (1559), 340.

Heretics, De Bres is saying, are simply a *species* of the *genus* idolaters. All idolaters conceive of God differently from how God has revealed himself in Scripture; this is what heretics also do, because instead of accepting God's full revelation of himself in all of Scripture, they "obstinately and maliciously" hold fast to a doctrine based on only a part of Scripture. Since heretics (those who obstinately and maliciously maintain false doctrine) are also idolaters, it follows from the two cited Bible passages that they should be punished, De Bres argues. This is also shown by "the examples of Moses, Asa, Jehu, Josiah, Elijah . . . who killed the priests of Baal, and Jehoiada."¹⁰² Thus the Old Testament gives clear examples of the use of the power of the government to punish heretics. De Bres then lists two biblical examples of pagan rulers who were willing to punish heresy.¹⁰³ These examples serve "to put to shame the Christian princes who are less keen to maintain the honor of God than these pagan kings had been."¹⁰⁴

In what might strike modern interpreters as a forced attempt to provide also New Testament proof texts for the punishment of heretics, De Bres cites Acts 5:4–10 and Acts 13:11, and claims that "the damnation that Peter proclaimed against Ananias and Sapphira . . . and of Paul against Elymas the sorcerer" also confirms this reasoning about government's duty to punish heresy. According to De Bres, we know that Elymas was blinded for the crime of heresy because the book of Acts informs us "he wanted to turn the governor from the faith and that that he tried to corrupt the right way of the Lord,"

¹⁰² *Baston* (1559), 340.

¹⁰³ De Bres quotes Ezra 6:11 "Also I make a decree that if anyone alters this word, a beam shall be pulled out of his house, and he shall be hanged on it, and his house shall be made a dunghill" and Daniel 3:29 "Therefore I make a decree: Any people, nation, or tongue that speaks blasphemy against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego will be hewn in pieces, and their houses laid in ruins, for there is no other god who is able to rescue in this way." *Baston* (1559), 340.

¹⁰⁴ *Baston* (1559), 341. See also *Racine* (1565), 845.

and this, after all, “is characteristic of heretics.”¹⁰⁵ It is possible that De Bres was following the exegesis of Beza,¹⁰⁶ or of another reformer who also used Acts 5:4–10 and Acts 13:11 for the same conclusion.¹⁰⁷ De Bres uses the punishment meted out to heretics in Acts 5:4–10 and Acts 13:11 to construct an *a fortiori* argument regarding the duty of the civil magistrate: If Peter “punished with death a despising of religion, although still hidden and concealed,” no one should think it strange if “the ordinary

¹⁰⁵ *Baston* (1559), 341.

¹⁰⁶ Theodore Beza’s exegesis of this passage had then recently been published. See Theodore Beza, *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis libellus, adversus Martini Bellii farraginem, & novorum academicorum sectam* (Geneva: Robertus Stephanus, 1554), 144–5. Significantly, Beza discusses Elymas’s sin in terms close to De Bres’s and gives the same argument why Elymas was a heretic: “This, however, is characteristic of heretics, to turn others from the faith by deceit and unscrupulousness, and to corrupt the ways of the Lord, which is the doctrine that is expressed in his own Word.” Beza, *De haereticis*, 145–6.

¹⁰⁷ Bullinger, for example, argued that Peter “slew Ananias and Sapphira, for their . . . feigned religion,” and likewise Paul “struck Elymas the sorcerer blind, and bereft him of his eyes.” See Bullinger’s eighth sermon in his Second Decade, in Heinrich Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger: The First and Second Decades* (Cambridge: University Press, 1849), 359. Bullinger sees this as explaining the duty of the magistrate: “Neither is their one hair’s difference to choose, whether a man be killed with a sword or with a word. For to kill is to kill, by what means or with what instrument soever it be done. God wrought that by his apostles, and doth the like by the magistrate also. For vengeance is God’s, who giveth it to the magistrate and chief men to be put in use and execution upon wicked offenders. There are to be seen many laws made by holy Christian princes for the state of religion, which give an especial charge to kill idolaters, apostates, heretics, and godless people.” Bullinger, *First and Second Decade*, 359. Thus Bullinger infers the duty of Christian princes to “kill idolaters, apostates, heretics, and godless people” from Acts 5:4–10 and Acts 13:11. The logical objections to inferring the duty of political compulsion of religion from New Testament passages that describe God’s direct actions by means of exceptional miracles during a unique period in the apostolic church are not addressed either by Bullinger or by De Bres. De Bres’s reasoning of what was “characteristic of heresy” and the “corruption of the ways of the Lord” closely parallels Beza rather than Bullinger. The likelihood that De Bres was following Beza is also suggested by the fact that De Bres is navigating *Baston* in this magisterial Reformed direction shortly after his period of formal theological studies in Lausanne and Geneva under Beza (and possibly also Calvin) around 1557 to early 1559. See Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 22–23; “Procedures tenues” in S. Cramer and F. Pijper, *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica: geschriften uit den tijd der hervorming in de Nederlanden. Vol.8*, (’s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1903), 497. Also, the timing of De Bres’s explanation of these passage coincides with the period in which Beza, in the aftermath of the execution of Servetus for heresy in Geneva, was actively defending the duty of the magistrate to punish sins like idolatry and heresy against the criticisms of Castellio. See e.g. Sébastien Castellion and Johann Oporinus, *De haereticis: an sint persequendi et omnino quomodo sit cum eis agendum, doctorum uirorum tum ueterum tum recentiorum sententiae* (Magdeburg: George Rausch, 1554); Beza, *De haereticis*; Theodore Beza, *Theodori Bezae Responsio ad defensionem et reprehensiones Sebastiani Castellionis, quibus suam Novi Testamenti interpretationem defendere adversus Bezam, et eius versionem vicissim reprehendere conatus est. In hoc libello multi Novi Testamenti loci accuratissime excutiuntur, quorum indicem adjecimus* (Geneva: Henri II. Estienne and Ulrich Fugger, 1563).

magistrate uses the sword against those who are openly and clearly persuaded of some heresy.”¹⁰⁸ Hence, there also exists New Testament warrant for the limitation of religious liberty by the political authorities.

De Bres was careful to underscore, however, that the jurisdiction to punish heresy ordinarily belongs to the political (not ecclesiastical) ruler. He must have sensed that the example of Ananias and Sapphira risked lending support to the Catholic claim to jurisdiction in matters of heresy. According to Catholics, of course, the pope was still exercising this authority originally given to Peter. De Bres therefore specifically points out that Peter was here exercising an “extraordinary power” which does not, as a consequence, belong to “the servants of the Word and those who have the charge of ecclesiastical discipline.”¹⁰⁹ Once again, we see in *Baston* (1559) how De Bres moved not only toward a position of allowing religious compulsion, but also toward assigning a monopoly of jurisdiction even in religious matters to civil government, while denying that of Roman Catholic ecclesiastical rulers.

What is becoming clear from these examples is that by 1559 De Bres was continuing the trajectory of *Baston* (1558) in departing from his 1555 position. In 1555, the individual religious conscience was almost sacrosanct: true religion can never be defended by harsh measures,¹¹⁰ violence belongs to the Antichrist,¹¹¹ and heresy is really a form of ignorance.¹¹² By 1559, these sentiments were being trivialized. *Baston* (1559)

¹⁰⁸ *Baston* (1559), 341.

¹⁰⁹ *Baston* (1559), 341.

¹¹⁰ *Baston* (1555), 189 r.

¹¹¹ *Baston* (1555), 189 v.

¹¹² *Baston* (1555), 175 r.

now insisted that, “despite what has previously been said,” political authorities must use the force of the law against wrong religious doctrine that is “obstinately and maliciously” maintained.¹¹³

The 1559 edition’s change of tack *vis-à-vis* the 1555 edition received further momentum by the insertion of three citations from Augustine and one from Nicephorus. In the first Augustinian citation, Augustine explains in his *Retractiones* how he came to appreciate the benefit of religious compulsion. Augustine had initially disapproved of violent measures against the Donatists by the worldly power, but that was because of naivety. The young and naive Augustine had not yet “learned from experience to what extent of overflowing evil they [the Donatists] would go if they remained unpunished, or how a rigorous and strict punishment can profit to convert them to the good.”¹¹⁴ Hard experience later prompted Augustine to abandon his former advocacy of toleration of religious dissent.

De Bres’s citation of Augustine’s approval of the principle of religious compulsion is significant, because it tapped into the exegetical support which Augustine was thought to have provided for the restriction of religious liberty through the power of the magistrate’s sword. One text Augustine famously used was Jesus’ parable of the banquet in Luke 14:12–24. In this parable, a master sent his servant to gather guests for the banquet, instructing him to “go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled” (v.23). According to Augustine, the servant is initially told to merely “bring them in,” which “symbolized the incipient stage of the church, still

¹¹³ *Baston* (1559), 339.

¹¹⁴ *Baston* (1559), 341. This is a citation from Augustine’s *Retractationes*, 2.5 (“Contra partem Donati, libri duo”).

developing to the point where it would have the strength to compel men to it [*ut essent vires etiam compellendi*].”¹¹⁵ In the church’s stage of political power and influence, however, the master tells the servant to “compel them to come in [*compelle intrare*]”:

Accordingly, since it was right that when it [the church] had grown stronger in power and extent men should actually be compelled to the feast of everlasting salvation, the words were afterward added: “It is done as thou hast commanded, and there still is room. And the lord said, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in [*exi in vias et saepes et compelle intrare*].’ ”¹¹⁶

For Augustine, the Donatists were “full of thorns and sharpness,” and “so we find you, as it were, in the ‘hedges’ and compel you to come in [*intrare compellimus*].” The Donatist deviants could rest assured that all of this was for their own good, and they should therefore stop rebelling against such benevolent compulsion: “He who is compelled is forced to go where has no wish to go, but when he has come in, he partakes of the feast right willingly. So curb your hostile and rebellious spirit, that you may find the feast of salvation within the true Church of Christ.”¹¹⁷

To be sure, Augustine’s reasoning for the principle of *compelle intrare* relied on more passages and more arguments than the parable of the feast in Luke.¹¹⁸ The point is, however, that Augustine’s exegesis of Luke 14:23 provided authoritative, crisp, and memorable exegetical support for the principle of political compulsion. Augustine,

¹¹⁵ Augustine “Letter to Donatus, *Epistle CLXXIII*,” in James Houston Baxter, ed., *St. Augustine: Select Letters* (London: William Heinemann, 1930), 301. See Augustine, “Letter to Augustinus Vincentius, *Epistle XCIII*,” in Jacques Paul Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Cursus completus. Series Latina, Vol. 33* (Petit-Montrouge: Migne, 1865), col. 321–347.

¹¹⁶ Baxter, *St. Augustine: Select Letters*, 301–303.

¹¹⁷ Baxter, *St. Augustine: Select Letters*, 303.

¹¹⁸ See e.g. Augustine, “Letter to Vincentius,” in Migne, *Patrologiae Series Latina*, vol.33, col. 321–347. Emilien Lamirande argues that the *compelle intrare* verse was “no major piece in his [Augustine’s] armory.” Emilien Lamirande, *Church, State, and Toleration: An Intriguing Change of Mind in Augustine* (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1975), 54.

Emilien Lamirande writes, was “the first to use the *compelle intrare* to support the use of force in matters of religion.”¹¹⁹ He was the first of many centuries of exegetes who would subsequently understand the passage to justify Augustine’s conclusion that “those in a position of authority know what is beneficial for their subjects and that it is good for the latter to be guided, even with a strong hand and even against their will.”¹²⁰ It is Augustine’s exegetical defense of this principle that came to serve historically as the charter for religious compulsion.¹²¹ As Wilbur Jordan explains, Augustine gave the theory of the political compulsion of religion its “rationalization and classic expression,” which subsequently became “firmly embedded in Christian ethic.”¹²² It was Augustine as protagonist of the political compulsion of religion to whom *Baston* (1559) was now appealing.

Baston (1559) did not discuss Augustine’s exegetical and theological reasoning, but it did cite Augustine’s defense of the principle of compulsion against Augustine’s own earlier views supporting toleration. Does this citation amount to an embrace of Augustine’s rationale of religious compulsion? It appears likely. Perhaps, like Augustine in his *Retractationes*, when he regretted his former views expressed in *Contra Partem Donati*, De Bres was in his *Baston* (1559) effectively negating his own former defense of

¹¹⁹ Lamirande, *Church, State, and Toleration*, 53.

¹²⁰ Lamirande, *Church, State, and Toleration*, 51.

¹²¹ See e.g. Charles Edward Osborne, *Christian Ideas in Political History* (London: J. Murray, 1929), 41. William Frend goes so far as to state that, “The questing, sensitive youth,” Augustine, “had become the father of the inquisition.” William H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 672.

¹²² Jordan, *Religious Toleration in England from the Beginning of the English Reformation to the Death of Queen Elizabeth*, 24.

religious liberty in *Baston* (1555). Perhaps De Bres, too, was coming to view his earlier opposition to compulsion as naïve and unrealistic.

In the second Augustinian citation in *Baston* (1559), Augustine rebukes his Donatist opponents for denying that the civil ruler may rightly punish idolatry.¹²³ Such a denial is inconsistent, Augustine argues, since even the Donatists acknowledge that “the rigor of the law is with good right used against sorcerers.”¹²⁴ Surely, then, legal force should also be employed against heretics and schismatics. After all, heresy and dissensions are numbered with sorcery among the “fruits of iniquity” listed by Paul in Galatians 5. If the Donatists are arguing that something in human nature makes it wrong for the civil ruler to “take care of” matters of religion, why then does the ruler, the servant of God, bear the sword?¹²⁵

If one assumes that such citations reflect De Bres’s view – and this assumption is supported by how De Bres uses the *genre* of the *florilegium*, as was argued earlier in this chapter – the 1559 insertion of these citations indicates a shift away from De Bres’s earlier plea for religious liberty.¹²⁶ Following the later Augustine, De Bres was in 1559 giving an outright defense of the political magistrate’s restriction of religious liberty. There is nothing in human nature, reasoned De Bres, that detracts from the legitimacy of the civil magistrate using his power to compel in the area of religion. The argument seems to be that since the civil magistrate bears the sword, he is to serve God by using

¹²³ *Baston* (1559), 341–2. De Bres incorrectly refers to *Contra Epistulam Parmeniani* 1.13. The citation is actually from Augustine, *Contra Epistulam Parmeniani*, 1.10/16.

¹²⁴ *Baston* (1559), 341–2.

¹²⁵ *Baston* (1559), 341–2.

¹²⁶ It was contended earlier that one should, as a general rule, attribute an opinion contained in a citation in *Baston* to De Bres himself.

the sword to compel wherever he can successfully compel people to do good. And since, as Augustine's experience with the Donatists has shown, the power of the sword can successfully compel people to do good in the domain of religion, the political ruler should use his compulsive power even in matters of religion. Nothing in human nature, or "the human constitution" as De Bres puts it, can prevent him from legitimately doing so.¹²⁷

A third Augustinian citation in *Baston* (1559) makes clear that the ruler's jurisdiction to regulate religion properly extends to church matters: magistrates are to impose criminal punishments against the "detestable deceivers of the church" so that the church would be at peace.¹²⁸

In a reference to Nicephorus's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, De Bres then provides an example of how such peace in the church would be served by legal force. Nicephorus relates "how the church obtained peace for the first time" under Constantine, who ordered after the first Council of Nicea that the books of Arius must be publicly burned and that "they who neglect to do so, would be punished with death."¹²⁹ De Bres is clearly commending Constantine's action, and thereby reinforces that, however *Baston* might previously have championed religious liberty, from 1559 it intended that religious liberty was to be restricted by law in order to promote true doctrine and worship. De Bres's commendation of Constantine also epitomizes the overall effect of the changes to *Baston* in the 1558 and 1559 editions with respect to religious liberty: By 1559, De Bres had

¹²⁷ *Baston* (1559), 342.

¹²⁸ *Baston* (1559), 342. De Bres refers to this as Augustine's second tractate on the gospel of John. I have not been able to locate this paragraph in Augustine's *Tractatus in Evangelium Ioannis*.

¹²⁹ *Baston* (1559), 342. See Nicephorus, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Vol.8, chapter 18 and 25.

shifted to a position favoring the political compulsion of religion typically associated with the Constantinianism of late antiquity and medieval Christendom.¹³⁰

Positive View of Political Government

The Constantinian shift visible in the 1558 and 1559 editions of *Baston* with respect to religious liberty was accompanied by a similar Constantinian shift in its assessment of political government, although this shift was somewhat more indistinct. The 1558 and 1559 editions of *Baston* replaced the negative view of government in *Baston* (1555) with an optimistic appreciation. The first example of De Bres's shift away from *Baston* (1555)'s suspicious portrayal of political government concerns his warning that, since the secular authorities were not administering true justice, they had to expect God's judgment. *Baston* (1555) devoted an entire chapter to impressing upon the political rulers how they were risking God's severe punishment. In 1555 this chapter, the eighteenth and final chapter of the book, bore the title, "That the magistrates that persecute the believers under pretense of religion will be tormented with eternal punishments."¹³¹ The 1558 and subsequent editions replaced this menacing title with a milder one: "Why the magistrates who persecute the believers under the pretense of religion will not remain unpunished."¹³² The new title more narrowly qualified the magistrates who should expect punishment, and removed the suggestion that these magistrates are bound for eternal damnation.¹³³

¹³⁰ See the definition of "Constantinian and Constantinianism" in chapter one.

¹³¹ *Baston* (1555), 198 r.

¹³² The 1558 and 1559 editions have "why" instead of "that." See *Baston* (1558), 323 ; *Baston* (1559), 334, *Baston* (1560), 413.

¹³³ *Baston* (1559), 334; *Baston* (1560), 413.

A second example is the opening contents of the chapter entitled “That the magistrates that persecute the believers under pretense of religion will be tormented with eternal punishments.”¹³⁴ In the 1555 edition, the first paragraph sounded a harsh warning to civil magistrates:

Now therefore, kings, listen! And listen, you judges of the ends of the earth. Power was given you by the Lord, and principality by the Sovereign, who will examine your life and scrutinize your thoughts. Although you are ministers of his kingdom, you did not execute true judgment, have not kept the Law, and have not walked after his will.¹³⁵

De Bres does not make the inference explicit here, but his intended implication is clear: the magistrates have *not* been executing true judgment, they have *not* been keeping God’s law, and they have *not* been following his will, therefore God, who is the truly Sovereign king, will judge them. *Bastion* (1555) added to the conspicuousness of this citation by printing in the margin, “Admonition to the kings, princes, and judges.”¹³⁶

In 1558 and 1559, *De Bres* softened this opening tone of admonishment to the magistrates by moving this paragraph to a less prominent position.¹³⁷ These editions opened less confrontationally by citing Psalm 116:15, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints,” and proceeded to cite passages relating to the duty of political

¹³⁴ *Bastion* (1555), 198 r. This chapter contains very little of De Bres’s own writings, but much can be gathered from his choice of citations. The marginal comments are also informative.

¹³⁵ *Bastion* (1555), 198 r. The Scriptures cited are Proverbs 16, Wisdom 6, Ecclesiastes 9, and Romans 13. *Bastion* (1555), 198 r.

¹³⁶ *Bastion* (1555), 198 r.

¹³⁷ *Bastion* (1558), 394 (Courteau edition) or 323; *Bastion* (1559), 334; *Bastion* (1560), 413; *Bastion* (1561), 518; *Bastion* (1565), 334.

rulers more generally and to God's special care for the believers, such as Proverbs 17:5 and Zachariah 2:8.¹³⁸

A third example immediately followed the chapter's opening citation discussed above. *Baston* (1555) cited two Scripture passages sharply critical of evil rulers. The first of these passages was from Micah 3:

Hear, you heads of Jacob
and rulers of the house of Israel!
Is it not for you to know justice? —
you who hate the good and love the evil,
who tear the skin from off my people
and their flesh from off their bones,
who eat the flesh of my people,
and flay their skin from off them,
and break their bones in pieces
and chop them up like meat in a pot,
like flesh in a cauldron.¹³⁹

De Bres could not have selected a more vivid depiction of the injustice and violence of wicked rulers. Immediately thereafter, De Bres cited another passage from Micah:

Hear this, you heads of the house of Jacob
and rulers of the house of Israel,
who detest justice
and make crooked all that is straight,
who build Zion with blood
and Jerusalem with iniquity.
Its heads give judgment for a bribe;
its priests teach for a price;
its prophets practice divination for money.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ *Baston* (1558), 394; *Baston* (1559), 334; *Baston* (1560), 413. In the 1555 edition, these passages were cited a few pages into the body of the chapter. *Baston* (1555), 200 v. Proverbs 17:5 reads, "He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord."

¹³⁹ *Baston* (1555), 198 v.

¹⁴⁰ *Baston* (1555), 198 v.

This passage, too, portrays a government's injustice and violence, but adds the further element of corruption, not only of the judges and rulers, but even of religious leaders who co-operate with the government for their own advantage, with the effect that they add to the oppression.

Such pointed prophetic condemnations added to the jaded view of political government of the 1555 edition of *Baston*, but De Bres apparently judged them unsuitable for the later editions, once again evidencing a shift toward a more favorable view of the political magistracy. As with the chapter's opening citation, the 1558 and subsequent editions of *Baston* departed from the negativity of the 1555 edition, in this case more radically: the condemnatory passages were not simply neutralized by moving them to less prominent locations, they were excised entirely.

A fourth example of a negative assessment of government is the reference in this same chapter of *Baston* (1555) to the murder of Naboth by Ahab, the greedy king of Israel, recorded in 1 Kings 21. De Bres remarked, "Because the judges wanted to please the wicked desire of Jezebel, they condemned the innocent Naboth to be put to death."¹⁴¹ Especially meaningful is De Bres's marginal comment in 1555: "They do the same today."¹⁴² As this marginal comment indicates, De Bres equated the political authorities of the mid sixteenth century southern Netherlands with the ruthless King Ahab, and their relationship with the idolatrous church leaders with the relationship between King Ahab and the idolatrous Queen Jezebel. The Naboth passage has long been used in the Christian tradition to condemn royalty and magnates, and its use in *Baston* (1555)

¹⁴¹ *Baston* (1555), 201 r.

¹⁴² *Baston* (1555), 201 r.

conveys a profound skepticism about political rulers.¹⁴³ Once again, however, we see that in *Baston* (1558) and *Baston* (1559) De Bres's political theology was shifting toward a more positive appreciation of political government. Such a vivid negative reflection on contemporary political government ("they do the same today") was now out of place. De Bres deleted all reference to the murderous greed of political rulers exemplified in the history of Naboth's vineyard from the 1558 and subsequent editions, just as he had deleted the passages from Micah. Thus, the comparison of the Dutch political rulers with the wicked rulers Ahab and Jezebel disappeared from *Baston* as speedily as the body of Jezebel, thrown from the window in Jezreel, disappeared from the palace courtyard.

A fifth example of a negative political assessment that was modified is an entry in the reference table at the back of *Baston*. In most editions of *Baston*, a reference table was included at the end of the book, organized alphabetically by topic. This end table provided, under the various topics, a list of phrases summarizing the various theses of the book; it also listed the page number in the book where the topic was addressed. By using the reference table, any reader could see at a glance what the book taught on various topics. In the 1555 edition of *Baston*, under the topic of "torments" or "agonies" (*tourmentez*) was listed the short phrase, "The torments/agonies of the bad princes."¹⁴⁴ From 1558 on, this entry no longer appears. The pains that such political rulers would suffer because of God's punishment in this life and the next no longer required emphasis in the quick reference guide.

¹⁴³ Chrysostom used the passage to denounce an act of imperial confiscation of private property. J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose and John Chrysostom: Clerics between Desert and Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 236; Kenneth G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 72.

¹⁴⁴ *Baston* (1555), D.d.7.v.

A sixth example is similar to the fifth. In the chapter “why one should not compel a person to believe,” the 1555 edition contains references to “tyrants” which were expunged from later editions. For instance, when the Church Father Lactantius criticizes the inhumanity and savagery of his contemporary persecuting Roman authorities, he laments the fact that some think the serious believers are wrong while the “tyrants and executioners” are right. In the 1555 edition, De Bres highlights the sixteenth century application of Lactantius in his marginal note: “Many think that those who try hard to keep God’s law, are greatly mistaken; and that the tyrants are right.”¹⁴⁵ The next edition, however, avoids any reference to tyrants: “It is thought that those who try hard to keep God’s law are greatly mistaken.”¹⁴⁶ Apparently, De Bres in 1558 decided that his point no longer required identifying political rulers as “tyrants.”

Enough examples have been given to show that while *Bastion* (1555) evinced a skepticism toward political government, subsequent editions of *Bastion* departed from these misgivings and became more sanguine. De Bres’s view of political government was becoming, as one scholar describes it, “distinctly positive.”¹⁴⁷

***Confession* (1561)**

It has been shown that by 1559, De Bres had in *Bastion* shifted away from religious liberty toward restriction of religious liberty by the political government, which he now viewed more optimistically. After 1559, *Bastion* was to see no further important changes,

¹⁴⁵ *Bastion* (1555), 185 r.

¹⁴⁶ *Bastion* (1558), 305.

¹⁴⁷ See Bouwman, *Overflowing Riches*, 395.

and the 1561, 1562, and 1565 editions maintained De Bres's Constantinian shift.¹⁴⁸ Not only *Baston* but also De Bres's two other major treatises, it will now be seen, solidified his new, more optimistic view of political government and advocacy of a degree of political compulsion of religion. The first of these major treatises that shows this is De Bres's *Confession* of 1561.

De Bres's 1561 *Confession* actually consisted of three texts. The main document was the *Confession of faith* proper (today known as the *Belgic Confession*). Closely associated with the confession proper were two additional documents that were printed and bound with it.¹⁴⁹ Preceding the confession proper was the *Letter to the King*, and following it was the *Remonstrance to the magistrates*. As will be seen below, all three texts confirm that De Bres was maintaining his Constantinian shift in 1561, and advancing his newer (pro-religious-restriction and pro-government) views with increasing confidence and consistency.

¹⁴⁸ See *Baston* (1561), 339–342; *Baston* (1562), 550–555; *Baston* (1565), 526–530. The 1565 edition was the last edition that appeared before De Bres's death in 1567.

¹⁴⁹ The three documents were published together, at least in the first two extant editions of *Confession*, the 1561 and 1562 editions. The bibliographical citations of all three these documents therefore refer to the same publication. There were two 1561 printings of the *Confession*, one printed by Abel Clemence in Rouen, according to Backhuizen van Brink, and the other by Jean II Frellon, ostensibly in Rouen. Their identification and subtle differences are discussed by Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 19–28. For our purposes, the minute differences between the two printings are immaterial, as are the differences between the 1561 and 1562 editions. I shall refer to the Clemence edition by the superscript C, and to the Frellon edition by the superscript F, i.e. *Confession* (1561)^C and *Confession* (1561)^F. The Clemence edition is regularly cited in scholarship because it has been made widely available by the reprint by Fick, *Confession de foy, faite d'un commun accord par les fideles qui conuersent es pays bas, lesquels desirent viure selon la pureté de l'Euangile de nostre Seigneur Iesus Christ: 1561, Réimprimé textuellement par Jules-Guillaume Fick* (Geneva: Jules-Guillaume Fick, 1855). Readers should note, however, that the page numbering of the *Letter to the King* in the Fick reprint is different from the numbering in the original Clemence edition.

Letter to the King

The first of the three associated texts to be investigated is the letter formally addressed to King Philip II, or *Letter to the King*, that preceded the *Confession* proper.¹⁵⁰ The *Letter to the King* reiterates De Bres's basic contentions in all editions of *Baston*, that the Reformed were being unjustly punished for heresy and that the cruelty of these punishments was objectionable.¹⁵¹ Unlike *Baston* (1555), however, the *Letter to the King* does not protest the compulsive restriction of religious teaching or worship. Rather, it reflects De Bres's later belief that political magistrates should restrict religious liberty.

The closest that the *Letter* comes to condemning political restriction of religion is to state that gentleness and compassion is the "true mark and proper difference between a true king and a tyrant."¹⁵² Such a general recommendation of kindness and compassion in royal government does not, however, amount to a denial of the King's right (or even duty) to act against either rebellion or heresy. This is evident, for example, when the *Letter* solemnly challenges, "If, after hearing us, Your Majesty judges us culpable, then let the fires be increased in your kingdom, let the torments and tortures be multiplied."¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ *Confession* (1561)^C, a.ii r – a.xi r. The full title of letter is "The believers who are in the Netherlands, who desire to live according to the true reformation of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the King Philip, their Sovereign Lord." I am following the page numbering in the 1561 Clemence edition in which the *Letter to the King* starts on p. a.ii. r, continuing the numbering also for those pages without printed page numbers. Note that the 1561 Clemence edition printed some page numbers incorrectly: page a.ix was printed as a.i, a.x as a.ii, a.xi as a.iii. To avoid confusion, I have ignored these incorrectly printed page numbers, and used the correct page numbers (a.ix through a.xi) for those pages.

¹⁵¹ In the *Letter*, De Bres specifically protests against the cruelty of the punishments. These involve "dark and hideous prisons," "torments and tortures," and "punishment and torture more cruel and barbaric than the pagan and ungodly tyrants have almost ever invented." *Confession* (1561)^C, a.vii. r. Elsewhere he mentions "banishments, imprisonments, public sale of their goods, tortures, and other oppressions without measure." (a.v. r.) The kind of cruelty inflicted upon them is "natural to the beasts but unworthy of a man," and "very unworthy and hostile to what a prince should be, whose excellence and virtue principally consists in gentleness and compassion." (a.vii. v.)

¹⁵² *Confession* (1561)^C, a.vii. v.

¹⁵³ *Confession* (1561)^C, a.ii. v.

Thus, De Bres's *Letter to the King* does *not* fault Philip for bringing the compulsive power of the law to bear on questions of religious doctrine and worship. The king's mistake was *not* that he was extending his royal jurisdiction to religious matters, or that he was employing the compulsive machinery of legal or political force ("fires. . . torments . . . tortures") to restrict religious liberty. De Bres expressly points out that the Reformed are by no means seeking exemption from the king's "jurisdiction and power."¹⁵⁴ The King's mistake, rather, was that he was backing the wrong party and ignorantly punishing the wrong "heretics." If he had truly considered the defense of the innocents so readily condemned as "heretics" – the Protestants – he would have realized that they were *not*, in fact, culpable of heresy. Thus the *Letter to the King* was implicitly acknowledging the ruler's right and duty to compel in matters of faith and religion, which is a long distance from the mindset of *Baston* (1555).¹⁵⁵

Far from pleading that people should enjoy religious liberty to worship God as they thought best, the *Letter to the King* contended that "idolatry, the false worship of God," is that of which the kingdom of the Devil consists.¹⁵⁶ By implication, not religious liberty

¹⁵⁴ *Confession* (1561)^c, a.iii. r.

¹⁵⁵ If De Bres had still held to *Baston* (1555)'s misgivings about extending compulsive power to the realm of religion, this *Letter to the King* of 1561 presented an ideal opportunity to air them. One or two sentences could have reminded the King that, as *Baston* (1555) so emphatically stressed, true religion cannot be advanced by force (see *Baston* (1555), 185). Here was an opportunity for prophetically voicing the solemn warning that "magistrates who persecute the believers under the guise of religion will be punished with eternal punishments" (see *Baston* (1555), 198). De Bres could have pointed the King to the sobering declaration of Jerome that "the persecuted one follows Christ; the persecutor follows Antichrist" (see *Baston* (1555), 189 v.). A persecuting king like Philip II needed to hear, perhaps, as *Baston* (1555) so fervently stressed, that executing people who disagree about religious matters was an evil that can no more be called good or virtuous than one could call the "day night," or the "night day," or the "sun darkness." (185 v.) Likewise the King could have benefited from remembering that compelled religion is worthless before God, and that only voluntary religious service and worship that freely comes from the heart can please God, and that compulsion can never advance true religion but can only defile and pollute it (see *Baston* (1555), 186 r., 189 r., 190 r.).

¹⁵⁶ *Confession* (1561)^c, a.x v.

but true worship of God should be the political ruler's aim. Political rulers must either promote true worship, true religion, and the kingdom of God, or support false worship, idolatry, and the kingdom of the Devil.¹⁵⁷

The final paragraph of the letter drives this point home when addressing the King about his duty: "It belongs to you, Sir, it belongs to you to become familiar with these issues so that you oppose the errors, no matter how deeply rooted they have been for so long."¹⁵⁸ In other words, the ruler's task was to oppose religious error – and to do this task properly, he needed to be well instructed and informed to recognize who were truly the apostolic believers and who were guilty of false religion and idolatrous worship.¹⁵⁹

Remonstrance

De Bres's settled commitment to a Constantinian political compulsion of religion is also confirmed by the other document closely associated with the *Confession* of 1561, the *Remonstrance to the Magistrates*.¹⁶⁰ Appended to the end of the *Belgic Confession*, the

¹⁵⁷ Hence, De Bres was suggesting, the Dutch nobles and other political rulers could not remain neutral while the Reformed were being oppressed; it was a matter of biblical worship against idolatry, of the kingdom of God against the kingdom of the Devil. This is further developed in chapter four.

¹⁵⁸ *Confession* (1561)^C, a.xi r – a.xi v.

¹⁵⁹ In underlining the civil ruler's duty to oppose religious error, it is possible that De Bres was desperately attempting to move King Philip II to start protecting the true worship and true religion of the Reformed faith and to start opposing Catholic error. It is also possible that De Bres was trying to influence the Dutch nobles, who were perhaps the primary rhetorical audience of the letter. Whether by design or not, by outlining the king's duty in this way, De Bres was subtly indicting the king for neglecting the duty that belongs to him, for not caring about true doctrine according to Scripture, and for aiding the kingdom of the Devil by protecting idolatrous and false worship in the form of Catholicism. Such an indictment had the potential to prod the Dutch nobles potentially favorable to the Reformed churches to spring into action to protect the true doctrine against the King's oppression. The Dutch nobles were certainly much in De Bres's mind, as the rest of this dissertation will show.

¹⁶⁰ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.iii.r. – d.vii.v. Like the *Letter to the King*, which might have had Calvin's letter to king Francis in the *Institutes* as precedent, the *Remonstrance to the Magistrates* could have been inspired by a number of historical precedents. One of them is John Knox's "Appellation" addressed to the "Nobility and Estates" of Scotland against the "cruel and unjust sentences" of the persecution, which was published in Geneva in 1558. John Knox, *The appellation of John Knoxe from the cruell and most iniust sentence pronounced against him by the false bishoppes and clergie of Scotland, with his supplication and*

Remonstrance was an appeal addressed to the lesser magistrates in language wide enough to include in its appeal both the approximately 450 lesser nobles and the several dozen high nobles of the Netherlands.¹⁶¹ In the *Remonstrance*, De Bres once again objected not to the restriction of religious liberty as such, but to the inaccurate and unjust condemnation of Protestants as heretics and to the cruelty of their oppression.¹⁶² De Bres's reasoning was tight: Orthodox doctrine is defined by the Scripture and ancient Christian doctrine; and as the *Confession* demonstrated, the Reformed believers' doctrine was in accordance with Scripture and ancient Christian doctrine. Therefore, the Reformed were not heretics, and those who condemned them did so unjustly, without proof.¹⁶³

exhortation to the nobilitie, estates, and comunalitie of the same realme (Geneva: 1558). Knox appealed to the magistrates "as God hath appointed you princes in that people, and by reason thereof requireth of your hands the defence of innocents troubled in your dominion" to take into their "defence and protection" Knox and others who "most uniuistlie by those cruell beastes are persecuted." Knox, *Appelation*, 3. See also David Laing, ed., *The works of John Knox, Vol. 6* (Edinburgh: Thomas George Stevenson, 1846), xxxvi.

¹⁶¹ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.iii – d.vii. See the distinction between the *grands seigneurs* ("great" or "high" nobles) and *gentilshommes* ("lesser" or "petty" nobles) discussed by Henk van Nierop, "The Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands: Between Church and King, and Protestantism and Privileges," in *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555–1585*, ed. Philip Benedict, Guido Marnef, Henk van Nierop, and Marc Venard (Amsterdam: Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1999), 83–4. Van Nierop estimates between 360 and 550 lesser nobles, which is about 450. Van Nierop, "The Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands," 88–9. Van Nierop arrives at this figure by estimating "somewhere between" the 549 nobles suggested by Georgette Bonnevie-Noël "Liste critique des signataires du Compromis des Nobles," *Vereniging voor de geschiedenis van het Belgisch Protestantisme* (1968): 80–110, and the 359 given by the "Catalogue des Gentilzhommes confederez" in Brussels, *Archives Généraux du Royaume, Papiers d'état et de l'audience*, no. 1177/5.

¹⁶² Their Catholic persecutors, De Bres sighed, attacked them "like furious beasts" with "bloodthirsty and teeming cruelty." *Confession* (1561)^C, d.iii. v. He gave this cruelty of the Catholic oppressors an apologetic edge, because "the religion, which commits such cruelty, is not based upon God's Word, but upon their imagination and the thoughts of their ancestors." *Confession* (1561)^C, d.iv. r. Since the cruelty of the Catholics substantiated that their religion could not be biblical, it was clear that *they*, and not the Reformed, were the real heretics.

¹⁶³ Rather than summarily "cruelly attacking" the Reformed, their detractors need first "to prove that we are heretics, that we err in the faith, and should convince us from passages in the Bible or the Gospel." *Confession* (1561)^C, d.v. r. They should not "before providing such proof deliver us to be burned, or cut out our tongues, or with iron hooks shut the mouths of those who desire nothing else than to show that their doctrine is based on the rock, who is Christ." *Confession* (1561)^C, d.v. r.

The *Remonstrance* also returned to an issue previously canvassed in *Baston*: the magistrates were to be more actively involved in recognizing what heresy involves, rather than simply relying on their (exclusively Catholic) ecclesiastical advisors. What was happening was that the Catholic clergy were effectively acting as both prosecutors and judges in the same legal proceedings because they “accuse and convict at the same time.”¹⁶⁴ This lack of magisterial independence and the perverse influence of the Catholic clergy in the judicial determination of religious matters produced injustice:

O virtuous and magnanimous lords, how long will you patiently listen to them who say that light is darkness, and darkness light? How long will you judge the innocent without a hearing, and will you not resist the violence of his opponents, that both accuse and convict him?¹⁶⁵

In raising this issue of legal procedure, De Bres nowhere suggested that the magistrates should desist from exercising their political power in religious matters. The problem was simply that justice was not being served by the present arrangement. Since the Catholics “have a particular interest in the entire law suite, and whose abuse the entire question is about,” they were obviously not a neutral party.¹⁶⁶ When these Catholic clergy were allowed by the magistrates to effectively make the decisions in cases that concerned religious doctrine, the magistrates were effectively abdicating the responsibility of their office and allowing themselves to be reduced to servants. “How long,” the *Remonstrance* asked the magistrates, would the Catholic opponents of the Reformed “make you simply the executors and servants of the sentences, judgments and

¹⁶⁴ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.iv. v.- d.v. r.

¹⁶⁵ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.iv. v.- d.v. r. It is noteworthy how De Bres’s earlier negative view of civil government (as murderers and persecutors who should expect God’s judgment) has given way to a more optimistic view: he now calls them “virtuous and magnanimous lords” – unless this is mere flattery.

¹⁶⁶ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.iv. v.- d.v. r.

convictions of monks, priests, holders of benefices, church doctors?”¹⁶⁷ Once again, the *Remonstrance* gave no hint that magisterial jurisdiction was misplaced in religious matters.

The *Remonstrance* did not propose as remedy that religious liberty be respected, in other words that the political rulers restrain their own jurisdiction and back off from religious matters, but that the rulers ensure their practical independence. Rulers should not allow Catholic clerics to continue to usurp the magistrates’ power of judging religious doctrine and heresy. This meant that the political magistrates needed to become well informed about what Scripture teaches. The Catholic clergies’ denial that magistrates themselves can handle Scripture was belittling the magisterial office: “Will it forever continue, that they deem you secular, uninitiated, or unholy persons, so that you may not speak about Scripture, and may not judge over doctrine and over matters of religion?”¹⁶⁸ Thus, according to De Bres, the power of the magisterial office properly extended to matters of religion – but magistrates should apply their own minds by relying on the teachings of Scripture rather than on the guidance of the Catholic clerics.

As an example of how magistrates should independently judge religious doctrine by the standard of Scripture, De Bres held forth the Old Testament leader Joshua, suggesting that the Catholics were unlawfully depriving the magistrates of this privilege and responsibility in order to hide their own perversion of religion :

When the Lord appointed Joshua as leader and governor over his people, He commanded him, that the book of the law should not depart from his eyes nor from his hands. Would these men pluck it from you

¹⁶⁷ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.v. r.

¹⁶⁸ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.iv. v.

with violence, so that you obtain no knowledge of their blasphemies against God?¹⁶⁹

It is by knowing Scripture that the magistrates, like Joshua, would be able to rightly wield the sword against idolatry and false religion – because they would recognize the blasphemy, or heresy, of the Catholics who have up to now been pulling the wool over their eyes.

An explicit apology for the legitimacy of the political exercise of compulsion in religious matters is found in a striking passage in the *Remonstrance*. The passage is also significant because it illustrates the sophistication that De Bres’s Constantinian shift had acquired by 1561. In the passage, De Bres rejects the medieval and ancient notions of a “two swords” jurisdictional division in favor of the political limitation of religious liberty. De Bres starts by summarizing what he describes as the teaching of most of the “old teachers,” the *docteurs anciens*:

Most of the old teachers [of the church] thought that it was not permitted for the magistrate to touch the conscience of a man by forcing and constraining him to believe. For the material sword is given in the magistrate’s hand to punish thieves, robbers, killers, and others who upset this human polity. But as to religion and what pertains to the soul, only the spiritual sword of the Word of God should and can effectively set it right, by distinguishing between [false] zeal and [that] religion which nobody can maintain together with [notions of] sedition and disturbance of the [civil] polity.¹⁷⁰

The majority of “old teachers,” De Bres is saying, denied the magistrate, who wields the “material sword,” the right to constrain religion. According to these old doctors, the magistrate’s jurisdiction did not extend to matters of belief and conscience. Rather, they

¹⁶⁹ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.v. r.

¹⁷⁰ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.v. v.

believed that only the “spiritual sword” could and should identify and adjudicate such matters.

Remarkably, De Bres rejects this view of the old teachers.¹⁷¹ In other words, he rejects their spiritual/material division of authority: “But we are satisfied not to follow them in this respect, and not to believe these good doctors.”¹⁷² That is, De Bres rejects an ecclesiastical jurisdiction that excludes or limits the civil jurisdiction of the magistrate in legal cases relating to what he calls “religion and what pertains to the soul.”

What De Bres promotes instead of a “two swords” division is a more direct and active role by the political rulers in religious matters. The rulers themselves must determine who

¹⁷¹ The precise view of the old teachers that De Bres had in mind is not clear. Did De Bres intend by his reference to a “material” and “spiritual” sword the ancient theory of Gelasius, or a medieval version of the “two swords” theory, perhaps of Peter Damian or of Bernard of Clairvaux, or some other version?

In De Bres’s summary of the old view’s two jurisdictions he uses the terms “material sword” and “spiritual sword” – terms that echo the ancient doctrine of Pope Gelasius of two irreducible jurisdictions, or even the medieval development of Gelasius’s view into the “two swords” doctrine. The doctrine, in rudimentary form, is visible in the letter by Pope Gelasius to Emperor Anastasius in 494 A.D. The text of the letter is widely available, e.g. James Harvey Robinson, *Readings in European History, Vol.1* (Boston: Ginn & Co, 1904), 72–3.

The terms “material” and “spiritual sword” are typically associated with ancient versions of Gelasian theory; terms like the “temporal” and “ecclesiastical” swords or powers, or *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, became common only later. As the notion developed in the two centuries after 1050, it increasingly stressed the so-called natural superiority of the spiritual over the temporal power. Thus, in contrast to Peter Damian’s eleventh century explanation of the “two swords” in the gospel of Luke as belonging respectively to the secular power and the spiritual power, the twelfth century “remodeling” of the two swords doctrine by Bernard of Clairvaux in his *De Consideratione* involved “that both the material and the secular sword were in the hands of the papacy.” See Gregory Whittington, “Doctrine of the Two Swords,” in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages, Vol 12*, ed. Joseph R. Strayer, 233–235 (New York: Scribner, 1989), 233; Patrick Stephen Healy “Doctrine of the Two Swords,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, ed. Robert E Bjork (Oxford University Press, 2010), s.v. “two swords”; I. S. Robinson, “Church and Papacy,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c.350-c.1450*, ed. J. H. Burns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 252–305, esp. 302.

The exact terms De Bres used, “material sword” and “spiritual sword,” therefore seem to argue that he was rejecting the more ancient Gelasian theory, i.e. what Healy calls Gelasius’s theory of “two separate but co-equal powers: ‘the sacred authority of the priesthood and the royal power.’” Admittedly, such a rejection of a twofold distinction of authority by De Bres seems counter-intuitive, given Calvin’s structural preference for a sort of two powers approach and Calvin’s influence on De Bres. See Matthew J. Tuininga, *Calvin’s Political Theology and the Public Engagement of the Church Christ’s Two Kingdoms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 140–178.

¹⁷² *Confession* (1561)^C, d.v. v.

heretics are, instead of ceding jurisdiction to the spiritual sword (presumably the ecclesiastical hierarchy). For this reason, the political magistrate needs to know what

Scripture teaches:

We confess that the Magistrate should be knowledgeable about heresies, which, we acknowledge, are disturbances in a commonwealth, in order that under this pretext innocence be not condemned by the mere accusation of its enemies, without being heard and understood. But the Magistrate should think upon what the sage said: He that justifies the wicked, and he that condemns the just, they both are abomination to the Lord. (Proverbs 17). Therefore, it is necessary that the judge himself be acquainted with and certain about injustice and heresy, convinced by the Word of God, before extending his arm to strike the accused.¹⁷³

According to this emphatic declaration (note the “we confess,” the same words introducing many of the articles of the *Belgic Confession*), the involvement of the political rulers in adjudicating matters of religious doctrine and worship should, if anything, be more direct than most theologians have traditionally held. Evidently, De Bres also accepted the common opinion of the day that without orthodoxy in religion there can be no political stability because he calls heresies “disturbances in a commonwealth.”¹⁷⁴ According to De Bres, all would be well if only the political rulers were properly informed about matters of doctrine and heresy and thus able to distinguish between true heresy and mere accusation and pretext. In brief, De Bres in the *Remonstrance* was less concerned over religious liberty than over the magisterial vigor and independence with which heresy should be prosecuted. His recommendation was not

¹⁷³ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.v. v.

¹⁷⁴ See the discussion of the sixteenth century association between heresy and political disorder in chapters six.

that political rulers respect religious liberty, but that they know God’s Word and cut the umbilical cord tying them to the Catholic Church.

Also confirming that De Bres was maintaining the direction of his Constantinian shift was the example he used to reinforce how deplorable it was that political magistrates had to depend on the Catholic clergy. De Bres reminded the political rulers reading the *Remonstrance* that the “three emperors, Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius” declared that ignorance or neglect of God’s law amounted to “criminal sacrilege” among those who were duty-bound to intelligently read, publish, and proclaim it.¹⁷⁵ But in doing so, De Bres also revealed his confidence in the correctness of a Constantinian approach to government and religious liberty.¹⁷⁶ After all, these emperors were famous for their laws regulating religion in the Constantinian tradition, so that by the early fifth century a plethora of laws proscribed heresy, and deviating from orthodox Christianity constituted a crime against the state.¹⁷⁷ De Bres registered no unease over these emperors’ famous

¹⁷⁵ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.v. r. De Bres asked the magistrates if they would allow themselves to be torn away from the law of God and to be implicated in a similar crime, because those (Catholic advisors) who “although they promised it [the law of God] to you, are depriving you of its use to judge doctrines, errors, and impieties?” *Confession* (1561)^C, d.v. r. Once again, De Bres does not question the political magistrates’ right to decide matters of religious doctrine. The only important thing is that Scripture should be the standard.

¹⁷⁶ Their periods of co-reign were, for Gratian, 367–383 A.D.; for Valentinian II, 375–392 A.D.; and for Theodosius the Great, 379–395 A.D. See Francis Dvornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy: Origins and Background. Vol. I* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies at Harvard University, 1966), 763. These post-Constantinian Christian emperors were well known for their legal measures (of which Theodosius’s *Edictum de fide Catholica* of 380 A.D. was the most famous) to enforce orthodox Christianity (i.e., Trinitarian doctrine as defined by the Council of Nicea) as the only religion permitted in the churches of both the Western and Eastern Empire. Valerian Sesan, *Kirche Und Staat Im Römischbyzantinischen Reiche Seit Konstantin Dem Grossen Und Bis Zum Falle Konstantinopels. Bd. 1. Die Religionspolitik Der Christlichrömischen Kaiser* (Czernowitz: Bukowinaer, 1911), 316. See also Judith Herrin, *The Formation of Christendom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 21.

¹⁷⁷ See Bates, *Religious Liberty*, 134–5. The emperor Theodosius, for example, famously made what one historian calls “an abrupt break with the policy of toleration,” and moved decisively toward greater control of dogma and greater control of the administration of the Christian church. Charles Freeman, *A.D. 381: Heretics, Pagans, and the Dawn of the Monotheistic State* (Woodstock, NY : Overlook Press, 2009), 104. According to Freeman, Theodosius “could be seen as the heir of Diocletian and Constantine, bringing

intensifications of the Constantinian program of harnessing the compulsive power of the state to restrict religious liberty and regulate worship and doctrine. This is significant, because De Bres would have been well acquainted with Catholic apologists like Nicole Grenier's appeal to emperors like Constantine, Theodosius, and Valentinian to justify the Catholic persecution of the Reformed religious dissidents.¹⁷⁸ Instead of disowning these emperors and their comprehensive restrictions of religious liberty, De Bres promoted their authority for sixteenth century political rulers.

The *Confession* Proper ("*Belgic Confession*")

The main document published in 1561 to which the *Letter to the King* and the *Remonstrance to the Magistrates* were attached was the *Confession* proper (the *Belgic Confession*). Like its accompanying documents, the *Confession* shows De Bres's increasingly positive expectation from political government and his confident and cogent advocacy of political limitation of religious liberty.

to fruition their attempts to create a more tightly structured empire that religious institutions were expected to serve," yet "by defining and outlawing specific heresies, he had crossed a watershed." Sesan calls Theodosius's *Edictum de fide catholica* a "pivotal point" which put not only the politics of religion but also the politics of the empire on a new track. Sesan, *Religionspolitik Der Christlichrömischen Kaiser*, 316.

¹⁷⁸ See Nicole Grenier's appeal to the examples of Constantine, Theodosius, and Valentinian in *Bouclier de la foy, extrait de la sainte esriture et des plus anciens docteurs de l'Eglise* (Paris: Gabriel Buon, 1548), 602. De Bres was well acquainted with Grenier's work, because De Bres's treatise *Baston* ("the weapon") was intended partly as a reply to Grenier's vigorous defense of Catholic doctrine. This is confirmed by several facts. For example, *Baston* twice explicitly refers to *Bouclier*, in *Baston* (1555), vii r. and viii r. In the second instance where De Bres refers to Grenier, he accuses the Catholic opponents of twisting the early teachers of the Christian Church: "Permit me to name one, who is quite skilled in this art, and is therefore called 'our master,' in his book entitled *Le Bouclier de la Foy*. Here he shows us the subtlety of his ingenuity. He cites the old doctors in Latin and then translates it into French. Every time that 'sacrificium' or something similar is found, he translates this with 'the holy mystery of the mass,' instead of 'sacrifice' or 'holy mystery.'" *Baston* (1555), vi v. - vii r. Not only is Grenier's book here specifically mentioned, but enough detail is provided to allow the passage to which De Bres is referring to be exactly located. Grenier, *Bouclier de la foy* (1548), 339. (I have not been able to access the 1547 edition, but De Bres could have used any edition, or multiple editions.) Also, recent scholarship has confirmed a link between *Baston* and Grenier's writings, see e.g. De Boer, "'Le Baston': From Personal Notebook to Patristic Anthology (1555–1565)," 83; Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 4–5.

In contrast with *Baston* (1555), the *Confession of faith* speaks in positive terms of political government in its Art.36:

We believe that our good God, because of the corruption of the human race has ordained kings, princes, and magistrates, desiring that the world be governed by their laws and policies, so that the human lawlessness might be restrained and all things might be conducted in good order among people. For this purpose God has placed the sword in the hand of the magistrate.¹⁷⁹

This is a bright picture of the nature of political government: it is our *good* God, who, for the sake of *good* order, has himself placed the sword in the hands of the magistrate. This bright picture of 1561 contrasts with the grey suspicion of government in *Baston* (1555), and has even moved beyond De Bres's slowly burgeoning optimism of 1559 expressed in the re-worked editions of *Baston*. But the picture is not yet the glowing one of 1565 that De Bres would sketch in *Racine*, as will be seen below. Here in the *Confession* of 1561, some somber colors remain: Art.37 contains shades of the eschatological threats to political rulers so vividly portrayed in *Baston*.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ *Confession* (1561)^F, 21; (1561)^C, 32–33.

¹⁸⁰ The significance of the “goodness” of political government for De Bres will be discussed again in chapter seven. Art. 37 of the *Confession* describes the second coming of Jesus Christ with royal glory – with “with great glory and majesty, to declare himself the judge of the living and the dead.” *Confession* (1561)^C, 33. In this final judgment, the oppressed believers, the “righteous and elect” will be comforted, and “their innocence will be openly recognized by all.” (p.34.) In its following warnings, Art. 37 of the *Confession of faith* is reminiscent of the warnings which *Baston* (1555) explicitly directed at oppressive magistrates and tyrants: When the faithful and elect are crowned “with glory and honor,” and their names openly professed before God and the holy angels, “their cause, at present condemned as heretical and wicked by the judges and magistrates, will be acknowledged as the cause of the Son of God.” (p.34.) Such judges and magistrates had reason to fear Christ’s final judgment, as it would reveal “the terrible vengeance that God will bring on the evil ones who tyrannized, afflicted, and tormented them [the righteous believers] in this world.” (p.34.) The wicked judges and magistrates “will be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences, and will be made immortal in such a way that they will be tormented eternally in the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.” (p.35.) Thus the eternal torments with which De Bres threatened the persecuting magistrates in *Baston* (1555), and which disappeared from the 1558 and 1559 editions of the same book, were not forgotten in Art. 37 of the *Confession of faith*.

With respect to the political restriction of religious liberty, too, the *Belgic Confession* shows that De Bres was maintaining his Constantinian shift. Art. 36 of the *Belgic Confession* rigorously advocates the political restriction of religious liberty.¹⁸¹ One paragraph in the article describes how the task of the civil ruler extends also to religious matters:

For this purpose he [God] put the sword in the hand of the Magistrate to punish the wicked, and to protect the virtuous and good people. And their office is not only, to restrain and watch over the political, but also over the church matters, to remove and abolish all idolatry and false worship of God, to destroy the kingdom of the Antichrist, and advance

¹⁸¹ De Bres's *Confession of faith* (1561) is a slightly different text from that of 1566 which after the Synod of Dordt became the confessional standard of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and subsequently of many Reformed churches internationally. Understanding the meaning of Art. 36 of the Belgic Confession is today complicated by an alternative interpretation, which might be called a "purposive" interpretation, of the task of political government, and which has since the first half of the previous century called the traditional interpretation into question.

The difference between the traditional and purposive understanding can best be explained by referring to the 1566 text of the most troublesome paragraph in Art. 36 describing the office of the civil magistrate: "And their office is, not only to have regard unto, and watch for the welfare of the civil state, but also to protect the holy church service, and to prevent and extirpate all idolatry and false worship, to destroy the kingdom of antichrist, to promote the kingdom of Jesus Christ, and to take care, that the word of the gospel be preached everywhere, that God may be honored and worshiped by everyone, as he commands in his word." (This translation is a quite literal one by the Reformed Church in America, *The Constitution of the Reformed Dutch Church in the United States of America* (New York: William Durell, 1793), 38.) The French text is: "Et non seulement leur office est de prendre garde et veiller sur la police, ains aussi de maintenir le sacré Ministère pour oster et ruiner toute idolatrie et faux service de Dieu, pour destruire le royaume de l'Antechrist, et avancer le Royaume de Iesus Christ, faire prescher la parole de l'Evangelie partout, à fin que Dieu soit honoré et servi d'un chacun, comme il le requiert par sa parole." De Brès, *Confession* (1566), 20 r. The central interpretative question is how the sentences in this passage intend the office of the magistrate. Do they give civil government the task to "protect the sacred ministry" (*maintenir le sacré Ministère*), to "prevent and extirpate all idolatry and false worship" (*oster et ruiner toute idolatrie et faux service de Dieu*), to "destroy the kingdom of Antichrist and to promote the kingdom of Jesus Christ," to "take care, that the word of the gospel be preached everywhere," and to "[take care] that God may be honored and worshiped by everyone, as he commands in his word?" Scholarship since early in the twentieth century has suggested two basic answers. The traditional answer has been in the affirmative. The alternative reading, increasingly influential since the first decades of the twentieth century, denies that Art. 36 intend all of these tasks as direct duties of government. In this view, only the first task is directly incumbent upon the political ruler: The ruler has only to protect the gospel ministry against its enemies, in order that all the other things mentioned in Art. 36 might follow as a result. The alternative reading can thus be termed a "purposive" reading of Art. 36. This alternative interpretation is perhaps the mainstream popular interpretation of Art.36 today, at least when measured by how it is translated in the confessional standards of most Reformed churches. Although the scholarly debate about the interpretation of Art. 36 merits careful attention, it cannot be covered in the scope of this dissertation. Suffice to say that the traditional interpretation which understands Art.36 as describing the direct task of the political magistrate is preferable for historical and textual reasons, despite the current popularity of the purposive interpretation.

the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, to ensure the preaching of the Word of the Gospel everywhere, so that God be honored and served by everyone as He has required it by his Word.¹⁸²

According to De Bres, the very reason why the magistrate has received the sword from God, is to punish the wicked and promote the good, and this involves “to restrain and watch over” *not only* civil matters, *but also* church matters. How such restraining must be done in church matters is detailed in three “to” (Fr. “*pour*”) clauses: The magistrate must “remove” (or “expel” or “drive away”)¹⁸³ and “abolish” (or “overthrow” or “destroy”)¹⁸⁴ all idolatry and false service (or worship) of God; he must destroy the kingdom of Antichrist and advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ; and he must ensure the preaching of the Word everywhere. The preceding ought to be done “so that” everyone would serve God as his Word requires. In sum, Art. 36 gives the civil magistrate not only the *right* but also the *duty* to actively promote true doctrine and the true worship of God by using his compulsive powers of law and government also with respect to religious matters.

Racine (1565)

The final document evidencing the culmination of De Bres’s Constantinian shift is his third and final major theological treatise, *La racine, source, et fondement des*

¹⁸² *Confession (1561)^F*, 21; *Confession (1561)^C*, 33. The French reads “Pour ceste fin il a mis le glaive en la main du Magistrat pour punir les meschants, et maintenir les bons et gens de bien. Et non seulement leur office est, de reprimer et veiller sur la politique, ains aussi sur les choses ecclesiastiques, pour oster et ruiner toute idolatrie et faux service de Dieu, pour destruire le royaume de l’Antechrist, et avancer le Royaume de Iesus-Christ, faire prescher la Parole de l’Evangile partout, afin que Dieu soit honoré et servi d’un chacun comme il le requiert par sa Parole.”

¹⁸³ Cotgrave defines “oster” as “to remove, withdraw; pull, take, or carrie away; to put off; bereave, or deprive of; to lay, or get aside; to discharge, or deliver; drive, or expel, from.” Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London: Adam Islip, 1611), s.v. “oster.”

¹⁸⁴ Cotgrave defines “ruiner” as “to ruine, wracke, wast, havocke, spoyle; subvert, overthrow, undo, destroy.” Cotgrave, *Dictionarie*, s.v. “ruiner.”

Anabaptistes ou Rebaptisez de nostre temps (“The root, source, and foundation of the Anabaptists or re-baptizers of our times.”) *Racine* shows that six years after muffling *Baston*’s 1555 trumpet call for religious liberty, De Bres was more profoundly than ever committed to a positive view of political government and to the duty of the legal or political restriction of religion. His views in *Racine* were also more explicitly mainstream Reformed.¹⁸⁵

Racine’s positive view of political government is most apparent in a chapter, “The Authority of the Magistrate,” appended to the third book of *Racine*.¹⁸⁶ This chapter not only explains in broad terms the nature and task of the civil government, but especially emphasizes its divine origin, goodness, and benefit to society. *Racine* delineates its optimistic view explicitly in order to oppose various Anabaptist views that were dismissive of the civil office.¹⁸⁷ Thus, *Racine*’s pro-magisterial emphasis is intertwined with its agenda as an anti-Anabaptist polemic, as chapter six and seven will analyze more fully.

With respect to the political restriction of religious liberty, *Racine* continues the direction of *Baston* (1559), but more confidently and more consistently. For example, it offers a fuller and more sophisticated treatment of notions like heresy, idolatry, and false

¹⁸⁵ In *Baston*, the influence of Reformed theologians remained unacknowledged, despite, as we have noticed, De Bres’s possible use of Beza’s exegesis on heresy and his use of works by Bullinger, Calvin, Melancthon, Viret, Thomas Cranmer, and other important Reformation figures that the research of Moehn has uncovered. Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 22–5; Moehn, “De Bres in de kaart gekeken.” In *Racine*, De Bres displayed a new boldness in associating with the Reformed camp. He acknowledges in the preface that he “made great use of” the works of John Calvin (the “great servant of God”), John à Lasco, Heinrich Bullinger, and Maarten Micron. *Racine*, a.iii r.

¹⁸⁶ *Racine*, 806–848.

¹⁸⁷ *Racine*, 806.

religion.¹⁸⁸ Also, *Racine*'s exposition of the ruler's task of restricting religious behavior is more systematic and comprehensive than the somewhat makeshift insertions of *Baston* of 1558 and 1559. This is seen, for example, in how *Racine*'s chapter "The Authority of the Magistrate" argues that God ordained that civil rulers should "shed the blood of the wicked with the sword of justice."¹⁸⁹ Among the wicked that should be executed, *Racine* lists not only murderers and those who curse their parents, but also blasphemers and similar offenders.¹⁹⁰ Magistrates can rest assured that putting such evildoers to death "is a proper, right and just thing to do, because God does not command anything which is not very good."¹⁹¹

De Bres substantiates his argument by citing many Old Testament examples of how "the holy judges, kings, and prophets . . . eagerly obeyed this commandment of the Lord." Thus we read how Moses and Joshua commanded the Levites to gird their sword and to "each kill his brother and his friend and his neighbor," because of the idolatry of the golden calf.¹⁹² Likewise, the Israelites stoned a blasphemer, according to God's commandment to Moses. Such an exercise of justice, De Bres explains, Moses calls

¹⁸⁸ Early in *Racine* De Bres defines heresy, along the lines of *Baston* (1559), as "using Scripture, but maiming and perverting it." *Racine*, a.iv. What is added in *Racine* but was absent in *Baston* is the element of blasphemy: The heretics pervert Scripture "to maintain their blasphemies, even though the Scripture gives no cause for error and heresy." *Racine*, a.iii. v. – a. The introduction of the idea of blasphemy right at the start of the heresy discussion also hints at magisterial Reformed influence, because it agrees with the deliberate approach adopted by Beza, Bullinger, and others in the controversy after the execution of Servetus – what Frans van Stam calls a "specific sensitivity" in the Reformed preference for the term. Frans Pieter Van Stam, *The Servetus Case: An Appeal for a New Assessment* (Geneva: Droz, 2016), 255. Focusing on the element of blasphemy, Musculus argued, would be less offensive to opponents of the burning of heretics, and would remove an occasion for the Catholics to continue in their "fury and savagery." See the letter of Wolfgang Musculus of 27 February 1554 in CO 15, 47, cited in Stam, *Servetus*, 255.

¹⁸⁹ *Racine*, 816.

¹⁹⁰ *Racine*, 817. De Bres refers to Leviticus 24:16.

¹⁹¹ *Racine*, 817.

¹⁹² *Racine*, 817.

“consecrating the hands to God in order to receive a blessing.”¹⁹³ The execution of the Israelites who worshiped the golden calf was nothing less than a holy exercise of force, of “consecrating the hands for God.” Consecration to God prompted the otherwise patient Moses to urge everyone to “spill the blood of those who had so grievously insulted the Lord by their idolatry,” not relenting until three thousand had been put to death.¹⁹⁴

Magistrates perform a holy task, they “consecrate their hands for the Lord” when they, like David, spill the blood of those who have committed violent crimes, claimed De Bres.¹⁹⁵ Likewise, one who exemplified the performance of a task of holy consecration was “the good king Josiah, when he purged religion anew. He sacrificed the idolatrous priests and killed them.”¹⁹⁶ This demonstrates that the holy task of the magistrates concerns the first table of the law no less than the second. King Solomon, too, insisted that none who blasphemed should remain unpunished.¹⁹⁷ Even the “great prophet Elijah” who, De Bres reminds his readers, “was taken up and carried to heaven in a chariot of fire because he pleased God,” is an example of this service. Elijah ordered the prophets of Baal to be seized, permitting none to escape, and slaughtered them at the brook Kishon.¹⁹⁸

This is not to suggest that De Bres in any way singles out transgressions of the first table of the Decalogue (i.e. against the first four of the Ten Commandments) as particularly worthy of punishment. The point is precisely the opposite: De Bres simply

¹⁹³ *Racine*, 817.

¹⁹⁴ *Racine*, 818. De Bres cites Exodus 32:26–29.

¹⁹⁵ *Racine*, 819.

¹⁹⁶ *Racine*, 819. De Bres cites 2 Kings 23:20.

¹⁹⁷ *Racine*, 819. De Bres cites Proverbs 17:15, 20:8, 20:26, 25:4–5, 24:24.

¹⁹⁸ *Racine*, 819. De Bres cites 1 Kings 18:40.

makes no distinction between the magistrate's duty to punish "religious" sins, i.e. those against the first table of the Decalogue, and his duty to punish other sins. In De Bres's interpretation, God commanded the punishment of both. This is confirmed by the magisterial role models of the Old Testament, rulers like Moses, Joshua, Samuel, and especially the "good kings" David, Hezekiah and above all Josiah.¹⁹⁹ These all "valiantly shed the blood of the wicked according to God's commandment."²⁰⁰

This kind of consecrated political or legal violence against religious offenders was by no means restricted to the biblical or early Christian eras.²⁰¹ The duty to punish religious offenses like idolatry was a duty still pertaining to the magistrates of De Bres's own time. It is not simply that magistrates are *permitted* to punish idolatry and blasphemy along with other serious crimes like murder; they are *dutybound* to do so:

Thus should the king, the rulers and the magistrates spill the blood of the evildoers, according to the examples in the Word of God and the command of God to do so; lest by their sympathy and compassion in saving the godless, they invoke God's wrath upon them by wanting to be more sympathetic and compassionate than God himself.²⁰²

In other words, civil governments should be forewarned: tenderheartedness is inappropriate, and God will judge rulers that fail to punish crimes appropriately.²⁰³

Magistrates are to punish such crimes because God in Scripture instructs them to do

¹⁹⁹ *Racine*, 808.

²⁰⁰ *Racine*, 843.

²⁰¹ In fact, De Bres specifically argued that "kings and rulers in the Christian church have the same power and authority to punish the godless that the good [Old Testament] kings formerly had." *Racine*, 824–5. De Bres's views will be more fully explained in chapter seven.

²⁰² *Racine*, 820.

²⁰³ Rulers who "spare the blood of the godless" endanger their own kingdoms, like Saul did by sparing Agag, *Racine*, 820. De Bres cites 1 Sam.15. Likewise, Ahab endangered his kingdom by sparing Benhadad. *Racine*, 820. De Bres cites 1 Kings 22:35. This is not only the case with murderers, although they seem to be foremost in De Bres's mind, but also with religious offenders. Once again, both "religious" criminals and criminals like murderers and robbers are simply interwoven in De Bres's discussion.

so.²⁰⁴ If he is too soft and fails to punish such serious offenses appropriately, the ruler pollutes not only himself but also the land.²⁰⁵

Conclusion

This chapter showed how De Bres in the 1555 edition of *Baston* defended religious liberty and viewed political government skeptically. From 1559 to 1565, however, we see what might be called a “Constantinian shift” in De Bres’s views: Increasingly, De Bres favored political compulsion of religion and viewed political government positively. This Constantinian shift was visible to a limited degree in *Baston* (1558). It was more pronounced in *Baston* (1559) and the three texts published together in 1561, i.e. the *Letter to the King*, the *Belgic Confession*, and the *Remonstrance to the Magistrates*.

²⁰⁴ De Bres writes, “For look how God himself speaks to them [the magistrates] through his Word and says: ‘Whoever sacrifices to other gods except to the Lord alone, must be killed.’ And again ‘You shall not allow a sorceress to live.’ . . . They, then, that are put to death by the magistrate according to the commandment of God contained in his word, are killed by the judgment of God, who condemns them to die. This is why Scripture emphatically says that the idolaters who worshipped the golden calf and were killed by Moses and his companions were put to death and killed by God, because they were executed according to his express commandment.” *Racine*, 836–7. De Bres cites from Exodus 22:20, 22:19, 32:27.

²⁰⁵ *Racine*, 837. De Bres cites Numbers 35:33. Some of the *caveats* about the political compulsion of religion that figured so prominently in *Baston* and in the documents related to *Confession* are still visible in *Racine*. For example, De Bres spends several paragraphs cautioning rulers against cruelty. Excessive harshness and rigor are indefensible, and rulers should not allow their seat of government to become a gallows. *Racine*, 821. Also, as De Bres reiterated in his other works, rulers should always take care that they punish only those who are truly guilty and worthy of punishment. *Racine*, 822. De Bres apparently sensed that his attempt in *Racine* to encourage civil rulers to greater activity and not to be driven “by too much gentleness” might be misunderstood, because at the end of the chapter dealing with civil government he repeats this disclaimer. He intends “simply to teach the charge and the duty of the magistrate in his calling,” and “by no means to arouse the governments to cruelty and inhumanity – that would never please God.” *Racine*, 645. Evidently the magistrates’ holy exercise of force, their “consecrating the hands for God,” even their valiant shedding the blood of wicked idolaters, does not give them *carte blanche* for cruelty and inhumanity.

Finally, *Racine* (1565) shows De Bres's shift at its latest development. By now, his advocacy of the political restriction of religious liberty had settled into a systematic and sophisticated position.

We infer from these findings that the cause for De Bres's shift of view must be sought between 1555 and 1565. Although it is possible that the cause was operative before 1555, its effect was not yet sufficient to shape *Baston* (1555). And since De Bres's shift was still slight in *Baston* (1558) and fully visible only in *Baston* (1559) and especially *Confession* (1561), it appears likely that the cause arose after 1555.

CHAPTER 3

BEYOND CONTINUITY: EXPLAINING DE BRES'S SHIFT

Why did De Bres embrace the political restriction of religious liberty in his shift from 1558 to 1565? This question is a vital key to explaining the reasons for De Bres's view of religious liberty. Although the standard explanation of De Bres's view of religious liberty, continuity with Reformed thought, offers some insight into the reasons for De Bres's shift, this explanation is inadequate. The continuity answer needs to be supplemented with contextual reasons that explain *why* De Bres moved toward such continuity. In other words, why did the political restriction of religious liberty make theological and political sense in De Bres's historical context?

Continuity Between De Bres and Reformed Thought

As we have seen in the first chapter, the aim of this dissertation is to suggest reasons for De Bres's view of religious liberty. Why did De Bres advocate a degree of political compulsion of religion? This question now prompts another, considering what we have found in the previous chapter: why did De Bres shift so profoundly from 1558 to 1565? So profound was this shift, and so undeviating was De Bres's commitment to it in his subsequent writings, that whoever explains De Bres's view of religious liberty also needs to account for his radical shift from 1558 to 1565.

This necessity of adequately accounting for De Bres's shift does not mean that scholars whose explanations have overlooked it have little to offer in their explanations

of De Bres's view of religious liberty.¹ Their scholarly explanations would still be of value to the extent that they can also account for the change in De Bres's view. This raises the question, however: Can the explanation for De Bres's view of religious liberty which some scholars have suggested, that of his continuity with Reformed thought, account for his shift from 1558 to 1565? The answer is yes – but only to some extent.

Reformers, Reformed Thought and the Sixteenth Century

As the first chapter detailed, several scholars have suggested a simple explanation for De Bres's advocacy of the political restriction of religious liberty: various degrees of continuity between De Bres's thought and wider theological, philosophical and political thinking.² De Bres's view, they suggest, was in continuity (more thinly) with specific reformers like Calvin and Beza, or (more richly) with Reformation thought in general, with the sixteenth century *Zeitgeist*, or with the thought of previous centuries.³ In other words, De Bres believed rulers must restrict religious liberty because that is what specific reformers, or general Reformed thought, or even the sixteenth century or some other earlier age believed.

For example, rich connections between De Bres's view and a theocratic tradition in ancient, medieval, and early modern thought have been identified by Hendrikus Berkhof. According to Berkhof, De Bres shows how thinkers, “even in the sixteenth century could

¹ As far as I am aware, no scholar has described the shift in De Bres's thought that the previous chapter outlined.

² As the first chapter pointed out, scholars have almost without exception limited their investigation to Art.36 of De Bres's *Confession*.

³ See the notes in the first chapter for bibliographical references.

not imagine theocracy as something that could accommodate toleration.”⁴ Continuity with ancient, medieval, and sixteenth century thought, Berkhof suggests, explains why De Bres’s notion of theocracy excluded the political toleration of religion.

But can this continuity also account for De Bres’s shift from 1558 to 1565? Yes, although not fully. That De Bres’s shift was to some extent aided by wider Reformed thought appears likely, even commonsensical, when one considers wider Reformed thought on the political restriction of religious liberty. De Bres’s Constantinian shift emphasized a more optimistic appreciation of political government as a positive and divine institution, as well as a recognition of the duty of political rulers to compel in religious matters.⁵ These same emphases were promoted by leading reformers in the sixteenth century, including those whose works De Bres interacted with: Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger, Melancthon, À Lasco, Beza, and Calvin, for example.⁶ We shall now observe that these influential reformers were promoting these emphases, especially the

⁴ Berkhof, *De kerk en de keizer*, 163.

⁵ As the previous chapter described, this involves that the ruler must enforce what is right and good and punish what is wrong and bad *also in matters of religious doctrine and worship*, for example, by acting against idolatry and false religion. As Art. 36 of De Bres’s *Confession* states: “And their office is not only, to restrain and watch over the political, but also over the church matters, to remove and overthrow all idolatry and false worship of God, to destroy the kingdom of the Antichrist, and advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, to ensure the preaching of the Word of the Gospel everywhere, so that God be honored and served by everyone as He has required it by his Word.” *Confession* (1561)^c, 33.

⁶ These authors’ books were among those discovered in January 1562 by the Governness’s commissioners in De Bres’s study just outside the city wall of Tournai. The report of the commissioners to the Governness mentioned that they had found “several very pernicious books of Calvin, Luther, Melancthon, Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger, Brenz, and others thoroughly heretical both in French and in Latin, with some books in Greek, and various other collected books, for the most part heretical and forbidden.” Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 46. For the commissioners’ entire letter to the Governness, see the *Papiers d’Etat*, Correspondence de Tournay, 1561–1563, fols. 136–38, reproduced in Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 45–48. Consequently, the list of authors used by De Bres includes Calvin, Luther, Melancthon, Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Bucer, Bullinger, and Brenz (mentioned by the commissioners’ report), À Lasco and Maarten Micron (acknowledged, together with Calvin and Bullinger, by De Bres in *Racine*, a.iii r.), Beza (discussed in Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession*, 71–91), Viret and Thomas Cranmer (identified, with others like Calvin and Bullinger, by Wim Moehn.) See Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 22–5 and Moehn, “De Bres in de kaart gekeken,” 296–309.

political restriction of religious liberty, in their confessional writings before and during the time of De Bres's shift. Since we know that these reformers were read by De Bres and some of them occasionally influenced De Bres, it follows that their emphasis on political restriction of religious liberty likely encouraged De Bres's shift.⁷

A brief survey of confessional writings by these reformers shows their widely shared view that political rulers should use their power to compel in matters of religious doctrine and worship. Zwingli, one of the authors that De Bres read, stressed the religious task of political rulers in his confessional writings. Thus Zwingli's *Short Christian Instruction* gives the political magistrate a definite duty in religious matters, although he should act with restraint.⁸ Idolatrous practices, such as the worshipping of God by using images "are to be tolerated nowhere on earth."⁹ To protect the honor of God, the political rulers should "act earnestly" against "stiff-necked ones that will not yield to the word of God."¹⁰ When false or idolatrous religious practices are promoted "indecently" and obstinately, without proper scriptural grounds, private individuals should not act against such false teachers but rather "leave them to the civil government which will handle them as is fitting."¹¹ Against such "pernicious" and "supercilious" offenders, government

⁷ For a brief discussion of the idea in the Reformed confessions that the political ruler should enforce both tables of the Ten Commands, i.e. also the first four commandments specifying so-called "religious" sins (i.e. the doctrine of *cura utriusque tabulae*), see Rohls, *Reformed Confessions*, 258–264.

⁸ "Zwingli's Short Christian Instruction" in James T. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 1, 1523–1552* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 9. See also Emil Elgi and Georg Finsler, eds., *Corpus Reformatorum, Vol.89* (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger, 1908), 628. One example of such restraint is that Zwingli's rejection of the Catholic priests is tempered by humaneness. The Catholic priests should first be warned about their errors and be allowed to cease their practices before acting against them.

⁹ "Zwingli's Short Christian Instruction" in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 35.

¹⁰ "Zwingli's Short Christian Instruction" in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 30.

¹¹ "Zwingli's Short Christian Instruction" in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 39.

must act according to Matthew 18:17 and Deuteronomy 13 – in other words, idolatrous religious leaders and false prophets may even be executed.¹²

Zwingli similarly promoted the political compulsion of religion in another of his confessional writings, the *Fidei Expositio* (1531). *Fidei Expositio* recognizes the difference between the domain of divine laws that command the conscience, and the domain of human laws that function to arrange and regulate external affairs in society.¹³ Notwithstanding, political rulers' compulsive authority extends to certain religious matters.¹⁴ The assertive religious task ascribed to the government in *Fidei Expositio* is evident in the appeal of the confession's final paragraphs to King Francis I of France, the "most holy King."¹⁵ Zwingli pleads with the king to "gird yourself to receive with due

¹² "Zwingli's Short Christian Instruction" in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 30. Matthew 18:17 merely requires the sinner that refuses to repent despite the condemnation of the congregation to be treated like a heathen and publican, but the reference to Deuteronomy 13 is more ominous, as has already been seen in the discussion of De Bres's insertion of Deuteronomy 13 into *Bastion* (1558). Deuteronomy 13 requires idolatrous religious leaders and false prophets to be stoned (v.5–11), and cities that are involved in such false worship to be attacked and burned and all their inhabitants to be killed (v.12–16). Government is not left any choice but to deal "as is fitting" with idolatry, false religion, or blasphemy in the form of the mass, because "when Almighty God reveals his word, then people must see that they comply with it, or they will invite the wrath of God on themselves." "Zwingli's Short Christian Instruction" in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 36, 39.

¹³ "Zwingli, *Fidei Expositio*" in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 223.

¹⁴ For example, the sixth chapter of *Fidei Expositio*, "The Church," gives civil government a vital role in the proper functioning of the church. This necessity is traced to the fact that the visible church "contains many rebellious and traitorous members who having no faith care nothing if they be a hundred times cast out of the Church," wherefore "there is need of a government, whether of princes or of nobles, to restrain shameless sinners. For the magistrate carries the sword not in vain." "Zwingli, *Fidei Expositio*" in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 198. Without the sword of the magistrate, the confession is saying, church discipline will in the case of unbelieving members simply have no effect. According to *Fidei Expositio*, still committed to the ideal of a *corpus christianum*, there should be an overlap of civil and church rule, and "it is clear that without a temporal government the Church is crippled and incomplete." Political government is thus "necessary to the completeness of the ecclesiastical body." "Zwingli, *Fidei Expositio*" in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 198. This role of government in the life of the church is reiterated in the seventh chapter of *Fidei Expositio*, on civil government: "To sum up, in the Church of Christ government is just as necessary as preaching." Just as a human person needs both a body and a soul, "so the Church cannot exist without the civil government." "Zwingli, *Fidei Expositio*" in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 199.

¹⁵ "Zwingli, *Fidei Expositio*" in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 209.

honor the Christ who is to be born anew for us and brought back to us.” Thus the restoration of Christianity involves royal activity, a girding on of royal armor, in order to recognize Christ, much as a lesser noble recognizes a higher one.¹⁶ Zwingli urged the king to take up his religious duty with vigor:

Go on, then, with these heroic virtues, seize shield and spear, and attack unbelief with dauntless and intrepid courage and with that body of yours conspicuous for all grace. Thus when the other kings shall see you, the most Christian king, championing the glory of Christ, they will follow you and turn out Antichrist.¹⁷

Such psalmodic exhortations to “seize shield and spear,” to courageously “attack unbelief,” to “champion the glory of Christ,” and to “turn out Antichrist” had strong military overtones. Zwingli’s clear intention was that royal power, the compulsive power of government, should be used to promote true religion and to expel false religion.

A similar doctrine is found in another early confession written in part by Bullinger, whose influence De Bres acknowledged, and by Bucer, whom De Bres read.¹⁸ This

¹⁶ The king’s business was nothing less than the restoration of the gospel, Zwingli implies: “For I see that by the providence of God it has come to pass that the kings of France are called ‘most Christian,’ since the restoration of the gospel of the Son of God was to take place in your reign.” This was an overly optimistic reading of the purpose of divine providence in French political history, as subsequent decades would reveal, but the optimism was clearly excited by the prospect of the king’s assuming the task of reforming the church. Zwingli gives an example of what this would involve in an appendix to the confession: The government of Zurich abolished the mass and decreed that “no one shall celebrate the Mass in our city after the Popish fashion henceforth.” Inviting the king to be similarly bold, Zwingli mentions that this example of abolishing the mass by governmental decree was followed by “many princes, nobles, peoples, and cities in Germany.” He implores, “We have dismissed the Mass, and pray that your Majesty be strong mightily in God.” “Zwingli, Fidei Expositio” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 209.

¹⁷ “Zwingli, Fidei Expositio” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 209.

¹⁸ See the list of reformers with whose works De Bres interacted earlier in this chapter. According to Moehn, De Bres used French translations of some of Bullinger’s works, such as *La source d’erreur* (1549) and *La perfection des Chrestiens* (1552), extensively in *Baston*. See Moehn, *Focus op de Kerkvaders*, 11. De Bres acknowledged Bullinger’s influence in *Racine*, a.iii r. He also extensively used Bullinger’s works for *Baston*, see Wim Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 11, 16; Wim Moehn, “De Bres in de kaart gekeken,” 306.

confession was the *First Helvetic Confession* of 1536, the *Confessio Helvetica Prior*.¹⁹ The *First Helvetic Confession* advocated that the political magistrate use his power in religious matters. “Since every magistrate is from God,” the Confession declares, “his principal duty . . . is to defend and look after religion by curbing all blasphemy; and just as the prophet teaches from the Word of God, to perform it vigorously.”²⁰ There was, therefore, a connection between political government’s divine origin, and the priority of its duty to use its compulsive power in religious matters, which was its “principal duty.”²¹ This duty involved, among other things, using the power of government to bridle, suppress, and punish unorthodox religion.²²

¹⁹ The First Helvetic Confession were jointly written by reformers like Bullinger, Bucer, Myconius, Capito, and others. The confession presented the common faith of the German-speaking Swiss cities that had joined the Reformation, including Zurich, Basle, Berne, Schaffhausen, St. Gall, Muhlhausen, and Biehl. Rohls, *Reformed Confessions*, 13. The First Helvetic Confession is arguably one of the most important Reformed confessions. The First and Second Helvetic Confessions have been described by Heinz Schilling as two of the four most significant Calvinist confessions. Heinz Schilling, “Confessional Europe,” in *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600. Vol.2*, ed. Thomas A. Brady, Heiko Augustin Oberman, and James D. Tracy (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 641. The other two most significant Reformed confessions identified by Schilling are the Zurich Consensus of 1549 and the Canons of Dordrecht of 1619. Philip Schaff calls the First Helvetic Confession the “first Reformed creed of national authority.” Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom. Vol.1* (New York: Harper, 1919), 389.

²⁰ “First Helvetic Confession (1536),” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 351. The magistrate was thus given the positive task of defending religion, of “looking after” [*procurare*] it, and of “curbing” [*reprimere*] (or “repressing” or “preventing”) all blasphemy – a duty which does not permit any lack of fervor but is to be performed with vigor. Significantly, the Latin word used for “taking care of,” *procurare*, connotes the notion of “conducting the administration of the affairs of another.” Ambrosius Calepinus, *Bergomatis Lexicon* (Paris: Jacob Kerver, 1538), 1137. The magistrate’s task, then, is to administer God’s affairs in religious matters. Comparable terms are used by other reformers: Calvin sometimes referred to the civil government as God’s vice-regents or representatives (Fr. *lieutenants*), and he and others used terms like “vicars” of God or Christ (*vicarius Dei an Christi*).

²¹ The German text puts it even stronger: The magistrate’s “*hochst und feurnamst ampt* [highest and most eminent office] . . . is to defend and promote the honor of the true God as well as the true religion, by punishing and preventing all blasphemy.” H. A. Niemeyer, *Collectio confessionum in ecclesiis reformatis publicatarum* (Leipzig: J. Klinkhardt, 1840), 114. What the magistrate’s task of administering God’s affairs in religious affairs involves, in addition to the suppression of false religion, is further spelled out: Governments should “keep watch that the clear Word of God may be preached purely and sincerely and truly to the people” and even ensure that “the ministers of the church may have a just provision.” “First Helvetic Confession (1536),” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 351.

²² Magistrates had a duty to use its compulsive force of law against “heretics and schismatics,” defined by the First Helvetic Confession as “whoever depart from the holy fellowship of the church, and either bring in or follow strange doctrines.” “First Helvetic Confession (1536),” in Dennison, *Reformed*

A similar view is found in another confession authored by Bullinger. This was the significant Reformed confession, the *Second Helvetic Confession* of 1566.²³ Art.30 of the *Second Helvetic Confession* summarizes its view of the religious duty of the political ruler: “Indeed we teach that the care of religion chiefly pertains to the holy magistrate.”²⁴ The ruler must, “after the example of the most holy kings and princes of the people of the Lord, advance the preaching of the truth and the pure and sincere faith and shall root out lies and all superstition, with all impiety and idolatry, and shall defend the church of God.”²⁵ In other words, the ruler must follow the examples of the theocratic kings of Israel and promote the preaching of true doctrine, abolish idolatry and false religion and

Confessions, Vol.1, 350–1. The Anabaptists, referred to as “Catabaptists,” are explicitly listed as belonging to this category of heretics that “since the beginning continue to labor today.” “First Helvetic Confession (1536),” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 351. Such heretics, the Confession declares, “if they obstinately do not heed the warnings of the church and of Christian teaching,” are “to be suppressed [cohercendos] by the magistrate, so that they do not by contagion infect the flock of God.” Niemeyer, *Collectio confessionum*, 121. I am translating “cohercendos” as “suppressed.” The German text reads that they are to be “gestrafft und hynderhalten,” i.e. “punished and suppressed,” suggesting the notion of force. See Niemeyer, *Collectio Confessionum*, 114. Latin word “coerceo” permits a range of meanings. The famous sixteenth century lexicographer Calepino includes the notions of “bind” [restringere] “contain” [continere] “restrain” [refrenare] or “force” or “compel” [compellere]. Ambrosius Calepinus, *Bergomatis Lexicon* (Paris: Jacob Kerver, 1538), 107. Later dictionaries give similar definitions. Elisha Coles defines it as “to hold hard, bridle in, tye up, compel, correct, punish, subdue, restrain.” These meanings all connote the idea of force. Elisha Coles, *A Dictionary, English-Latin, and Latin-English* (London: Parker, 1699) s.v. “coerceo.” Similar are the meanings listed by Robert Ainsworth: “1. To restrain, to stop, to stay. 2. To bridle or curb. 3. To keep under, to keep in awe. 4. To bind or tie up. 5. To comprehend, or contain. 6. To force, or compel, to hinder, or forbid. 7. To correct, or punish. . . Magistratus – multa, vinculis, verberibusve coërcento, Cic.” Robert Ainsworth and Thomas Morell, *An Abridgement of Ainsworth's Dictionary, Vol.2* (London: Charles Revington, 1758). P. G. W. Glare connects the Latin word’s sense of punishment with the magistrate as subject. P. G. W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 343. In the present context, to opt for “bridle,” as Dennison translates, appears too meek, especially in light of the German language of the Confession. See Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 351.

²³ Schaff describes the Second Helvetic Confession as “the most widely adopted, and hence the most authoritative of all the continental Reformed symbols, with the exception of the Heidelberg Catechism.” Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom, Vol.1*, 394.

²⁴ “The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)” in James T. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Vol. 2, 1552–1566* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 880.

²⁵ “The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.2*, 880.

defend the church of God against false doctrine and false practice. This means that the ruler must, by his power, prevent the preaching of false doctrine; in fact he was to “hold the Word of God in his hands and see to it that nothing is taught contrary thereunto.”²⁶

But it also means that the ruler must punish more serious and recalcitrant religious error.²⁷ Thus, magistrates were not allowed to tolerate false religious doctrine and practice, whether in the form of false preaching, idolatry, heresy, or blasphemy.

Another example of similar doctrine is found in a confession that according to scholarly consensus directly influenced De Bres’s own *Confession* written during the period of his shift, the 1559 *French Confession* or *Gallican Confession*.²⁸ According to the French Confession, God has “delivered the sword into the hands of the magistrates, that so sins committed against both tables of God’s law, not only against the second but

²⁶ “The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, Vol.2, 880.

²⁷ The magistrate was to use the “sword of God . . . against blasphemers,” and he had to “suppress stubborn heretics (which are heretics indeed), which cease not to blaspheme the majesty of God, and to trouble the church.” “The Second Helvetic Confession (1566)” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, Vol.2, 880.

²⁸ The French Confession of Faith was authored in its original form by Calvin and his pupil, Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, Vol.1, 498. It was reworked by Francois de Morel. Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 62–3. Beza and Viret, too, probably gave some input. See “The French Confession (1559)” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, Vol.2, 140. Its influence upon the Belgic Confession has been pointed out by several scholars. See e.g. Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer*, Vol.3b, 621, 622, 630, 631, 633, 635; Erik De Boer, “Franse geloofsbelijdenis,” in *Confessies: gereformeerde geloofsverantwoording in zestiende-eeuws Europa*, ed. M. Te Velde and A. Bijlsma-van Bochove (Heerenveen: Groen, 2009), 355. De Boer, for example, describes it as the “primary exemplar” for De Bres’s *Confession*. Elsewhere, De Boer writes that the Belgic Confession was “modeled” on the French Confession. Erik De Boer, “Calvijns Brief over De Bres’s belijdenis,” in *Guido de Bres: zijn leven, zijn belijden*, ed. Emile Braekman and Erik de Boer (Utrecht: Kok, 2011), 169. According to Gootjes, too, the French Confession was evidently the *Confession*’s most influential source. Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 89. Gootjes argues that it is obvious that the French Confession served as the template or “pattern” for De Bres’s *Confession*. Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 64. A comparison of the two confessions reveals a close resemblance in the overall structure, but also a remarkable correspondence in content, both in directly similar sentences and paragraphs and in paraphrased content. Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 65–7. De Bres consciously followed the content of the Gallican Confession, Gootjes argues, although in De Bres’s hands it “grew far beyond Calvin’s original draft and even beyond the Gallican Confession.” Also with respect to its teaching on the civil magistrate, the French Confession closely resembles De Bres’s Belgic Confession. Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 67.

the first also, may be suppressed.”²⁹ The first table of the Decalogue contains the first four commandments, the first three relating to offenses such as idolatry, false worship, heresy, false religion, and blasphemy, and the fourth relating to the keeping of the Sabbath.³⁰

Finally, recent scholarship maintains that another Reformed confession directly influenced De Bres: Theodore Beza’s Confession of Christian Faith or *Confession de la foy chrestienne* of 1560.³¹ Art. 42 of the section “of the church” in Beza’s *Confession*

²⁹ “The French Confession (1559)” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.2*, 154. The French Confession discusses the topic in two separate articles, Art. 39 on the “authority of magistrates” and Art. 40 on “obedience to magistrates.” Art.39, as translated by Dennison, reads: “We believe that God will have the world to be ruled by laws and civil government, that there may be some sort of bridles by which the unruly lusts of the world may be restrained; and that, therefore, He appointed kingdoms, commonwealths, and other kinds of principalities, whether hereditary or otherwise, and not that alone, but also whatever pertains to the ministration of justice, whereof He avows Himself the author; and, therefore, has He even delivered the sword into the hands of the magistrates, that so sins committed against both the tables of God’s law, not only against the second but the first also, may be suppressed. And, therefore, because God is the author of this order, we must not only suffer magistrates, whom He has set over us, but we must give them all honor and reverence as unto His officers and lieutenants which have received their commission from Him to exercise so lawful and sacred a function.”

Article 40 reads: “Therefore, we affirm that obedience must be yielded unto their laws and statutes, that tribute must be paid to them, taxes and all other duties, and that we must bear the yoke of subjection with a free and willing mind, although the magistrates are infidels; so that the sovereign government of God may be preserved entire. Wherefore we detest all those who do reject the higher powers, and would bring in a community and confusion of goods, and subvert the course of justice.” See “The French Confession (1559)” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.2*, 154.

³⁰ This view that the magistrate must enforce the first table of the law also appears in art.39 of the subsequent recension of the *French Confession*, the *Confession of La Rochelle* (1571), adopted by the “Synod of Princes” in which Theodore Beza played a large role. “The Confession of La Rochelle (1571)” of Princes” in James T. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation, Vol. 3, 1567–1599* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 322.

³¹ See e.g. Emile Braekman, “Les sources de la Confessio Belgica,” *Bulletin de la commission de l’histoire des Églises Wallones* 7 (1961), 19–22. Gootjes has identified Beza’s confession as the second most important source for the *Confession*. According to Gootjes, “Guido de Bres probably wrote an outline for a confession based on the Gallican Confession and then decided to include material from Beza’s confession as well.” Beza’s Confession was “worked into an already existing structure” of De Bres’s *Confession*. Many full sentences from Beza’s confession appear in De Bres’s *Confession*, as well as smaller phrases and expressions, for example in Articles 10, 12, 13, 18, 22, 27, 29, and 33 of the *Confession*. Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 89. According to Gootjes, Beza’s *Confession* had an influence upon De Bres’s that was “more pervasive than has been acknowledged up to now.” Beza’s *Confession* served as a model for De Bres’s Confession, Gootjes contends, and its influence upon De Bres’s was “more pervasive than has been acknowledged up to now.” Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 91. The lengthiest such influence by Beza’s confession is upon Art. 37 of De Bres’s *Confession*. Art. 37 is regarded by Gootjes as

declares that the “duty and office” of the magistrate is not simply to maintain justice, but “principally to order that religion be perfect and holy, and that the whole church be ordered according to the Word of God.”³² Once again, a degree of restriction of religion is described as government’s principal duty. The political government must, “as the case requires,” protect the church against trouble makers and punish those affected by church discipline.³³ In this, the good kings of Israel serve as role models. Beza mentions, as examples of faithful princes who “have willingly done their duty,” David, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, “and other faithful kings and emperors,” presumably referring by “faithful . . . emperors” to Christian Roman emperors like Constantine, Gratian, Valentinian, Theodosius, and Justinian.³⁴ By stressing the ruler’s task to order religion and the church and to reinforce church discipline, and by impressing upon the magistrate the example of the reforming kings of Israel, Beza’s Confession asserts the duty of the magistrate to compel also in religious matters.

To summarize, all these Reformed confessions promoted what amounted to the Constantinian view of political government and religious liberty toward which De Bres shifted between 1558 and 1565.³⁵ Political rulers have the duty, this view holds, to use their compulsive powers of law and government also in religious matters, by punishing transgressions of the first table of the Decalogue like idolatry, heresy, and blasphemy. As

“a reworking “ of the sixth chapter of Beza’s confession, which, like art. 37, begins with the expression “Finally we believe.” Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 90.

³² “Theodore Beza’s Confession (1560)” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, Vol.2, 332.

³³ “Theodore Beza’s Confession (1560)” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, Vol.2, 332.

³⁴ “Theodore Beza’s Confession (1560)” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, Vol.2, 332.

³⁵ More examples could be given. For example, À Lasco, one of those whom De Bres acknowledged as influential upon him (see *Racine*, a.iii, *r*) advocated the exercise of political magisterial power with regards to religious worship, to the extent of enforcing proper religious practices within the church. See the “Confession of John à Lasco (1551)” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, Vol.1, esp. on 575–6.

we have noted earlier in this section, the authors of these confessions all potentially influenced De Bres; we know that he studied their writings and used them in his own writings, admitted the influence of some of them, and corresponded with some of them, like John Calvin.³⁶

Moreover, since these were confessional documents, this view of the political compulsion of religion was not limited to the individual authors. These authors also expressed a confessional view – in other words, something of a wider Reformed consensus.³⁷ For Reformed thought, as for mid-sixteenth century thought more widely, religious liberty was not an option which Scripture permitted those in political office to tolerate. As a result, the major reformers whose works De Bres read and the wider Reformed consensus formed a kind of center of gravity of mainstream Reformed thought on the political restriction of religious liberty. This center of gravity would have acted as a force exerting an attraction upon De Bres to move in the direction in which he finally

³⁶ The report of the commissioners of the Governness who discovered De Bres's secret study in Tournai, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, refers to "a letter of John Calvin from the year 1556 in which he responds to certain questions which the aforesaid Guido had submitted to him, of which we send a summary to your Highness." Cited in Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 61. See Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 45–48.

³⁷ The mainstream view in the Reformed confessions was that the civil magistrate had to use its powers of legal compulsion also with respect to religious matters. Rulers have the duty, for example, to extirpate idolatry and false worship. Of course, as will appear even from the confessions here cited, there were limits in Reformed confessional thought to this duty of the legal compulsion of religion, and there was disagreement about how far this competence of the state extended to church affairs such as church government and church discipline. Also, there were rare exceptions in the Reformed camp whose thinking ran counter to the confessional mainstream, "libertines" like Castellio and Jacob Acontius, or those who pleaded for toleration of Anabaptism like Adrian van Haemstede, who disagreed with the less tolerant position of De Bres, Petrus Datheen, Maarten Micron, À Lasco, or the major reformers. See e.g. Ole Peter Grell, "Exile and Tolerance," in *Tolerance and intolerance in the European Reformation*, ed. Ole Peter Grell and Robert W. Scribner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3, 180; Jacobus Acontius, *Satanae stratagemata libri octo* (Basil: Petrus Perna, 1565).

did shift from 1558 to 1565, suggesting that wider Reformed thought contributed to De Bres's shift.

Further Evidence of Reformed Influence

There are also more specific indications that Reformed authors contributed to De Bres's changing view of political government and religious liberty from 1558 to 1565. For example, De Bres's writings often reflect the insights of Calvin, as several scholars have established, also with respect to political theology and the political limitation of religious liberty.³⁸ The imprint of Calvin upon De Bres was greater even than that of Theodore Beza, who, according to Gootjes, also notably impacted De Bres's *Confession* of 1561.³⁹ Scholars have also identified the influence of specific writings, like Calvin's catechism and his *Institutes*, upon De Bres's political theology.⁴⁰ The influence which

³⁸ The most important are Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, esp. 59–70, and Emile M. Braekman, "La pensée politique de Guy de Brès." *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, 115 (1969): 1–28. See also Emile M. Braekman "Guy de Brès et la Propagande Anabaptiste," *Bulletin Société Royale d'Histoire du Protestantisme Belge*, 4 (1952): 14–31; Visscher, *Staatkundige Beginselen*, 52–75, 78–107, 206–216, and especially 156–161; Van Goor, *Het Geloof der Vaders*, 329; Kakes, *De vaste grond*, 218; Willem Hendrik Gispén, *De geloofsbelijdenis der Nederlandsche Gereformeerde Kerk* (Kampen: Zalsman, 1900), 270–3; Van Dam, *God and Government*, 51; Diepenhorst, "Christelijke staat," 293; Polman, *Woord en belijdenis*, Vol.2, 308–309; Polman, *Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis*, Vol.4, 266–273; Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer*, Vol.3b, 558–569; Lane, *Justification*, 82. According to Jelle Faber, De Bres mirrored Calvin's view of civil magistrate's duty to enforce both tables of the Decalogue, even though De Bres uses slightly different terminology in Art. 36 of the *Confession* and his other writings. Jelle Faber, "Textus Receptus of the Belgic Confession," In *H.E.R.O.S. Lustrumbundel 1925–1980* (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1980), 97–100; Jelle Faber, "The Civil Government in Article 36 B.C." *Clarion* 28 no. 24 (1 Dec.1979): 512.

³⁹ Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 71–91. Gootjes summarizes how Calvin played an "indirect role" in what he calls "the early history" of De Bres's *Confession*, also because Calvin's draft was used for the French or Gallican Confession on which the Belgic Confession is based.

⁴⁰ Once again, scholarly attention has largely been limited to De Bres's *Confession*. For example, John Hesselink believes that virtually the same view of political government as Calvin's First Catechism of 1537/8 is taught in the Belgic Confession. John Hesselink, *Calvin's First Catechism: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 170. According to Hesselink, Calvin's catechism gives the civil magistrate three primary duties: "To keep [Fr. *conserver*] the public form of religion uncorrupted, to form the people's life by the best of the laws, and publicly and privately to look after the welfare and tranquility of the realm." (p.38) These three tasks summarized in the 1537 Catechism were subsequently

Calvin's *Institutes* exerted upon De Bres as well as Calvin's indirect influence via Pierre Viret have recently been affirmed by Moehn's analysis of the citations in *Bastion*.⁴¹

Indicative of the extent to which De Bres's theology comported with Calvin's is that Calvin personally approved the 1561 edition of De Bres's *Confession*, as appears from a letter of advice written by Calvin on behalf of the ministers of Geneva.⁴² Later, advisors

expanded in later editions of Calvin's *Institutes*, Hesslink argues (p.169). Hence Hesslink thinks Bres's *Confession* also closely resembles Calvin's *Institutes* (p.170). According to Hesslink, like De Bres's *Confession*, Calvin's *Institutes* mention religious matters as one of the main purposes of civil government: "Civil government has as its appointed end, so long as we live among men, to cherish and protect the outward worship of God, to defend sound doctrine of piety and the position of the church, to adjust our life to the society of men, to form our social behavior to civil righteousness, to reconcile us with one another, and to promote general peace and tranquility." Calvin, *Institutes* IV.20.2 cited in Hesselink, *Calvin's first catechism*, 169–170. Elsewhere, Calvin describes a twofold purpose, he suggests, of which "the first is 'to prevent idolatry, sacrilege against God's name, blasphemies against his truth, and other public offenses against religion from arising and spreading among the people.' Thus far the function of the state is to guarantee and support a 'public manifestation of religion [*publica religionis facies*] among Christians.'" Calvin, *Institutes* IV.20.3 cited in Hesselink, *Calvin's first catechism*, 169–170. Calvin's catechism's view of the task and purpose of civil government that was, according to Hesselink, amplified in his *Institutes*, resonates in De Bres's view in Art. 36 of his *Confession* which also tasked the civil ruler with the prevention of idolatry and false religion. *Confession* (1561)^F, 21; (1561)^C, 33. De Bres, like most reformers, would likely have agreed with Calvin's catechism that "the second table of the law (love of neighbor) always depends on the first (love of God)" because "both tables of God's law . . . undergird a well-ordered society which is just and righteous," Hesselink, *Calvin's first catechism*, 170.

⁴¹ Moehn, *Focus op de Kerkvaders*, 9, 10. According to Moehn, fifty-three citations in *Bastion* can be traced to Calvin's *Institutes*. Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 14. De Bres obtained twenty of the citations of Augustine in *Bastion* from Calvin. Moehn, "De Bres in de Kaart Gekeken" 302. Not only did De Bres read the *Institutes* and adapt much from Calvin directly (Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 11), but but there was also an indirect Calvinistic influence at work: Statistically, Calvin's colleague and friend, Pierre Viret, emerges as one of De Bres's favorite authors. *Bastion* reproduced fifty-three citations from no less than nine books by Viret. Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 13.

⁴²See W. Lobstein, W. Baldensperger, and Ludwig Horst, eds., *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia, Vol.10* (Brunsvick: C.A. Schwetschke, 1863), 224–6, esp. on 225. The letter is also fully cited in Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 199–200. Although Calvin's letter of advice is undated, it was likely given shortly before rather than after the *Confession*'s publication in 1561. According to Martinus Schook, Calvin was approached for his opinion in 1559. Martinus Schook, *Liber de bonis vulgo ecclesiasticis dictis* (Groningen: Johannes Nicolas, 1651), 520. That De Bres's doctrine often echoes Calvin's has long been recognized: Already in their report to King Philip II of December 19, 1561, the investigators of the Duchess of Parma noted that the Belgic Confession was "full of all the errors and perverse doctrine of Calvin." The late sixteenth and early seventeenth century writer Anthonius Thysius even suggests that in the process of creating the *Confession*, De Bres and others obtained input from several "faithful ministers" in the southern Netherlands (Lille, Tournai, Valenciennes) and even, via Jean Crespin, from some in Geneva, "and especially . . . that exceptional and valuable man of God, John Calvin, at Geneva." Anthonius Thysius, *Leere ende Order der Nederlandsche soo Duytsche als Walsche Ghereformeerder kerken: in twee deelen onderscheyden* (Amsterdam: Pieter Pitersz, 1615), (***) 2 v. (Thysius numbered the foreword by increasing numbers of asterisks and recurring arabic numerals.) The accuracy of aspects of Thysius's account has been

in Geneva, possibly including Calvin, approved De Bres's *Confession* after the 1566 synod of Reformed churches in Antwerp.⁴³

That wider Reformed thought contributed to De Bres's shift is also suggested by some historical events in De Bres's life. From around 1557 to early 1559, De Bres formally studied theology in Lausanne and then in Geneva under Beza (and possibly also Calvin).⁴⁴ This period of study in Lausanne and Geneva thus preceded the visible start of De Bres's shift in 1558 and 1559, leaving enough time for De Bres to be steeped in the magisterial political theology then dominant in Geneva, which some reformers called the "New Jerusalem."⁴⁵

The likelihood seems almost compelling, therefore, that the intellectual influence of major reformers would have contributed to De Bres's shift.

Inadequacy of Continuity as a Causal Explanation

Continuity between the thought of De Bres and leading reformers or wider sixteenth century thought does not, however, adequately account for the shift in De Bres's view from 1558 to 1565. This inadequacy is at least partly rooted in a more general problem, the problem of identifying continuity as a cause: How does it actually explain De Bres's

questioned by Van Langeraad, but the important point is that Calvin's influence in De Bres's thought has long been plausibly advocated. Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 104.

⁴³ Abraham Kuyper, ed., *D. Francisci Junii Opuscula theologica selecta* (Amsterdam: Frederic Muller and Johannes H. Kruyt, 1882), 26; Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 70, 91.

⁴⁴ This was some years after De Bres's return from England after the death of Edward VI in 1553. Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 22–23; "Procedures tenues" in S. Cramer and F. Pijper, *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica: geschriften uit den tijd der hervorming in de Nederlanden. Vol.8*, ('s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1911), 497.

⁴⁵ See Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform* (London: Yale University Press, 1981), 367.

shift to say that there was “continuity” between him and a specific reformer, Reformed thought in general, or the wider sixteenth century or medieval thought?

As we have seen in the first chapter, scholars widely accept that De Bres’s ideas of religious liberty, specifically in Art. 36 of the *Confession*, stand in some sort of continuity with the thought of reformers like Calvin, Beza, or Bullinger, or even with some vague notion like the sixteenth century *Zeitgeist*.⁴⁶ Additionally, a few scholars have traced De Bres’s ideas to the Middle Ages or even the late ancient period, again arguing for some sort of continuity.⁴⁷ Such appeals to continuity ring true: historical continuity is usually a self-evident explanation of any historical theological view. Later thinkers, as John of Salisbury famously remarked, are dwarves standing on the shoulders of giants. This was true in the early modern period no less than in medieval or ancient theology and philosophy.⁴⁸ Thus, even in the disruptive Reformations of the sixteenth century, a measure of continuity can almost always be assumed. This also applies to De Bres, as Moehn’s recent work has cogently demonstrated.⁴⁹

However, continuity between thinkers does not, by itself, explain much. Although the notion of continuity is by now well established in Reformation scholarship, it often has limited value as a historiographical tool.⁵⁰ How does “continuity” explain De Bres’s

⁴⁶ See e.g. Van Dam, *God and Government*, 51; De Pater, “Marnix van St. Aldegonde,” 1–2; H. Kakes, *De vaste grond*, 218; J. Van Lonkhuijzen, *De blijvende schriftuurlijke grondgedachte van art. 36 onzer geloofsbelijdenis: de positieve taak der overheid ten opzichte van den godsdienst* (Franeker: Wever, 1939), 14–30; Diepenhorst, “Christelijke staat,” 293; Polman, *Woord en belijdenis*, Vol.2, 308–309; and Polman, *Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis*, Vol.4, 266–273.

⁴⁷ Rothuizen, *Altijd bereid tot verantwoording*, 97–8; Kuyper, *Het Calvinisme: zes Stone-lezingen*, 92; Verkuyl, *Het Probleem Der Godsdienstvrijheid*, 167–181; Berkhof, *De kerk en de keizer*, 163.

⁴⁸ See Etienne Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience* (New York: Scribner, 1950), 91.

⁴⁹ Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*; and Moehn, “De Bres in de kaart gekeken.”

⁵⁰ A lack of conceptual precision in discussions of continuity in Reformation history has been criticized by Carl Trueman, who raises important methodological caveats. Carl Trueman, “The Reception of Calvin: Historical Considerations,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 91, no. 1–2 (2011): 20–1. An example

view, unless other views can be shown to have *caused* De Bres's view? Nevertheless, causality in historiography, as scholars have long warned, is an even thornier issue.⁵¹ The complexity of continuity as an explanation for De Bres's shift is visible both on a small scale, when looking at specific influencers of De Bres's thought (Calvin, Beza, Bullinger, À Lasco, etc.), and on a wider scale, when considering the influence of such aggregates as "Reformed thought" or "sixteenth century thought."

Did Calvin (or Beza, Bullinger, etc.) Cause De Bres's Shift?

In the case of individual reformers like Calvin, the well-founded resemblance between De Bres's Constantinian view of the political restriction of religious liberty and Calvin's (or, for that matter, any other reformer) that we have already noted does not yet indicate that Calvin's view (or Beza's, or Bullinger's, etc.) *caused* De Bres's Constantinian shift.

Of course, one might say that Calvin's view "caused" De Bres's shift, if the question is whether Calvin's insights can be described as a *sine qua non* for De Bres's views. So many similarities and even identical features in De Bres's writings are so obviously connected to Calvin that without Calvin's writings De Bres's position can scarcely be imagined.⁵² It is true, as has already been mentioned, that De Bres read Calvin and

of a careful methodological handling of continuity is given by Richard A. Muller. See e.g. his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987–2003); *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁵¹ See Michael Oakeshott, "Historical Continuity and Causal Analysis," in *Philosophical Analysis and History*, ed. W. H. Dray (New York: Harper & Row, 1966).

⁵² That De Bres's doctrine often echoes Calvin's has long been recognized. As has already been mentioned, in their report to King Philip II of December 19, 1561, the investigators of the Duchess of

consulted him for advice. Yet such general Calvinistic influence – to the extent of being a *sine qua non* for De Bres's Reformed thought – still falls short of establishing that on the matter of the political magistrate Calvin's views *caused* De Bres's.

Here lurks a risk of fallacious *post hoc ergo propter hoc* reasoning. The appeal of such reasoning is real, because as De Bres's time of study under Beza and possibly Calvin in Geneva in 1558 and 1559 indicates, increasing exposure to Calvin's influence coincided with De Bres's shift towards a higher view of civil government and its powers in religious matters – what one might term a more magisterial view. The likelihood seems compelling that the intellectual influence of Beza and Calvin in Geneva contributed to De Bres's later view on the political compulsion of religion.

Even this does not settle the matter, however, because in another case the same intellectual cause failed to produce a similar outcome. Like De Bres, Philip of Marnix, Lord of St. Aldegonde, studied at the Academy in Geneva in the late 1550's, and returned to the Netherlands in 1561.⁵³ Marnix thoroughly absorbed Calvinist theology. He soon became a leading figure in the organization of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and was present at the early synod of Antwerp in 1566.⁵⁴ But, unlike De Bres's post-1558 shift embracing the political extirpation of idolatry and false worship, Marnix favored a higher degree of political toleration and later promoted the so-called religious peace [*religievrede*] involving the toleration of the Roman Catholic religion when Dutch

Parma noted that the Belgic Confession was “full of all the errors and perverse doctrine of Calvin.” Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, xvii. The letter is cited in Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, xv – xviii.

⁵³ C. E. H. J. Verhoef, *Philips van Marnix, Heer van Sint Aldegonde* (Weesp: Heureka, 1985), 10.

⁵⁴ Arnoldus Rotterdam, *Verklaring Der Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis*, ed. Abraham Kuyper (Rotterdam: Gebroeders Hoge, [1795] 1900), 40; Thysius, *Leere ende Order*, (***) 2 v.

territories came to be controlled by a Protestant government.⁵⁵ Although Calvinistic influence and Genevan theological education might have been necessary conditions for an intellectual position like De Bres's, they were clearly not by themselves sufficient to produce it. We still need to explain why it made sense for De Bres to embrace the political restriction of religion, rather than opting for a position closer to Marnix and his own earlier defense of religious liberty in *Baston* (1555).

Likewise, the limits of the extent to which the influence of Calvin can explain De Bres's shift is indicated by the fact that De Bres sometimes displayed striking independence with respect to Calvin's thought. For example, De Bres was convinced that the apostle Paul was the author of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews, as stated in Art. 4 of De Bres's *Confession*.⁵⁶ Calvin disagreed. In the undated letter mentioned above, Calvin, in a probable reference to the *Belgic Confession*, sighed that "we should not want to ascribe the epistle to the Hebrews to Paul, since we are by firm arguments

⁵⁵ Marnix recognized, as De Pater puts it, that "a spiritual warfare was only to be conducted with spiritual weapons." De Pater, "De Godsdienstige Verdraagzaamheid bij Marnix van St. Aldegonde," 31. See also Duits, Hendrik, and Ton van Strien, *Een intellectuele activist: studies over het leven en werk van Marnix van Sint Aldegonde* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2001), 54. One should add that even Marnix lamented the rise of a spirit of religious relativism, i.e. that "each and everyone is really free to follow whatever religion and worship he prefers," which is, he wrote, the true root of "all public godlessness and mocking disparagement of all religion, which is nowadays apparently gaining the upper hand in the world." The cure, Marnix thought, was in part for government to provide faithful ministers of the Word. Government should also "by her daily official acts, as far as her vocation allows, seek, if it is possible, to try to repel and to wisely prevent and to hinder all false doctrine, heresy, and error." J.J. van Toorenenbergen, ed., *Philips van Marnix de St. Aldegonde. Godsdienstige en kerkelijke geschriften Vol. 2* ('s Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1873), vi-vii. But Marnix added that the latest "sect or heresy," "commonly called spiritualist fanatics or libertines" in fact "far surpasses all others in excess of evil and godlessness, since it under the guise of a spiritual and Christian forbearance" overthrows such direction-giving principles such as the Word of God. The doctrine of the spiritist fanatics (*geest-drijveren*) or libertines was also a threat to good order and political society. Toorenenbergen, *Marnix Godsdienstige en kerkelijke geschriften, Vol. 2*, vii. (Note that Van Toorenenbergen's pagination is confusing. This citation is not from Toorenenbergen's introduction, but from Marnix's "Onderzoeking ende Grondelijke Wederlegginge der Geestdrivische Leere" reproduced in volume 2 of Toorenenbergen's collection of Marnix's writings.)

⁵⁶ De Bres mentions the "fourteen letters of saint Paul." De Bres, *Confession* (1555), 2; De Bres, *Confession* (1566), A.iii.r. On this issue, see De Boer, "Calvijns Brief over De Bres's belijdenis," 169–170.

persuaded that it has another author.”⁵⁷ Yet De Bres made no effort in any of the editions of the *Confession* to soften his opinion on the issue and to accommodate himself to Calvin’s view.

Another example of De Bres’s independence is his decision to publish his *Belgic Confession* contrary to Calvin’s advice.⁵⁸ Whatever Calvin’s reasons for opposing publication, De Bres remained unpersuaded.⁵⁹ Hence, for all his intellectual and theological indebtedness to Calvin, we can be sure that De Bres was prepared to depart, publicly and boldly, from Calvin’s views. Surely this would have included Calvin’s views favoring the moderate political compulsion of religion, if De Bres did not believe them biblical and compelling.

⁵⁷ Lobstein, *Calvini Opera*. Vol.10, 225.

⁵⁸ See Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 44. According to the seventeenth century theologian Martinus Schoock, Adrian Saravia took parts of the Confession to “Calvin and the other Genevan theologians” for his advice in the year 1559. Schoock, *Liber de bonis*, 520. Calvin advised against the Belgic confession, preferring that the Netherlands use the French Confession, approved by the Synod of French Reformed churches in Paris earlier in 1559. One can only guess at Calvin’s reasons for advising against publication. He might have feared that a plethora of Reformed confessions would suggest disagreement and factions – an impression of Protestantism that Catholic propaganda, for political purposes, was always keen to foster. Such an impression would have weakened the societal appeal of the Reformed churches. See W. Verboom, *Kostbaar belijden: de theologie van de Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1999), 25. In addition, although Beza only presented the French Confession to King Charles IX at Poissy in 1561, it was already long before that date gaining recognition among French nobles. The churches in the Netherlands, Calvin might have thought, would benefit from the increasing political traction of the French Confession, and should leverage this potential in their attempts at gaining political recognition and working towards some sort of confessionalization. See the discussion of the importance of confessionalization for understanding the dynamics at work around De Bres’s *Confession* in chapter four.

⁵⁹ De Bres’s decision to bypass Calvin’s recommendation was carefully weighed and, it would seem, without injured pride: In 1561 De Bres, upon advice from Godfried van Wingen (Wingius), sent his draft *Confession* to churches in Emden, Frankfurt, London, and beyond, where it met with approval from influential church leaders like Cornelius Cooltuin, Valerandus Pollanus, and Petrus Datheen. See Schoock, *Liber de bonis vulgo ecclesiasticis dictis*, 520. Thus encouraged, De Bres proceeded to have it published and he had by January 1562 at least two hundred copies in his own possession, as reported by the commissioners of the Governness, the Duchess of Parma, in Tournai. See the *Papiers d’Etat*, Correspondence de Tournay, 1561–1563, fols. 136–38, reproduced in Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 45–48.

Consequently, Calvin's ideas could not simply have "caused" De Bres's. Although Calvin was singularly influential upon De Bres, continuity between De Bres and Calvin can offer only a partial and tentative explanation for De Bres's shift from 1558 to 1565. This conclusion about Calvin, who had greater influence upon De Bres than other reformers like Bullinger, Beza, À Lasco, Zwingli, Viret, and Cranmer, argues *a fortiori* that the ideas of these reformers also offer only partial and inadequate explanations for De Bres's shift.

Did the Reformation Cause De Bres's Shift?

Upon closer examination, continuity between De Bres's view from 1558 to 1565 and the mainstream Reformed view favoring political compulsion of religion is less a phenomenon explaining De Bres's shift than a phenomenon itself requiring explanation. This appears from two reasons: first, De Bres must have been well acquainted with the mainstream Reformed view from about 1548, yet he remained unconvinced by the time of *Baston* (1555); second, the coming of the Reformation to the Netherlands was too complex to suggest such a simple model of causality.

First, then, influence of major reformers and of mainstream Reformed thought inadequately accounts for De Bres's shift, because those same views were already known to him long before 1555, when the first edition of *Baston* appeared. In other words, already from 1548, when De Bres fled to England, he would have been exposed to the Reformed influences that, as we have remarked above, contributed to his eventual shift

from 1558 to 1565. Notwithstanding this formative exposure, De Bres was by 1555 still promoting religious liberty in a way uncharacteristic of broader Reformed thinking.⁶⁰

Two circumstances highlight the importance of the failure of wider Reformed thought to convince De Bres by 1555: First, the publication of *Baston* (1555) reveals De Bres had embraced Reformed theology by this time, and it was only on the issue of religious liberty that his view was conspicuously anomalous. In *Baston* (1555), De Bres shows himself to be a theologian and pastor who is completely at home in such important Reformed doctrines as the function of Scripture as the ultimate standard in theology,⁶¹ the distinction between grace and merit and justification by faith alone,⁶² the nature of the sacrament of the “holy supper,”⁶³ Christ as the only mediator,⁶⁴ the corruption of human free will,⁶⁵ objections to the use of images in the church,⁶⁶ and the nature and authority of the church.⁶⁷ De Bres’s precocity in so soon attaining such a sophisticated level of Reformed theological understanding would be puzzling, if one considered only the primitively organized state of the Reformed church in the Netherlands in the late 1540’s and early 1550’s. But the lively theological climate of the Strangers’ Churches in London provided opportunities for growth in Reformed theological growth unlike anywhere in

⁶⁰ See the discussion of *Baston* (1555) in the previous chapter.

⁶¹ *Baston* (1555), 157 ff.

⁶² *Baston* (1555), 37 ff.

⁶³ *Baston* (1555), 1 ff. De Bres’s marginal notes are instructive. For example, “The bread is the sign of the body of Christ.” *Baston* (1555), 6 r.

⁶⁴ *Baston* (1555), 100 ff.

⁶⁵ *Baston* (1555), 26 ff.

⁶⁶ *Baston* (1555), 106 ff.

⁶⁷ *Baston* (1555), 136 ff.

the Netherlands. Here was a safe climate for Reformed thought and worship offered by the *asylum Christi*, as Protestants often referred to England.⁶⁸

In addition, the religious climate in England during De Bres's sojourn in England makes it highly likely that De Bres would have been intimately exposed to the mainstream Reformed views that favored the political compulsion of religion. Shortly before De Bres's arrival in 1548, England had entered a fruitful period for Reformed thought on government and society, not only as the reforms of Henry VIII continued to reshape society, but especially after the boy king Edward VI ascended the throne in 1547. In England there was now dawning, it seemed, a magisterial Reformation equally committed to the triumph of the Reformed cause as that of Calvin's Geneva or the Zurich of Zwingli and Bullinger.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ On the theological climate that England offered, see e.g. Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign protestant communities in sixteenth century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). It is tempting to speculate how this theology was transmitted to De Bres. He much later acknowledged his indebtedness to the theology of John à Lasco and Maarten Micron, and it seems is possible that he knew them already in England (he later also met À Lasco in Frankfurt). *Racine*, a.iii r. Recently Wim Moehn has mooted the possibility that De Bres was in contact with Thomas Cranmer. This is by no means implausible. De Bres's extensive citation of the church fathers in *Baston*, and the fact that Cranmer was renowned for his well-furnished library, as well as Cranmer's own intense studies of the church fathers and his notes on them, let Wim Moehn suggest that Cranmer could have persuaded De Bres during his time in London of the value of studying the church fathers. Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 12. See also D.G. Selwyn, "Cranmer's library: Its potential for Reformation studies." In *Thomas Cranmer: Churchman and Scholar*, ed. Paul Ayris and D. G. Selwyn (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1999), 67–70. It has also been shown that soon after De Bres's return from England, he was citing works by Thomas Cranmer. Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 12. Additional circumstantial evidence suggesting a link between De Bres and Cranmer (and perhaps even De Bres's use of Cranmer's library?) is the list of Reformed and Lutheran authors later discovered in De Bres's study in January 1562, in the report already mentioned earlier of the commissioners of the Governness of the Netherlands, the Duchess of Parma. *Papiers d'Etat*, Correspondence de Tournay, 1561–1563, fols. 136–38, cited in Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 45–48. With only two exceptions, Calvin and Zwingli, all of these authors have been traced to Cranmer's library as it has been reconstructed in modern scholarship. Significantly, the authors so traced are not only the famous such as Luther, Bucer, Bullinger, Melanchthon, and Oecolampadius, but also the lesser figure Johannes Brenz. Selwyn, "Cranmer's library," 70. For more on Cranmer's library, see D.G. Selwyn, *The Library of Thomas Cranmer* (Oxford: Oxford Bibliographical Society, 1996).

⁶⁹ See Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts. Vol.1. Laws against images* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 247.

These were the years of answered prayers, because God had given England a reforming king commonly hailed as a new king Josiah.⁷⁰ As Stephen Alford writes, the reformers presented the young Edward as “a godly prince, a second king Josiah (2 Kings 22–23) guided by providence to extinguish once and for all the influence of the papal Antichrist of Rome in England.”⁷¹ Archbishop Cranmer charged Edward VI’s at his coronation “to see, with your predecessor Josiah, God truly worshipped, and idolatry destroyed, the tyranny of the Bishops of Rome banished from your subjects, and images removed. These acts be signs of a second Josiah, who reformed the church of God in his days.”⁷² Internationally, reformers were elated, and their hope that England’s king Josiah would use his power to abolish the idolatry of Catholicism was expressed by theologians and churchmen whose theological influence upon De Bres has been traced even to *Boston*

⁷⁰ Aston, *England’s Iconocasts*, 249. See also Stephen Alford, *Kingship and Politics in the Reign of Edward VI* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 51–2.

⁷¹ Alford, *Kingship and Politics in the Reign of Edward VI*, 2.

⁷² Henry Jenkyns, ed., *The Remains of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, Vol.2* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1833), 119. Cranmer’s address contained several references to Josiah. See also Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 62.

(1555), such as Cranmer,⁷³ À Lasco,⁷⁴ and Calvin.⁷⁵ Margaret Aston explains the meaning of the comparison:

It was for the best of reasons that the reformers cast their new king in an Old Testament role. It became commonplace (especially for those of more advanced beliefs) to advert to Edward VI as the young Josiah. There was a very distinct purpose in the choice of this Judaic prototype, for Josiah was a model of the king who had done his duty in rooting out idolatry.⁷⁶

What scholars have insufficiently realized, Aston, contends, is the significance of the popularity of comparing Edward VI with Josiah. According to Aston, “The prime importance of this pattern was that of a king who destroyed idolatry.”⁷⁷

⁷³ See Moehn, *Focus op de kerkvaders*, 12.

⁷⁴ John à Lasco wrote during his time in England in 1551 that as God had formerly raised up Josiah, to “restore the dignity and authority of his Divine law among his people” and to “renew the religion which had completely fallen into ruins,” God had now raised up Edward to be “the restorer of the Church of Christ in this most happy Kingdom” and the “the restorer of the true religion oppressed for the most part by the Antichrist.” “London Confession of John à Lasco” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 553–4. The Larger Emden Catechism of 1551, also written by Lasco, rejoiced that, “God, in this kingdom, most liberally placed us under a pious magistrate, namely King Edward the Sixth, who, from his youth hence, having expelled all idolatry and false religion from his kingdom, restored the true Apostolic faith, doctrine and just worship of God, just as did Josiah (2 Kings 22, 23).” “Larger Emden Catechism Catechism (1551)” in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.1*, 586. Since À Lasco was influential upon De Bres, as De Bres acknowledges in *Racine*, a.iii r., and since both were in England together, it seems likely that De Bres would have interacted with such ideas of À Lasco’s even before 1555.

⁷⁵ Calvin dedicated at least two of his commentaries to Edward VI. Calvin, John, *Joannis Calvinii Commentarii in Epistolas Canonicas: Petri unam, Joannis unam, Jacobi unam, Petri alteram, Judae unam* (Geneva: Jean Crespin, 1554); and John Calvin, *Commentaires sur le prophète Isaïe par M Jean Calvin. Avec la table, tant des passages que des sentences* (Geneva: Adam & Jean Riveriz, 1552). Jules Bonnet also includes in his work a dedicatory letter to Edward VI in a volume of four of Calvin’s sermons on Psalm 87. See Calvin’s “To Edward VI” in Jules Bonnet, ed., *Selected works of John Calvin. Tracts and Letters. Vol.2. Letters, Part 2. 1545–1553* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 354. Calvin wrote that God had established Edward VI as God’s “vice-regent” or “lieutenant in ordering and maintaining the kingdom of Jesus Christ in England.” Bonnet, *Calvin. Tracts and Letters. Vol.2*, 355. In 1551, Calvin wrote a letter to the young king repeatedly referring to Josiah, who proved himself “a prince excellent in faith, in zeal, and in all godliness.” Bonnet, *Calvin. Tracts and Letters. Vol.2*, 301. Calvin encouraged King Edward to be similarly zealous in abolishing superstitious religious worship: “Reach forward to the mark which is set before you in the example of this godly king, that you may have the honour, not only of having overthrown impieties which are clearly repugnant to the honour and service of God, but also of having abolished and razed to the ground, whatsoever served merely to nourish superstition.” Bonnet, *Calvin. Tracts and Letters. Vol.2*, 301.

⁷⁶ Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 249.

⁷⁷ Aston, *England's Iconoclasts*, 249.

Thus, in whatever English church circles De Bres moved, he would have encountered a presentation of mainstream Reformed doctrines of the political ruler's duty to use his political power to destroy idolatry and purge religion. He might even have heard Cranmer and À Lasco personally explain their hopes about England's King Josiah, if he ever met them, which is not unlikely. Yet, despite encountering the pull of these mainstream Reformed views, in 1555 De Bres in *Baston* emphasized religious liberty and a more pessimistic view of government. In other words, Reformed influences had long been insufficient to convince De Bres of a more magisterial, i.e. Constantinian, position. Obviously, therefore, more than these influences are needed to adequately explain De Bres's shift from 1558 to 1565.

A second reason why the later continuity between De Bres and the mainstream Reformed view is less a phenomenon explaining De Bres's shift than a phenomenon requiring explanation is the complexity of the early Reformation in the Netherlands. This complexity prevents us from inferring that the progress of the Reformation in the Netherlands simply "caused" De Bres to favor the political restriction of religious liberty, or that the mainstream Reformed view of religious liberty relentlessly rolled forward in one direction, conquering all the Reformation-minded in their way.

To be sure, with respect to the political restriction of religious liberty it is possible to identify continuities from 1558 to 1565 between De Bres and other reformers, just as one can identify continuities between the reformers and the centuries-old Christian justification of such restriction that extended, through the Middle Ages, back to at least the fourth century A.D. But there were also forces of *discontinuity* at work, and the webs of continuities between pre-sixteenth century Christianity and Reformed thought were

under severe strain, as seen in the debates that exploded after the execution of Servetus in Geneva in 1553. By the second half of the sixteenth century, versions of political toleration of religious liberty were advocated by French *politiques*, Erasmian humanists, Anabaptists, and spiritualists.⁷⁸ Such disruptive discontinuities were also present within the Reformed camp, as the published altercations between the Genevan theologians and Sebastian Castellio make evident.⁷⁹ In the Netherlands, the tradition of Erasmian civility involved a positive appreciation for toleration that often re-asserted itself in the second half of the sixteenth century, and competed with what J.C.A. de Meij calls a spirit of “militant Calvinism.”⁸⁰ Since De Bres could have opted for any of these alternative approaches to religious liberty, his embrace of the political restriction of toleration of the mainline magisterial tradition seems by no means a determined response.

The convoluted growth of Protestant thought in the southern Netherlands by the middle of the sixteenth century created a complicated lattice of continuities and discontinuities that is almost impossible to disentangle as causes and effects. Adding to this impossibility is the suddenness of the Dutch Reformation. Internationally, there was

⁷⁸ See Hans R. Guggisberg, “The Defence of Religious Toleration and Religious Liberty in Early Modern Europe: Arguments, Pressures and Consequence,” *History of European Ideas* 4 No 3 (1983): 35–50.

⁷⁹ See Sebastian Castellio, *Concerning Heretics, Whether They Are to Be Persecuted and How They Are to Be Treated: A Collection of the Opinions of Learned Men, Both Ancient and Modern*, ed. Roland H. Bainton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935.) Earlier editions are Sebastian Castellio, *De haereticis: an sint persequendi et omnino quomodo sit cum eis agendum, doctorum uirorum tum ueterum tum recentiorum sententiae* (Magdeburg: George Rausch, 1554); and Sebastian Castellio, *Corte ende duydelijcke wederlegghinghe, van' tghene door mr. Johan Calvijn tot beweringe vande macht der Overheynt int straffen der ketteren by gebracht wert* (N.p., 1613). See also e.g. John Calvin, *Defensio orthodoxae fidei de sacra Trinitate, contra prodigiosos errores Michaelis Serveti Hispani: ubi ostenditur haereticos iure gladii coercendos esse, et nominatim de homine hoc tam impio justè & meritò sumptum Genevae fuisse supplicium* ([Geneva]: Robert Estienne, 1554); Théodore de Bèze, *De haereticis a civili Magistratu puniendis libellus, adversus Martini Bellii farraginem et novorum Academicorum sectam* ([Geneva]: Robertus Stephanus / Robert Estienne, 1554).

⁸⁰ J.C.A. De Meij, *De watergeuzen en de Nederlanden, 1568–1572* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandische Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1972), 177–9.

nothing in Europe that could properly be called “Calvinism” until the early 1530’s.⁸¹ Whenever international Reformed theology in its Calvinist sense might have started to flourish, locally in the Netherlands there were no Reformed churches before the 1550’s.⁸² The boundaries between Lutheranism and Calvinism in the Netherlands in the 1550’s and even during the 1560’s were much more fluid than they later became.⁸³ When Reformed or Calvinist (rather than merely Protestant) ideas finally did start to take root in the Netherlands, their growth represented a jungle more than an orchard. Scholars like Enno van Gelder, Juliaan Woltjer, and A.Th van Deursen have painted a scene of hybrid and eclectic appropriation of the big European Reformation ideas by early protagonists of the Dutch Reformation. Local perspectives somehow meshed with international ideas without losing their regional character.⁸⁴ As Herman Selderhuis explains, wider European perspectives were conveyed to Dutch communities through a number of conduits, and were subsequently adapted to local and regional conditions and spread through society in various ways, some voluntary and some coercive.⁸⁵ The resulting

⁸¹In 1532 there was no sign that Calvin was yet a Protestant, as Ford Lewis Battle argues (*pace* Beza and Doumergue) based on an analysis of Calvin’s Commentary on Seneca’s *De Clementia*. Ford Lewis Battle, and André Malan Hugo, eds., *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969), 62. This is not to suggest that even Calvin was entirely original, because Calvin’s theology, too, was, as Trueman points out, “the expression of a number of traditions which neither originated with him nor were made confessionally normative by him or his writings.” Trueman, “The Reception of Calvin,” 24.

⁸² Horst Robert Balz et al (eds.), *Theologische Realenzyklopadie. Vol.24* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1994), 477. This is widely accepted. See e.g. Herman J. Selderhuis, *Handbook of Dutch Church History* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 181; Joke Spaans, “Reform in the Low Countries,” in *A Companion to the Reformation World*, ed. Po-chia R. Hsia (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 122.

⁸³ De Pater, “Godsdienstige Verdraagzaamheid bij Marnix van St.Aldegonde,” 4.

⁸⁴ A. T. Van Deursen, *Bavianen en Slijkgeuzen: kerk en kerkvolk ten tijde van Maurits en Oldebarnevelt* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 1991); J. J. Woltjer, *Friesland in hervormingstijd* (Leiden: Universitaire Pers, 1962); H. A. Enno van Gelder, *The Two Reformations in the 16th Century; A Study of the Religious Aspects and Consequences of Renaissance and Humanism* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1961); H. A. Enno van Gelder, *Van beeldenstorm tot pacificatie: acht opstellen over de Nederlandse revolutie der zestiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: Agon Elsevier, 1964); H. A. Enno van Gelder, *Nederland sinds de zestiende eeuw* (Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen, 1937).

⁸⁵ Selderhuis, *Handbook of Dutch Church History*, 158.

theological image is a multi-layered one of intricate complexity with a myriad of strands of historical continuities and discontinuities.

This intricacy specifically affected theological reflection on the toleration of, for example, heresy and idolatry because, as Philip Benedict notes, “the theological currents that molded heresy” in the Netherlands were “unusually diverse.”⁸⁶ In other words, while theological reflection about religious liberty and religious compulsion had followed a tortuous course in Europe, even long before the Reformation, its specific transmission to the Netherlands further complicated rather than simplified its flow. By the sixteenth century, reflection on religious liberty, orthodoxy, and heresy in the Netherlands was a confluence of many crisscrossing brooks and rivulets and rivers, with some new fountainheads opening, some more ancient ones re-opening, and a (re)discovery of old streams running in new courses.

Consequently, the intellectual topography of mid sixteenth century Netherlands where the Dutch Reformation took hold, is too complex to allow the notion of continuity to sufficiently explain, in a causal sense, De Bres’s shift to mainstream Reformed views of government and religious liberty from 1558 to 1565.

Did the *Zeitgeist* Cause De Bres’s Shift?

The cause for De Bres’s shift is also left unanswered when some form of overarching continuity like the sixteenth century *Zeitgeist* is relied upon as an explanation. Unless one can uncover, in addition to continuity, the concrete historical embeddedness and the inner

⁸⁶ Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 177.

logic of De Bres's shift, continuity does not clarify *why* De Bres's view changed.

Otherwise, failure to move beyond mere continuity will entangle the reasons for De Bres's thought in the spider web of the sixteenth century *Zeitgeist*.

An example from scholarship will illustrate this inadequacy of a broad, overarching continuity to explain De Bres's shift. Jan De Pater illuminates what he calls De Bres's religious intolerance by pointing out that De Bres, "without any reserve," supported the sixteenth century high view of the state.⁸⁷ De Pater connects De Bres's notion with how the sixteenth century frowned upon religious liberty:

The sixteenth century was intolerant. Thinkers of this age thought that variety of religion in the same State endangers the State, because only unanimity of spirit with respect to religion guaranteed a strong, undivided nation. Such unanimity with respect to religion was therefore viewed as the main bond that held the State together. The institution that determined which religion would be the ruling one, was the government, or, in categories of the growing absolutism, the ruler, whose task it was to defend against false religion.⁸⁸

The problem with this explanation is not that any one of these generalizations is incorrect, but that the agreement between De Bres's view of the state and the general view of "the sixteenth century" is assumed categorically to explain De Bres's "intolerance" and, perhaps, even to have caused it. Why did De Bres advocate religious compulsion? Because he shared the sixteenth century high view of the state, the answer goes, and the sixteenth century was intolerant. Therefore, he was caused to be intolerant by the sixteenth century *Zeitgeist*.

⁸⁷ De Pater, "Godsdienstige Verdraagzaamheid bij Marnix van St.Aldegonde," 1.

⁸⁸ De Pater, "Godsdienstige Verdraagzaamheid bij Marnix van St.Aldegonde," 1.

Such an answer, however, obscures other questions. Why *did* De Bres have a high view of the state? And why would he have valued, in De Pater's words, "a strong, undivided nation" and "unanimity of spirit" more than religious forbearance and irenicism? Does it explain De Bres's "intolerance" to say that he thought that the government had the task "to defend against false religion" – or is it his view of the task of government that needs to be explained?

Two further problems affect attempts to make continuity function as a kind of *Zeitgeist* explanation. The first is that "the sixteenth century," "sixteenth century Protestantism," or "the Reformed tradition" are no more than shorthand terms for aggregates of thousands or even millions of individual thinkers. Why was the sixteenth century intolerant, if not because countless real individuals, including countless persons prominent in institutions like civil government and churches, were individually, actively, and decisively acting, speaking, and thinking in ways that compelled religious conformity? No doubt the sixteenth century was a century of deep and often incompatible religious commitments, but these commitments could never exist in the abstract. They were always and everywhere held by real individuals. Likewise, even the Reformed confessions surveyed in the previous chapter were formulations of agreed belief among many individual thinkers. It is therefore the individual Reformed thinkers that constitute and explain such notions as "Reformed thought of the sixteenth century," rather than the other way around. In other words, it is only by surveying the thought of Guido de Bres, as well as Herman Moded, Godfried van Wingen, Adriaan Saravia, Peregrin de la Grange, Marnix of St. Aldegonde, Adriaan van Haemstede, Petrus Datheen, Franciscus Junius, Martin Bucer, John Calvin, Pierre Viret, John à Lasco, Thomas

Cranmer, Heinrich Bullinger, Theodore Beza and dozens or hundreds like them, that we can infer an abstract notion like “sixteenth century Reformed thought” or the “Reformed view” of religious toleration (or of anything else) in the southern Netherlands.

This is not to deny that individuals and groups of individuals influenced one another, as no doubt has always been the case in every period of history. But the abstraction has no mind of its own and – what is crucial for our purposes – has no true explanatory power. The sixteenth century *Zeitgeist*, and the mainstream Reformed position on religious liberty, should not be assigned a mind and will of its own, as if it were a kind of pantheistic (or panentheistic) soul that animated local actors. Continuity with Reformed thought was not a conduit by means of which a kind of Reformed *Zeitgeist* could have poured into De Bres’s mind. To treat it as such, which is basically to attempt to wrest an explanation from De Bres’s continuity with the Reformed *Zeitgeist*, risks dissolving whatever intellectual reasons informed De Bres’s position into a continuous and almost autonomous idea of the age.⁸⁹

A second problem with treating continuity as a kind of *Zeitgeist* explanation for De Bres’s shift is related to the first. In a real sense, asserting continuity does not truly offer additional explanation in the sense of adding insights beyond what have already been discovered. Of course, it would necessarily follow that if De Bres was fully *in continuity* with Reformed thinking on the issue of the political restriction of religious liberty, one would be able to deduce De Bres’s reasoning from the wider reasoning of the Reformed position. But this is circular logic. One can deduce De Bres’s reasoning by referring to

⁸⁹ For a critique of viewing ideas in seventeenth century Dutch thought as such an autonomous power, see Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 344–5.

the general Reformed position to no greater extent than what one has previously determined was truly *continuous* between De Bres's reasoning and Reformed thinking. To move beyond this boundary is to make an unwarranted inference; to stay within it does not offer any additional explanation.

Beyond Continuity: Theology and Political Context

How do we need to supplement the explanation of continuity in order to arrive at a more adequate explanation of De Bres's shift from 1558 to 1565, and hence at a more adequate explanation of the reasons for De Bres's view of political restriction of religious liberty? As we have just seen, the incontrovertible continuity between De Bres and wider Reformed thought (or, *a fortiori*, the more tenuous continuity between De Bres and medieval or ancient thought) does not adequately explain De Bres's shift because it does not sufficiently uncover the *causes* of De Bres's change from 1558 to 1565. And an explanation which does not essentially address *why* De Bres shifted his position is incomplete. On this point, the advice of the historian and philosopher R.G. Collingwood is apt. Collingwood describes the historian's task as not separating the search for *what* happened from the search for *why* it happened.⁹⁰ And in describing *why* it happened, the historian's task involves describing *thought*.⁹¹

⁹⁰ R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 177.

⁹¹ Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 215–6. Collingwood pushes this much further: "The history of thought, and therefore all history, is the re-enactment of past thought in the historian's own mind." 215. Following Collingwood, mere continuity will not suffice as a description if it does not uncover the historical person's network of ideas or "processes of thought." Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 255.

To some extent, then, to explain *why* requires clarifying what caused a historical person to act, or think, as they did. The challenge this poses to our investigation is that although the continuities between De Bres's views and those of wider thought do indicate correlation, correlation itself does not yet imply causation. The impressive continuities between De Bres and other proponents of the political compulsion of religion, although perhaps readily identifiable *a posteriori* as diagnoses and descriptions of De Bres's view, cannot be called *causes* of De Bres's view – at least, not simply by virtue of their reality as continuities. De Bres, after all, accepted these beliefs. Why?

To use Collingwood's example: the man who anxiously tries to cross the mountains and superstitiously believes that they are inhabited by devils "is not suffering merely for the sins of his fathers who taught him to believe in devils, if that is a sin; he is suffering because he has accepted the belief, because he has shared the sin."⁹² Likewise, it has to be admitted that De Bres was not ultimately the product of the long trajectory of medieval thinking about heresy, or of long-standing tussles between ecclesiastical powers and secular political powers, of sixteenth century Reformed notions of the duty of the magistrate to enforce the first table of the Decalogue, of Calvin's or Beza's attempts to justify the execution of Servetus, or whatever other "continuities" can be identified.

Ultimately, however real and obvious the continuities, De Bres *chose* to embrace a view of the political compulsion of religion for reasons that must have made sense, at least to himself, given his historical circumstances and vis-à-vis his other theological and philosophical ideas. This dimension of *choice* is what Collingwood insists needs to be

⁹² Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 317–8.

acknowledged. In a real sense, people whose actions are studied historically should be considered free, and historical understanding should offer insights about rational activity.⁹³ No doubt this emphasis can be pushed too far, but that does not discount it.⁹⁴

Consequently, continuity needs to be supplemented with explanations of the political theological dimensions of De Bres's thought in order to suggest the reasons why restricting religious liberty would have made sense to him, considering some of his other intellectual positions and his concrete political circumstances.

The political theological dimensions of De Bres's thought would inevitably have been informed by the political situation of the Reformed in the Netherlands, which was worlds apart from those of the magisterially entrenched Reformed of Geneva, Zurich, Strasbourg, Scotland or the Palatinate. The one feature of the Reformation in the Netherlands which distinguished it from other regions, Alastair Duke points out, is the unceasing persecution of dissidents.⁹⁵ Likewise, Horst Balz writes that the characteristic feature of the Dutch Reformation is that it was forced to survive for half a century in an underground existence amidst persecution and an Inquisition based on the Spanish

⁹³ Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 8.

⁹⁴ Michael Oakeshott goes further than Collingwood's advice warrants when he writes, "In the individual will is to be found the cause of all events; all other causes are subsidiary to this; history cannot look behind it and does not require to look beyond it for a principle of explanation." Michael J. Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 130. This, it seems to me, risks excessive subjectivism. My appeal to supplement the continuity explanation can be stated differently: What should be guarded against is employing continuity as what Brad Gregory calls a "teleological" explanation of the past, as if, because the past has made the present what it is, or because the more remote past had made the more recent past what it was, things had to turn out this way. Gregory rejects this, because "institutionally and ideologically, materially and morally," things could have ended up quite differently. Rather, he argues, *choice* was pivotal in all that resulted from the past: "Human decisions were made that did not have to be made." Continuity should not obscure the role of "rejections" and "selective appropriations" of "ideas, commitments, norms, and aspirations." Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 12.

⁹⁵ Alistair Duke, "The Netherlands," in *The Early Reformation in Europe*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 163.

model.⁹⁶ Several scholars recognize, then, that the Dutch unfolding of the Reformation was uniquely marked by grave persecution.

It is this gravity of persecution in the Dutch development of the Reformation that makes De Bres's shift to embrace the mainstream Reformed view so awkward to explain. Why did De Bres forsake a defense of religious liberty and begin to advocate the right and duty of the magistrate to compel (true) religion and to repress (false) religion and idolatry? Surely the vehemently persecuted Reformed in the southern Netherlands had everything to gain from the toleration of religious liberty? The question asked in the first chapter returns in a slightly different form: If toleration in the sixteenth century was, as Pettegree describes it, always a "loser's creed," why did De Bres so soon abandon it for the creed of non-toleration, the magisterial "winner's creed"?⁹⁷ After all, the Reformed in the Netherlands at this time were still unmistakably inveterate "losers" – losers of property, liberty, family, and, for inestimable thousands, their lives. What prevented De Bres as a church leader of the oppressed community of Reformed "losers" in the Netherlands from holding on to the loser's creed of toleration? In other words, since it made perfect sense for De Bres, who was mindful of the plight of the Dutch Reformed believers, to unfurl his theological sails in the winds of toleration that were picking up across Europe, as he did in *Baston* of 1555, why did he begin to change tack less than five years later?

It is here proposed that continuity *does* help us to understand De Bres's shift, but only if firmly and concretely rooted in the political circumstances of the late 1550's and the

⁹⁶ Balz, *Theologische Realenzyklopadie*, 477. The Spanish authorities denied that they had imposed an Inquisition, see Duke, *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Low Countries*, 112.

⁹⁷ Pettegree, "The Politics of Toleration in the Dutch Republic," 198.

1560's, the time when De Bres adopted and defended a characteristically mainstream view discordant with the high view of religious liberty of *Baston* (1555). After all, the cause for De Bres's shift must be sought between 1555 and 1565, which requires us to look not only at De Bres's ideas but also to pay thorough attention to the political dynamics of the southern Netherlands in the period. In other words, we need to seek for a balance between what Heiko Oberman calls an approach that assumes that "ideas are constitutive of reality" and one that allows historians to "return to the noise and debates of the streets."⁹⁸ This is what the following chapters will attempt to do.

Conclusion

There is strong continuity between De Bres's restrictive view of religious liberty and that of major Reformers like Zwingli, Calvin, Beza, Bullinger, Bucer, and À Lasco. More abstractly, there is strong continuity between De Bres's view and mainstream Reformed and even wider sixteenth-century thought. Nevertheless, continuity cannot adequately account for De Bres's shift from 1558 to 1565 toward the legal and political restriction of religious liberty. Additional contextual and historical explanation and additional intellectual and theological analysis is required. In other words, we need to analyze De Bres's historical context from 1555 to 1565 and seek to answer the question: why did the

⁹⁸ Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Reformation: Roots and Ramifications* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 204. The balance to aim for has been well formulated by Euan Cameron: "It is not enough to say that ideas (as opposed, say, to social or economic trends) do not matter, or (at the other extreme) that they can be studied in isolation from their context. One needs a 'social history of belief', in which the role of ideas is neither assumed, nor ignored, but *analyzed*." Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3.

restriction of religious liberty begin to make theological and political sense to De Bres
from 1558 onward?

CHAPTER 4

DE BRES'S QUEST FOR AN ALLIANCE

The previous chapter underlined the need to explain De Bres's shift toward an optimistic view of political government and a favorable view of the political restriction of religious liberty. Such explanation must go beyond continuity. *Why* does De Bres shift closer to the mainstream Reformed view? This chapter proposes that the prospect that political powers would protect the Reformed against King Philip II began to make increasing theological and practical sense to De Bres. As a result, De Bres began to envision a church-political alliance between the Reformed churches and the Dutch nobles. The remaining chapters of the dissertation will argue that his support for the political restriction of religious liberty was largely a concomitant of his quest for such an alliance. The chapter will proceed along three points. First, it suggests historical circumstances that might have encouraged De Bres to view political power more optimistically. Second, it will argue that De Bres was indeed becoming intimately involved in Reformed efforts to establish an alliance with the Dutch nobles. Third, it will argue that this incipient Reformed alliance can be characterized as an instance of *confessionalization*, and that it is therefore helpful to understand the aims of the alliance in light of the dynamics suggested by *confessionalization theory*.

Changing Circumstances and New Perspectives

Three historical circumstances are likely to have encouraged De Bres toward greater optimism about political power. First, persecution of Protestants was escalating in the Netherlands in the late 1550's and into the 1560's. This underlined the need for political protection against the political power of the King, if the Reformed churches were to survive. Second, De Bres encountered ideas and models in Geneva and France that theologically and practically presented a more hopeful approach to political power and modelled how a Reformed church-political alliance could advance the Reformation. Third, new attitudes among the nobility in the Netherlands were apparently opening the door for a church-political alliance.

Escalating Persecution

The first historical circumstance that emphasized the necessity of political protection for the survival of the Reformed churches was the escalation of the persecution of Protestants in the Netherlands during the late 1550's and early 1560's. Although Emperor Charles V already consolidated the previous anti-heresy ordinances in his "bloody edict" for the Netherlands on 29 April 1550,¹ the oppression he started was exacerbated under his son and successor, Philip II.² Prosecution of Protestants for heresy intensified notably in the late 1550's and early 1560's. In Antwerp, for instance, which was the largest city

¹ Guido Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a Commercial Metropolis, 1550–1577* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 82.

² Martin van Gelderen, *Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt 1555 – 1590* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 36.

in the Netherlands, Marnef observes that “the repression of Calvinism only really got under way in 1558.”³ The number of executions in Antwerp rose sharply in the five years from 1557.⁴ Decavelle gives the figure of 1,600 heresy investigations in the Netherlands by the judicial council of the Inquisition under Pieter Titelman from 1550 until 1566 in Flanders alone (i.e., excluding cities like Tournai and Lille), with the number of investigations escalating especially from 1560.⁵ Duke calculates at least 1,300 executions (and probably 6,500 to 7,800 prosecutions) until 1566.⁶ A much larger, additional number (about eight times as many people) were judicially charged for lesser religious offenses.⁷ According to Duke, the period between 1557 and 1564 stands out as a particularly intense time of oppression. This period witnessed a “wave” of persecution that flared up in Flanders and Brabant due to increased support for the Reformed faith.”⁸ In Flanders and the small cities of Mons, Tournai, Valenciennes, and Lille, the number of executions escalated sharply during the years 1555 to 1565.⁹

There are several likely reasons for the heightened persecution from the late 1550’s to 1560’s. One reason was the remarkable effectiveness with which the anti-heretical investigations and the Inquisition in various cities in the southern Netherlands were

³ Marnef, *Antwerp in the Reformation*, 82.

⁴ Marnef, *Antwerp in the Reformation*, 85.

⁵ Johan Decavelle, *De Dageraad van de reformatie in Vlaanderen 1520–1565. Vol.1* (Brussel: Paleis der Academien, 1975), 25.

⁶ Alastair C. Duke, *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries* (London: Hambledon Press, 1990), 71. In another book, Duke describes the calculation of the number: “This estimate of 1,300 is based almost entirely on official records (court proceedings, exchequer records, government correspondence) for the ‘seventeen Netherlands’. It also includes the condominium of Maastricht, but omits the nominally independent bishoprics of Liège and Cambrai.” Duke, *Dissident Identities*, 100–101.

⁷ Duke, *Dissident Identities*, 101.

⁸ Duke, *Dissident Identities*, 101.

⁹ Duke, *Reformation and Revolt*, 99. See also Decavele, *Dageraad van de Reformatie, Vol.2*, 57, which served as the basis for Duke’s calculations.

pursued in the 1550's by the tireless inquisitor, Pieter Titelmans. Decavelle describes how Titelmans and his staff braved summer heat and frozen winter weather, not hesitating on occasion to row through flooded areas in pursuit of suspected (Protestant) heretics, and to "gather information, hear testimonies, make arrests, interrogate prisoners, institute judicial processes, pronounce judicial sentences, set magistrates straight."¹⁰

Another likely reason for the rising persecution from the late 1550's was the abdication in 1555 by the Emperor Charles V of his rule of the Netherland territories in favor of his son Philip II.¹¹ Even more than the elderly Charles (who soon retired to a monastery in Castile), "Philip the Pious" was devoted to defending the Catholic faith, and took seriously the claim of previous kings to be *rex et sacerdos*, king and priest.¹² King Philip II artfully combined apparent Catholic devotion with a calculated consolidation of power, according to Geoffrey Parker. The King's communications with the Pope, for example, evidenced a "passive-aggressive combination of pleas and threats."¹³ Whatever his real reasons, Philip II made no secret of his desire to crush the heretics, and a special

¹⁰ Decavelle, *De Dageraad van de reformatie, Vol.1*, 23. According to Duke, as many as half of those executed for heresy in Flanders between 1545 and 1566 "passed through his [Titelman's] hands." Titelman often succeeded in intimidating magistrates and city officials to comply with ever sharper anti-heresy measures, but although he enjoyed the support of the King, he was opposed by some of the provincial and city authorities who often sympathized with the Reformed. See Duke, *Dissident Identities*, 107. Further increasing the effectiveness of Titelman and his associates were additional powers that King Charles V and Philip II in 1555 assigned to the inspectors of the Inquisition. Decavelle, *De Dageraad van de reformatie, Vol.1*, 19.

¹¹ Peter Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 48; Spaans, "Reform in the Low Countries," 118.

¹² Geoffrey Parker, *Imprudent King: A New Life of Philip II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 89; Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*, 48. One of the King's butlers left a careful account of Philip's daily hours of prayer and meditation. Another butler described the bookcase next to the King's bed filled with Catholic devotional works (such as the *Life of Christ* by Ludolf of Saxony, and Spanish Counter-Reformation works by Juan of Avila, Teresa of Avila, and Luis of Granada.) Still another servant recorded how "there was not a corner of his [Philip's] bedroom where one did not see a pious image of some saint or a crucifix, and he kept his eyes fixed and absorbed on these images, and his spirit lifted to the heavens." Parker, *Life of Philip II*, 81.

¹³ Parker, *Life of Philip II*, 88.

theological committee, the *juntas de teólogos*, was tasked with advising the king on policy towards heresy in the Netherlands.¹⁴

Another likely reason for the intensification of Catholic oppression was the end of Habsburg Spain's war with France. The end of hostilities sealed by the treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis left Philip free to devote new energies to what Nicole Sutherland describes as an evolving "catholic crusade" in the Netherlands.¹⁵ The king thought it a good time, as Van Nierop puts it, to "crack down on heresy."¹⁶ Duke concurs, writing that after the treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis, the King "made plain his determination to use the respite gained to reform the Catholic Church and to root out heresy once and for all."¹⁷ This was not idle talk; the King appointed at least five former inquisitors to bishoprics in 1560, and designated two canons in every diocese to investigate heretics.¹⁸ Denying that he was introducing the Spanish Inquisition into the Netherlands, Philip II nevertheless boasted that "the Inquisition in the Netherlands" was "more pitiless than that of Spain."¹⁹ Whatever one calls it, something resembling the Inquisition was now operating in the Netherlands.²⁰

¹⁴ Parker, *Life of Philip II*, 83.

¹⁵ Nicola M. Sutherland, "William of Orange and the Revolt of the Netherlands: A Missing Dimension," in *Princes, Politics and Religion, 1559–1589*, ed. Nicola M. Sutherland (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), 209–210.

¹⁶ Nierop, "Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands," 88.

¹⁷ Duke, *Dissident Identities*, 112.

¹⁸ Duke, *Dissident identities*, 112. See also the book-length treatment of this topic, Michiel Dierickx, *De oprichting der nieuwe bisdommen in de Nederlanden onder Filips II: 1559–1570* (Antwerpen: Standaard-Boekhandel Uitgeverij Het Spectrum, 1950).

¹⁹ Duke, *Dissident identities*, 112.

²⁰ See Alastair Duke, "Salvation by Coercion: The Controversy Surrounding the 'Inquisition' in the Low Countries on the Eve of the Revolt," in *Reformation Principle and Practice: Essays in Honour of Arthur Geoffrey Dickens*, ed. Brooks, Peter Newman (London: Scholar Press, 1980).

A further reason for the harsher treatment of Protestants might have been a hardening in Catholic theological attitudes. After 1550, as the success of the Reformation appeared irreversible and increasingly widespread, many Catholic authorities across Europe showed signs of losing patience, or at least showed that their apparent willingness to debate should not be presumed upon. Barbara de Negroni has identified three basic Catholic approaches to Protestant heresy that were attempted in various places and at different times: extermination, conciliation, and political pragmatism.²¹ Since conciliation seemed ineffective in winning back the Protestants, extermination and, if need be, pragmatism remained. Protestants' obstinacy in clinging to their errors was, after all, proving their indurate heresy. Ralph Keen detects that in the Empire, "notwithstanding colloquies and attempts by some Catholic theologians to see merits in at least some of the Reformation proposals," attitudes were toughening.²² An official or institutional inclination was developing, appealing to the secular powers "to protect their religion by allowing no change in the life of the church and by driving the Protestant leaders from the country."²³ Much Catholic literature of the period shows little real engagement with Reformed theologians, Keen describes: "Few, if any, treatises were addressed to the Reformers or their followers: most were directed to bishops and the nobility. The intention of this literature is to discourage dialogue and to have heresy punished as strongly as possible."²⁴ Hence Catholic theological attitudes were stiffening,

²¹ Barbara de Negroni, *Intolérances: catholiques et protestants en France : 1560–1787* (Paris: Hachette, 1996), 17–37.

²² Ralph Keen, *Divine and Human Authority in Reformation Thought: German Theologians on Political Order 1520–1555* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1997), 170.

²³ Keen, *Divine and Human Authority*, 170.

²⁴ Keen, *Divine and Human Authority*, 170.

even if the persecution of Protestants did not increase everywhere in Europe because of local conditions that influenced patterns of persecution and toleration.²⁵

Accordingly, the late 1550's and 1560's was a period of intensifying persecution of the Reformed in the southern Netherlands for several reasons. The late 1550's and 1560's was also the time of De Bres's journey toward a new and higher view of civil government and its duty of religious compulsion, although, as we have previously seen, the major part of De Bres's intellectual journey was completed by 1561. The intersection of such persecution and De Bres's own development in his position on religious liberty suggests a correlation between persecution and De Bres's view of toleration. Remarkably, however, this correlation operated in the opposite direction from what one would expect: the deteriorating plight of the Reformed believers did not persuade De Bres to hold on to the "loser's creed of toleration" which he espoused in 1555. On the contrary, while

²⁵ In France, for example, heresy persecutions decreased in the 1550's. But this decrease might have been the result of fiscal pragmatism, as William Monter contends. According to Monter, political and economic considerations led to limited toleration of the Reformed churches of France in the 1560's, but this was a temporary respite. William Monter, *Judging the French Reformation: Heresy Trials by Sixteenth-Century Parlements* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 2. The decrease of heresy persecutions in France might also have resulted from the near-collapse of the court system under the load of heresy cases so that was finally conceded, as James Farr argues, that the judicial system was "no longer willing to expend resources it did not have on a heresy it could no longer contain." James R. Farr, "Confessionalization and Social Discipline in France, 1530–1685," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte - Archive for Reformation History* 94, no. 1 (2003): 282. Despite the pragmatics of a decreasing number of convictions, ideological resolve against Protestantism was stiffening, as evidenced by the Edict of Chateaubriand in 1551, which Farr calls "the most comprehensive body of anti-heresy legislation to date," and the royal decrees against heresy such as the Edict of Compiègne of 1557 and the Edict of Ecoeuven of 1559. Farr, "Confessionalization and Social Discipline in France," 281. Even after what has been called the "high water mark of the Reformed movement in France" in 1562, *un roi, une loi, une foi* (one king, one law, one faith) remained the Catholic theological and political ideal even in the 1560's. Scott M. Manetsch, *Theodore Beza and the Quest for Peace in France, 1562–1598* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 23; Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 2. Farr summarizes the opinion of several scholars who reckon that the more favorable dispensation for Protestantism in the 1560's and the concessions of the Edict of Nantes were "interruptions demanded by political necessity rather than harbingers of modern notions of toleration." Farr, "Confessionalization and Social Discipline in France," 286.

persecution was escalating, De Bres ever more consistently insisted on civil rulers' duty to restrict the toleration of religious liberty.

Mere continuity is unable to make sense of this paradox. Once again, continuity between De Bres's views and mainstream Reformed views of religious liberty is less an explaining phenomenon than a phenomenon that itself is in need of explanation, so that continuity might be called an *explanandum* rather than an *explanans*.²⁶ Neither can the paradox be explained by Reformed opportunism. Some scholars have suggested that the public position of the Reformed in the Netherlands on the issue of religious liberty was one of opportunism: The Reformed favored religious liberty while they were themselves oppressed, but once their fortunes changed and they had the opportunity to oppress others, they changed their view. Thus Maarten Kater writes,

The main thrust of Calvinists in these early years was to propose limited freedom for themselves, freedom from persecution in the still Catholic state. . . . But within a few years their position radically changed from a minority to a majority, from weakness to power. And then each and every thought of tolerance appears to be forgotten.²⁷

But this explanation cannot make sense of the co-occurrence of De Bres's Constantinian shift and escalating persecution of Protestants in the Netherlands. De Bres moved away from his 1555 plea for the political toleration of religious liberty even as the situation of the Reformed deteriorated. This contradicts Kater's analysis that *when* the Reformed's

²⁶ See Carl G. Hempel and Paul Oppenheim, "Studies in the logic of explanation," in *Philosophy of Science* 15 no. 2 (1948):135–175.

²⁷ Maarten Kater, "Reformed Tolerance: Scriptural or Opportunistic?" in *Reformed Majorities in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Herman Selderhuis (Göttingen Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 39.

position changed “from weakness to power” *then* “each and every thought of tolerance” was forgotten.²⁸

The paradox posed by De Bres’s Constantinian shift while persecution of the Reformed was becoming more intense suggests, rather, that a change of mind occurred in De Bres long before the attainment of effective political power for the Reformed became a reality in the Netherlands. De Bres was starting to realize that the presentation of Reformed truth, dialogue and reason would not by itself break the grip of Catholic error upon society, as his writings show.²⁹ The intensifying persecutions of the Reformed confirmed to him beyond all doubt that Catholicism was not simply a force of theological error and ignorance, but of political power – requiring, in part, a political answer. In the Netherlands, too, the dynamic that Robert Kingdon identified in sixteenth-century France was becoming increasingly evident: “The reformers’ challenge to papal and hierarchical authority was also a challenge to secular government.”³⁰ Political power was, therefore, desperately needed to shield the Reformation from its foes.

Constitutional and Practical Models of Church-Political Alliance

A second historical circumstance that might have prompted De Bres to embrace the idea of political protection of the Reformed churches was the constitutional and practical models of church-political alliance which he encountered from the late 1550’s on.

²⁸ Another problem with the opportunism explanation is more general: Once one starts to look for hidden motives behind reformers’ theology, one introduces a hermeneutic of suspicion which is hard to restrain. When can one *ever* trust what the reformers said on any question of interpretation – was not all their theology a pretext to hide their real, more self-serving motives?

²⁹ The next chapter will argue this more fully.

³⁰ Robert M. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion in France (1555–1563)* (Geneva: Droz librairie, 2007), 54.

Theology and constitutional ideas undergirded the practical models of church-political alliance that French speaking ministers in Geneva and elsewhere were encouraging, especially in Huguenot France.

It is probable that from 1557, when De Bres studied in Lausanne and Geneva, he encountered poignant intellectual approaches to political theory that stressed constitutional limits to royal power. Before 1557, the Reformed political theology that De Bres can with a degree of certainty be said to have known stressed more one-sidedly the absolute authority and divine right of the monarch.³¹ Now, however, De Bres was encountering different perspectives, such as that of Theodore Beza and perhaps more nuanced versions of Calvin's views. Beza, under whom De Bres studied in Lausanne and Geneva, was already by 1554 emphasizing constitutional limitations upon the sovereign's power, such as the authority of the inferior magistrates and the inviolability of customary

³¹ Examples are the views of Cranmer and Calvin, as discussed in the previous chapter. Cranmer's theory of divine right of kings appears from his coronation address to Edward VI. Calvin's view, according to J.W. Allen, was close to that of the apologist of royal absolutism, "the Catholic Royalist and champion of divine right of kings, Alexander Barclay." J. W. Allen, *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1928), 55. However, Allen's characterization of Calvin needs to be qualified. Even Calvin's *Institutes*, with which De Bres had been familiar even before 1555, as the previous chapter showed, recognized some limits to the political power of the king. See e.g. chapter sixteen of Calvin's *Institutes* of 1541. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion* [1541], ed. Robert White (Carlisle, PA : The Banner of Truth Trust, 2014), 775–781. According to Calvin, God himself will judge oppressive princes, and for this purpose God sometimes "raises up certain of his servants and arms them with his mandate to punish an unjust ruler and to deliver from calamity a people evilly afflicted." Calvin, *Institutes* [1541], 782. Also, according to Calvin God in his providence usually provides constitutional safeguards against tyranny in the form of lower magistrates in the political order. Thus ancient Sparta had her ephors, and Rome her popular tribunes, and "perhaps today each kingdom has the three estates when they come together." These political magistrates "serve as protectors of the people in order to curb the excessive greed and licentiousness of kings." In Calvin's theology, these lower magistrates have the duty to resist oppressive princes: "I would not forbid those who occupy such an office to oppose and withstand, as is their duty, the intemperance and cruelty of kings. Indeed if they pretended not to see when kings lawlessly torment their wretched people, such pretense in my view should be condemned as perjury, since by it they wickedly betray the people's liberty of which, as they ought to know, God has made them defenders." Calvin, *Institutes* [1541], 783. In Calvin's view, Harro Höpfl summarizes, "the moment magistrates exceed their measure of authority, they become (at least in respect of those particular actions, and perhaps wholly) akin to robbers, usurpers and invaders." Harro Höpfl, *Luther and Calvin on Secular Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xxiii.

law.³² According to Beza, local authorities even had the authority “to defy superior government authorities on religious issues,” Kingdon explains.³³ As a result, “Beza developed, in rudimentary fashion, a theory justifying revolt by the people.”³⁴ Such an approach to political power would have offered hope to the Dutch reformers groaning under escalating persecution, and might have encouraged someone like De Bres to explore how church-political alliances could be used of God to offer relief to the Netherlands.

The idea of constitutional limits to royal power was also avidly discussed in French speaking Europe in the late 1550’s and 1560’s. In France, the political issue was made more urgent by the problem of religious pluralism that the sizeable Huguenot minority presented. At issue in France, as in the Netherlands, was the struggle between medieval constitutionalism and the rising royal absolutism of the sixteenth century.³⁵ Similarly, in France, as in the Netherlands, this struggle was exacerbated by the continued association of the monarchy with Catholicism. The Huguenot approach, Beatrice Reynolds points

³² Beza even used terms like “consent of the citizens” [*civium consensus publica*] in *De haereticis a civili magistratu puniendis*, 22. See also Robert M. Kingdon, “The First Expression of Theodore Beza’s Political Ideas,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 46 (1955), 89; Donald R Kelley, *François Hotman: A Revolutionary’s Ordeal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 62. Much later, in 1573, Beza completed his *De Iure Magistratum in Subditos*, published first in Lyon and then in Geneva as *Du Droit des Magistrats sur Leurs Sujets* ([Geneva]: Jacob Stoer], 1574). See Theodore Beza, *Concerning the Rights of Rulers Over Their Subjects and the Duty of Subjects Towards Their Rulers*, ed. Henri-Louis Gonin (Cape Town: HAUM, 1956), 1. Beza’s later view has been characterized as an “essentially pluralistic political theory, in which . . . the powers of the central authority [are] curtailed” by A.H. Murray in Beza, *Concerning the Rights of Rulers Over Their Subjects*, vi.

³³ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 71.

³⁴ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 71. Remarkably, some thirteen years after the publication Beza’s book, in January 1567, De Bres would be involved in the resistance of the city of Valenciennes against the military power of the King’s besieging forces. Emile Braekman, “Laaste Bediening in Valenciennes,” in *Guido de Bres: Zijn leven, zijn belijden*, ed. Emile Braekman and Erik de Boer (Kampen: Kok, 2011), 278–289.

³⁵ Julian H. Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Rise of Absolutist Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1–22.

out, was “in sharp contrast to the constantly increasing autocracy of royal rule.”³⁶ Despite the ascendancy of royal absolutism since the previous century, in the 1560’s there was still a near consensus among French scholars, a “dominant opinion” as Julian Franklin calls it, that the king’s power was limited.³⁷ This insistence upon constitutional limits to royal power, whether theological, reasonable, historical, or legal, was significant not only for the Huguenot minority in France, but also for the much more vulnerable Reformed communities in the Netherlands; and this would have been of great interest to De Bres.

It seems likely that De Bres would have encountered these debates from the mid-1550’s. After all, strong ties had always existed between the Reformed churches of Geneva, the more than two thousand Huguenot churches in France, and the small number of clandestine French speaking Reformed churches in the southern Netherlands.³⁸ De Bres’s ministry was always closely connected to the Reformation in France, and he ministered in northern France for several years: in Amiens and Montdidier in 1562, and in Sedan from approximately 1563 to 1566.³⁹ Some of the leading ministers in the French speaking churches in the southern Netherlands, including Franciscus Junius and Pérégrin de la Grange, were Frenchmen.⁴⁰ It is also likely that De Bres encountered these

³⁶ Beatrice Reynolds, *Proponents of Limited Monarchy in Sixteenth Century France: Francis Hotman and Jean Bodin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), 33.

³⁷ Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Rise of Absolutist Theory*, 22. The fervent advocacy of royal absolutism by Catholic sympathizers was precipitated only by the Saint Bartholomew Massacres in 1572. Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Rise of Absolutist Theory*, 41–53.

³⁸ Philip Benedict and Nicolas Fornerod have recently confirmed Beza’s claim of at least 2,150 Reformed churches in France at the beginning of 1562. Philip Benedict and Nicolas Fornerod, “Les 2150 ‘églises’ réformées de France de 1561–1562.” *Revue Historique* 311, no. 3 (2009): 529–530, 557–8. That De Bres remained connected with the Huguenot churches is abundantly evident from his modeling his Belgic Confession on the French Confession of 1559, as chapter three mentioned.

³⁹ Johan Decavele, “De Nederlanden in de Tijd van De Bres,” in *Guido de Bres: Zijn Leven, zijn Belijden*, ed. Emile Braekman and Erik de Boer (Kampen: Kok, 2011), 11.

⁴⁰ See Daniel Ollier, *Guy de Brès: étude historique* (Paris: L’aigle, 1883), 106.

constitutional debates because of the books he read and the circles in which he moved. De Bres was abreast of current publications on the book market and had direct access to new books.⁴¹ Several authors that influenced him, like Beza, Calvin, and Viret, were closely connected with French constitutional scholars like Francois Hotman. Thinkers like Beza, Viret, and Hotman, Donald Kelley contends, were forced by their circumstances to “concern themselves with the most fundamental political questions.”⁴²

Francois Hotman was a prominent Huguenot scholar arguing for a constitutional limitation of French royal power whose views De Bres would likely have encountered. De Bres’s connections with Beza and Calvin and the time he spent in locations like Lausanne, Geneva, and later Metz, make it probable that he would have been exposed to Hotman’s views. Hotman was an intimate friend of Beza with whom he had taught at the Academy of Lausanne (where De Bres studied in 1557), and he was working closely with Beza to engineer a Huguenot political alliance to advance the Reformation in France.⁴³ Hotman was also a friend of Calvin for whom he also served as secretary in Geneva at some point before he accepted academic positions at Reformed academies in Lausanne and Strasbourg in 1555.⁴⁴ A scholar and jurist, Hotman argued on Roman law principles

⁴¹ Moehn, *Focus op de Kerkvaders*, 11–12.

⁴² Kelley, *François Hotman*, 62. See also Kingdon, “First Expression of Theodore Beza’s Political Ideas,” 89–99.

⁴³ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 71.

⁴⁴ Like De Bres, Hotman also spent time in Metz. Kelley, *François Hotman*, 62; Reynolds, *Proponents of Limited Monarchy in Sixteenth Century France*, 45–8. See also Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), s.v. “Hotman, Francois.” Some of Hotman’s early juristic works are François Hotman, *De Legibus Populi Romani Liber* (Basle: Episcopius Junior, 1557) and François Hotman, *Iurisconsultus Sive De Optimo genere Iuris interpretandi* (Lyon: Gryphius, 1566). After the Saint Bartholomew Massacres, he produced his well-known work, *Francogallia* (Geneva: Jacob Stoer), 1573.

against royal absolutism: the king was not sovereign; rather, sovereignty had always been shared in France between the king and the estates.⁴⁵

In brief, then, circumstances suggest that De Bres might have been exposed to intellectual and constitutional models that give a more variegated perspective of political power than royal absolutism. In such a variegated light, it was possible for De Bres to become more optimistic and see the potential of political power to counterbalance the oppressive Catholic king.

In addition to these intellectual influences in the late 1550's and early 1560's, De Bres's sojourn in Geneva would have acquainted him with practical models of church-political alliances that were advancing the Reformation. Years before in England, De Bres had witnessed the blessing of a reforming monarch like Edward VI who suddenly, many would say miraculously, ascended the throne. The Dutch dilemma was that God was not answering the prayer to repeat such a miracle in the Netherlands. Did this leave Reformed believers no option but to suffer passively under the fury of King Philip II, who was bent on destroying Protestantism?

Perhaps not. In Geneva, De Bres was glimpsing what a different model could accomplish. A growing alliance of Huguenot church leaders and noblemen in neighboring France were allying to advance the Reformation. The reformers in Geneva were pivotal to the growing success of this model of church-political alliance in France, as Kingdon has shown.⁴⁶ For example, Geneva trained and sent out large numbers of

⁴⁵ This is the reading of Hotman of Graeme Murdock, *Beyond Calvin: The Intellectual, Political and Cultural World of Europe's Reformed Churches, C. 1540–1620. European History in Perspective* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 66.

⁴⁶ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 54 – 67.

Calvinist missionaries who became involved in political efforts to further the Reformation. Geneva also supplied a constant stream of propaganda to assist the Huguenot theological and political cause.⁴⁷ Genevans like Calvin were meticulously advising the reformers in France on political strategies – initially stressing the need for secrecy in local activity, and for keeping up efforts to win the favor of the high nobility, the “cultivation of aristocrats,” as Kingdon calls it.⁴⁸ French noblemen like Francois de Morel and Nicolas de Gallars became leading members of the Genevan churches, and frequently travelled to France to organize churches and consult with aristocracy in Paris or elsewhere, eventually meeting, with Beza, the King of France and the royal council.⁴⁹ Some prominent French noblemen like Ardoin de Maillane from Languedoc were refugees in Geneva, but occasionally travelled to France and remained involved in organizing and financing the Huguenot political movement.⁵⁰ Another example is the young aristocrat, Antoine de la Roche Chandieu, who was closely connected with Calvin and worked with Beza on the French Confession, and was involved in establishing both Huguenot churches and strengthening Huguenot political organization.⁵¹ According to Kingdon, from 1555 to 1562, leaders in Geneva were on several occasions approached to assist in planning schemes against the French government.⁵² Beza was highly involved in

⁴⁷ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 107.

⁴⁸ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 6, 56, 64.

⁴⁹ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 6.

⁵⁰ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 73.

⁵¹ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 73. According to Kingdon, Chandieu also played a role in the abortive conspiracy of Amboise, as revealed by journey Geneva to gauge expressly to find out Calvin’s attitude on the conspiracy.” Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 73.

⁵² Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 68. According to Kingdon, Beza, unlike Calvin, evidently sympathized even with the conspiracy of Amboise. Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 70–72.

establishing a Huguenot church-political alliance through his contacts with aristocrats in France, hence Henry Baird's appellation of Beza as the "counsellor of the French Reformation."⁵³ At the time of the Colloquy of Poissy in July 1561, French Protestantism was openly entering the arena of politics and was actively assisted in doing so by the ministers of Geneva.⁵⁴ As Kingdon describes it, Geneva wanted to ensure that the "military-political-ecclesiastical structure" that had taken shape in France by 1561 was functioning well.⁵⁵ Genevan trained ministers played an important role in the agitation that led up to the wars of religion in France in the 1560's, urging French churches organized under Genevan guidance to raise soldiers and money to fight a civil war.⁵⁶

Consequently, Genevans were directly and indirectly involved in the church-political alliance of Huguenots in France in the late 1550's and early 1560's. It seems almost certain that De Bres would have acquired an intimate knowledge of these religious and political developments while in Geneva by 1557/1558 and 1559. Long after his time in Geneva, De Bres could have been inspired by the Huguenot church-political alliance, for example when the French Calvinists successfully obtained recognition of their religion by the edicts of Saint-Germain and Amboise of 1562 and 1563 respectively.⁵⁷

In summary, from the mid 1550's, De Bres encountered in Geneva and elsewhere intellectual and constitutional models that showed the potential of political power to

⁵³ Henry Martyn Baird, *Theodore Beza: The Counsellor of the French Reformation, 1519–1605* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1899).

⁵⁴ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 86.

⁵⁵ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 86.

⁵⁶ Kingdon, *Geneva and the Coming of the Wars of Religion*, 107.

⁵⁷ Van Nierop, "Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands," 88. See also Emile Braekman "In dienst van de Kerken 'onder het kruis'" in *Guido de Bres: Zijn Leven, zijn Belijden*, ed. Emile Braekman and Erik de Boer (Kampen: Kok, 2011), 187.

protect Reformed churches against a hostile Catholic monarchy. De Bres encountered practical models, too: the Huguenot alliance offered an apparently successful example of how political rulers could organize to protect the Reformed churches and harness political power to advance the Reformation.

Concern Among the Dutch Nobles

Another circumstance which might have induced De Bres to view political power with greater expectation was a more promising attitude among many concerned Dutch nobles from the late 1550's. In the early 1550's, prospects seemed dim that Dutch nobles might step forward to protect Protestants against the violence of their royal and clerical opponents. The country's two or three dozen *grands seigneurs* or higher nobles had a tradition of solid loyalty toward the Habsburg king.⁵⁸ These higher nobles (in contrast to the approximately 450 *gentilshommes* or lesser nobles) depended on the king's patronage.⁵⁹ Many of them served as royal advisors in the prestigious Order of the Golden Fleece, held high military commissions, or served as governors in the provinces. In exchange for their services they were richly rewarded with pensions, incomes, and landed property.⁶⁰ As a result, these higher nobles were well aware that "they owed their exalted position entirely to their mutually profitable collaboration with the monarchy,"

⁵⁸ Van Nierop, "Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands," 84. Graham Darby estimates that there were probably about twenty families. Graham Darby, "Narrative of Events," in *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt*, ed. Graham Darby (London: Routledge, 2010), 15.

⁵⁹ I am basing this number on the estimate of those who signed the petition of 5 April 1566, but it is possible their number was much higher. Darby estimates that there were about 4,000 nobles in total. These, however, lived a lifestyle "sometimes little better than that of a wealthy peasant." Darby, "Narrative of Events," 15.

⁶⁰ Van Nierop, "Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands," 84.

Van Nierop writes.⁶¹ The lesser nobility, in turn, were often clients of the higher nobility, and provided magisterial functions for them.⁶² Such a system of patronage discouraged checks on royal power by lesser rulers. Unsurprisingly, in the early 1550's only a few nobles were willing to openly protect the Protestant cause, and they were a "small and unconvincing band of reform-minded patrons" who "could not defy openly the religious policy of the central government," as Duke describes them.⁶³

By the late 1550's, however, cracks were appearing in the higher nobility's alliance with the King. It was becoming obvious that the centralizing tendencies of Philip II's royal government potentially threatened the position of the Dutch nobles. For example, Philip was increasingly selecting his high appointees from a new cohort of university trained lawyers and clerics, whose unquestioning loyalty was ensured by their total dependence on royal favor, rather than from the potentially more independently minded high nobles.⁶⁴ Such policies had the result, Spaans points out, that many high nobles "felt excluded from the real center of power, which was located in the small entourage of the regent."⁶⁵ In addition, long-standing privileges of both high and lower nobles, as well as those of cities and lower magistrates, were perceived to be increasingly brushed aside in the exercise of royal power. According to Van Nierop, the King and his ministers increasingly treated the Netherlands as a "top-down type of polity."⁶⁶ The harsh policy of the persecution of Protestants by Philip's inquisitors was seen by many cities and towns

⁶¹ Van Nierop, "Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands," 84.

⁶² Van Nierop, "Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands," 85.

⁶³ Duke, "The Netherlands," 146.

⁶⁴ Geoffrey Woodward, *Philip II* (London: Longman, 1997), 11.

⁶⁵ Spaans, "Reform in the Low Countries," 122.

⁶⁶ Van Nierop, "Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands," 86.

as what Van Gelderen calls “a threat to their autonomy and privileges concerning jurisdiction,” and a threat to ancient legal principles such as the *ius de non evocando*, according to which a citizen could be put on trial only in his own town.⁶⁷

From the early 1560’s on, several nobles began to challenge the increasingly hierarchical view of the state that was centralized in Philip II as the supreme monarch. They countered that the Netherlands was a “loose federation of autonomous communities,” and that the task of the monarch was not to exercise supreme lordship, but rather “to guarantee internal peace and to defend the country against external threats.”⁶⁸ In their view, the nobles, both the *grands seigneurs* and the *gentilshommes*, were vassals, not mere subjects. Thus, if the policies of the monarch were detrimental to the common good, the vassals had to point that out by way of a remonstrance. The lesser nobles eventually presented a petition to Margaret of Parma where they as vassals – not mere subjects – warned that if the king persisted on his harmful course, “vassals could temporarily suspend their obedience,” as Van Nierop notes.⁶⁹ This movement among especially the lesser nobles, initially, to insist upon their medieval role as “mediator between monarch and subjects” in the Netherlands revealed the potential, De Pater explains, to “persuade or, if need be, to force the high nobles to do their duty” and protect the Reformed churches against persecution.⁷⁰

In 1561, two of the high nobles, William of Orange and Lamoral, Count of Egmont, soon joined by Philip of Montmorency, Count of Horne, started to organize against the

⁶⁷ Van Gelderen, *Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 27, 36.

⁶⁸ Van Nierop, “Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands,” 86.

⁶⁹ Van Nierop, “Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands,” 87.

⁷⁰ De Pater, “Geloofsbelijdenis en de religievrede in de phase van het verzet tegen Spanje,” 196.

influential cardinal Granvelle, confidant of the King and strident proponent of religious oppression of the Protestant heretics.⁷¹ From 1561, nobles like William of Orange repeatedly protested against the anti-heresy laws by means of letters of grievance to King Philip II. The influence of Granvelle became a rallying point for the high nobles to resist the erosion of their power by the centralizing royal court and its growing bureaucracy as well as the destructive excesses of religious persecution.⁷² In 1562 Orange, Egmont, and Horne, together with other high nobles, formed a “League of the Great (nobles)” that by 1564 became powerful enough to effect Granvelle’s dismissal.⁷³ In December 1564, Prince William of Orange pleaded in King Philip II’s Council of State for freedom of conscience.⁷⁴

As a result, the late 1550’s and certainly the mid 1560’s looked increasingly promising that the Reformation in the Netherlands might for the first time obtain political patrons. The King’s centralizing policies, his disregard of ancient privileges, his hard-lined religious policies that threatened to destroy commerce and destabilize the country, and his dismissive attitude toward the nobles were alienating the Dutch *grands seigneurs*, the *gentilshommes*, and the city and town magistrates. The prospect seemed to be materializing that Dutch nobles would be willing to protect Protestants against the crushing power of the King – although, as the next chapter will show, overcoming the notorious apathy of most of the Dutch nobles was to prove a long battle.

⁷¹ Van Gelderen, *Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 34–5.

⁷² Van Gelderen, *Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 34–5.

⁷³ Van Gelderen, *Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 35–6.

⁷⁴ Graham Darby, ed., *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt* (London: Routledge, 2010), xiv.

De Bres's Quest for a Reformed Church-Political Alliance

In addition to the circumstantial evidence that suggests that De Bres would have started to view political power more optimistically and might have contemplated a religious and political alliance similar that that of the Huguenots, there are more direct indications that De Bres was envisioning a Reformed church-political alliance. We shall first examine indications that in the late 1550's and throughout the 1560's, Dutch reformers desired to establish an alliance with the Dutch nobles. Then, we shall note evidence that shows that De Bres was in practical ways involved in some of these efforts.

The Dutch Reformation and the Quest for an Alliance

Lack of powerful patrons had already plagued the Protestants in the Netherlands in the 1530's and 1540's.⁷⁵ In the late 1550's, the escalating persecution described earlier in this chapter made it obvious that the Reformed churches' only realistic hope for survival was to find patrons (magnates such as the Dutch nobles, or even the neighboring German lords) who could offer political shelter against King Philip's violent power.

Considered as a part of the broader European scene, the quest for protection of churches in a church-political alliance was a typically Reformed and Lutheran endeavor. This was not a uniquely Protestant practice, because Catholics, also, claimed that political rulers had to protect the *true* church – which was, of course, the church holding to the

⁷⁵ See e.g. Alastair Duke, "The Netherlands," in *The Early Reformation in Europe*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 145.

true form of Christianity.⁷⁶ Yet an appeal to political magistrates was certainly a characteristically Protestant *modus operandi*. As Cameron writes, “As soon as the Reformation became in any way organized, it appealed to lawful worldly authority to protect and foster it.”⁷⁷ Thus church-political partnerships played an important role in the Reformation movement across Europe. The reformers courted political rulers to implement their vision of a godly society, and held forth their own reforming movement as a reliable partner for inculcating obedient, submissive, and disciplined subjects.⁷⁸ As Steven Ozment describes the general patterns of the Reformation, “The process of gaining government sanction was an integral part of the development pattern and of the final content of the Reformation; magisterial consolidation is an essential part of the definition of the Reformation.”⁷⁹ Cameron even refers to “a peculiarly Reformed type of ‘coalition’ between reformers and politicians.”⁸⁰ This quest for church-political coalitions so often shaped Reformed writings and confessions that to some degree it is even implied

⁷⁶ As recent scholarship reminds us, appealing to political rulers for protection was characteristic of the sixteenth century reformations in the broad sense, including what might somewhat awkwardly be termed Catholic reformations. See the title of Carter Lindberg, *The European Reformations* (Chichester, UK: Blackwell, 2010).

⁷⁷ Cameron, *The European Reformation*, 179. If such appeals were more vocal among Protestants, the reason could be that protecting the Catholic bureaucracy more naturally appealed to the rulers’ own interests. Co-opting the ecclesiastical hierarchy of Rome offered the princes from the mid sixteenth century opportunities for patronage and control, Hugh Trevor-Roper suggests: “The Catholic princes had vast clerical patronage for laymen as well as clergy; the Church absorbed the potential critics; and the new or strengthened religious orders, by evangelization, reconciled society to the burden which they imposed upon it. Thus the Catholic princes of the Counter-Reformation were generally able to stifle the forces of change to which Protestant princes found themselves more nakedly exposed, and it became a truism, and perhaps a truth, that popery was the sole internal preservative of monarchy.” Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1967), 61.

⁷⁸ See Cameron, *European Reformation*, 179.

⁷⁹ Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 131.

⁸⁰ Cameron, *European Reformation*, 3.

by the *magisterial* nature of the Reformation.⁸¹ The quest was so typical of successful Calvinist Reformations in Europe that Daryll Hart claims, “Reformed Protestantism could not live without the state’s support.”⁸²

In the Netherlands, too, soon after Reformed churches became organized from the 1550’s, church leaders labored to obtain political protection, a process that gathered speed in subsequent decades and has sometimes been described as “Calvinisation.”⁸³ By the late 1550’s, these efforts to establish a political alliance that could oppose the centralizing policies of the aggressively Catholic monarch and offer political protection for the Reformed were becoming more desperate. From about 1559, evidence suggests that the Reformed consistories in the southern Netherlands were discussing an alliance with political leaders, eventually culminating in the meeting of nobles at St.Trond in July 1566, to which some Reformed congregations also sent delegates.⁸⁴ Reformed church leaders made contact not only with the Dutch nobility but also with those from German territories.⁸⁵ Reformed consistories were also involved in the establishment of the covenant of about 450 nobles, the Compromise of Nobles, in December 1565.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Recognizing that the Reformation was in a profound sense “magisterial” is not the same as arguing for a Reformation “from above” rather than “from below.” This is convincingly showed by Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities*, 121–138. Ozment argues that the Reformation was at once a “preacher’s, a people’s, or a magistrate’s reform” that “embraced and required for its completion all three movements.” Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities*, 131.

⁸² Darryl Hart, *Calvinism: A History* (Cumberland: Yale University Press, 2014), 28.

⁸³ See e.g. the regional study by A. Ph. F. Wouters and P. H. A. M. Abels, *Nieuw en ongezien: kerk en samenleving in de classis Delft en Delfland 1572–1621, Vol. 1* (Delft: Eburen, 1994), 19.

⁸⁴ See Spaans, “Reform in the Low Countries,” 122; A. A. van Schelven, *Willem van Oranje, een boek ter gedachtenis van idealen en teleurstellingen* (Amsterdam: W. Ten Have, 1948), 116–7.

⁸⁵ Phyllis Mack Crew, *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm in the Netherlands, 1544–1569* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 6.

⁸⁶ De Pater, “Geloofsbelijdenis en de religievrede in de phase van het verzet tegen Spanje,” 201.

Another indication of the Dutch reformers' quest for a church-political alliance is the decisions of the Reformed churches at the Synod of Antwerp in 1566. The assembly at the synod specifically stated that they wanted to produce an edition of the Confession with full citation of Scripture passages, which they hoped to use to persuade "certain leaders and nobility of Belgium."⁸⁷ In other words, the Reformed church leaders desired a confession of faith that, as one older scholar put it, "was of such a nature that it could obtain the approval and thus the protection of the nobility."⁸⁸ It is possible, as F. S. Knipscheer has argued, and as Gootjes seems to accept, that this was not the *Belgic Confession* but another confession.⁸⁹ Be that as it may, the fact remains that the very same synod which confirmed the acceptance by the previous year's synod (i.e. the synod of Antwerp of 1565) of the *Belgic Confession* as its confessional standard, was expressing its intention of using confessional documents in its negotiations with nobility and civil magistrates. As Gootjes states, "Synod wanted a confession made consisting of passages of Scripture for the specific purpose of persuading the nobility of the scriptural

⁸⁷ Abraham Kuyper, ed., *D. Francisci Junii opuscula theologica selecta* (Amsterdam: Muller & Kruyt, 1882), 26.

⁸⁸ Marinus Lodewijk Van Deventer, *Het jaar 1566. Eene historische proeve uit den nederlandschen vrijheidsoorlog* ('s Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1856), 76.

⁸⁹ F. S. Knipscheer, *De invoering en de waardeering der Gereformeerde belijdenisschriften in Nederland vóór 1618* (Leiden: A.H. Adriani, 1907), 52. The Belgic Confession was by no means the only candidate to serve as such a charter for a church-political alliance; and the zealous Reformed minister De Hames, for example, thought the Augsburg Confession more political suitable. Apparently, the potential of the Augsburg Confession to attract the protection of nobles in Germany and the Netherlands outweighed its Lutheran leaning doctrines. Franciscus Junius also wrote a confessions upon request of the nobles that might have been intended to find a confession acceptable to Lutheran adherents of the Confession of Augsburg. See Van Deventer, *Het jaar 1566*, 76; Gerhard van Gorp, *Reformatie in Brabant: Protestanten en katholieken in de Meierij van 's-Hertogenbosch, 1523–1634* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren BV, 2013), 99.

basis of the Protestant position.”⁹⁰ Gootjes speculates about the advantages that this would hopefully offer the Reformed churches:

The fact that Synod 1566 made the effort to revise the confession is an indication that the Reformed churches wanted their faith to be expressed as clearly as possible. Trigland pointed out that this synod met during the Diet of Augsburg. The members of the synod may have seen a glimmer of hope that this diet would lead to more freedom of religion in the Netherlands, and for that reason decided to check over their confession carefully.⁹¹

Gootjes thinks, then, that the timing of the synod and Trigland’s reference to the Diet of Augsburg suggest that the churches’ envisioned discussions with rulers and nobles are to relate to this important meeting of the Imperial Diet of the Holy Roman Empire.⁹² This view seems too narrow. No doubt the Diet of Augsburg was one opportunity, no doubt important, to negotiate with European magnates in the hope that the Emperor would induce King Philip to moderate his stance against the Reformed in the Netherlands. But Reformed leaders’ dealings with nobles were more extensive than this.⁹³ The most significant case in point was the meeting of Dutch nobles at St.Trond. Since De Bres, too, was directly involved in the meeting of nobles in St.Trond, it will be more fully discussed below.

⁹⁰ Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 99.

⁹¹ Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 99.

⁹² According to Trigland, some Dutch high nobles even referred to the Belgic Confession in their address during the Diet of Augsburg in 1566. Jacob Trigland, *Kerkelycke geschiedenissen : begrypende de swaere en bekommerlijcke geschillen, in de Vereenigde Nederlanden voor-gevallen, met derselver beslissinge, en de aenmerckinger op de Kerkelycke historie van Johannes Wtenbogaert* (Leiden: Adriaen Wyngaerden, 1650), 146.

⁹³ For example, as has already been noted, December 1565 saw the formation of the Compromise of Nobles after negotiations involving Reformed church leaders.

De Bres's Involvement in the Quest for an Alliance

There can be no doubt that De Bres was involved in these efforts to establish a church-political alliance. De Bres's negotiations with important political rulers, among other things, offer proof of this. De Bres had extensive contact, for instance, with the Reformation-minded aristocrat Henri Robert de la Marck, the Duke of Sedan.⁹⁴ Sedan was an independent sovereignty within the borders of northern France.⁹⁵ From the early 1560's, Sedan became a haven for Reformed refugees from the Netherlands and France, and soon became known as "the little Geneva."⁹⁶ By the end of 1562, De Bres was serving as the Duke's court chaplain in Sedan, placing him at the nerve center of political and religious connections involving the southern Netherlands.⁹⁷ Evidently, De Bres's involvement in Sedan was political as well as theological; Braekman maintains that the Duke held De Bres in high esteem and entrusted important diplomatic missions to him.⁹⁸

A diplomatic and political role is also evidenced by De Bres's correspondence. In 1564, De Bres met in Brussels with high nobles, another Reformed minister and a Lutheran delegation.⁹⁹ The high nobles with whom he conferred included such leading political figures as Philip Marnix, Lord of St. Aldegonde, Prince William of Orange, and

⁹⁴ Emile Braekman, "Hofprediker van de Prins van Sedan," in *Guido de Bres: Zijn leven, zijn belijden*, ed. Emile Braekman and Erik de Boer (Kampen: Kok, 2011), 213.

⁹⁵ Mark Konnert, *Local Politics in the French Wars of Religion: The Towns of Champagne, the Duc De Guise, and the Catholic League, 1560–95* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 29–30.

⁹⁶ Stuart Carroll describes Sedan as a "notorious safe haven" for Calvinists. Stuart Carroll, *Noble Power During the French Wars of Religion: The Guise Affinity and the Catholic Cause in Normandy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 51.

⁹⁷ See Braekman, "Hofprediker van de Prins van Sedan," 213.

⁹⁸ Braekman, "Hofprediker van de Prins van Sedan," 213.

⁹⁹ See De Bres's letter to Antwerp consistory of 10 July 1565. Reproduced in Braekman, *Guy de Bres: pages choisies*, 30–5.

William's brother, Louis of Nassau.¹⁰⁰ Both Marnix and Louis had, like De Bres, studied in Geneva and were keen to advance the Reformation. Also in 1564, De Bres met in Metz with Pierre van Ceulen and Jean Taffin, the Antwerp reformer and later chaplain of the Prince of Orange, where they drafted another confession, presumably for the purpose of negotiating with the nobility.¹⁰¹

The recorded desire of the 1566 synod of Antwerp to obtain the support of nobles has already been mentioned. It seems likely that De Bres attended this synod, further corroborating his involvement in the Reformed quest for an alliance. In the same year, the meeting of nobles at St.Trond mentioned in the previous section provided further evidence of De Bres's involvement in the quest for an alliance. At St.Trond, soon after the July 1566 synod of Antwerp, several nobles, including the high nobles Louis of Nassau and the Duke of Brederode, gathered for a series of strategic discussions that were attended also by selected church leaders like De Bres.¹⁰² According to Van Nierop, at these conferences the Reformed consistories discussed "the possibilities for armed resistance" with the nobility.¹⁰³ Crew adds that some of the nobles undertook to protect the Reformed church, and the Reformed consistories agreed to collect funds to raise German troops in case Philip II rebuffed the Compromise's attempts to abolish the

¹⁰⁰ See James D. Tracy, *The Founding of the Dutch Republic: War, Finance, and Politics in Holland, 1572–1588* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 70; Van Deventer, *Het jaar 1566*, 63.

¹⁰¹ Korteweg, *Guido de Bres*, 170–1. This confession is mentioned in two sources: De Bres's letter to the Antwerp consistory of 10 July, 1565, and Beza's letter to Jean Taffin of Aug. 24, 1565. See also Wes Bredenhof, "The Other Confession of Guido de Bres." *Clarion* 60 no. 22 (October, 2011): 526–527.

¹⁰² For documentary evidence of the conference and its discussions, see Charles Paillard, *Huit mois de la vie d'un peuple les Pays Bas du premier janvier au premier septembre 1566, d'après les mémoires et les correspondances du temps* (Brussels: F. Hayez, 1878), 165–73. For one account of this meeting see W.C. van Manen, *Guy de Bray, opsteller van de belijdenisse des gheloofs der Gereformeerde Kercken in Nederland* (Amsterdam: Van Holkema, 1885), 43.

¹⁰³ Van Nierop, "Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands," 93.

persecutions.¹⁰⁴ De Bres preached to the nobles over a period of three weeks during the conferences.¹⁰⁵ Clearer evidence of the involvement of De Bres in efforts to establish an alliance with the Dutch nobility – an alliance extending, potentially, even to military resistance against royal Catholicism – can scarcely be asked for.¹⁰⁶

Finally, De Bres's months in Valenciennes, before and after the besiegement of the city in late 1566 and early 1567, also confirm his diplomatic activities and his involvement in the activities of a church – political alliance while he co-pastored the Reformed church with De la Grange. De Bres's sermons in August 1566 were attended by some of the noblemen confederated in the Compromise of Nobles, the approximately four hundred nobles that had demonstratively demanded a moderation in the religious policy in April 1566.¹⁰⁷ His church council in Valenciennes conferred on 26 August with nobles of the confederated nobility. Then, following correspondence between De Bres and the Reformed pastor of Tournai, Ambrois Wille, a delegation from Valenciennes went to Tournai to meet Count Horne, who was one of the leading high nobles in the movement that was attempting to curtail the power of King Philip.¹⁰⁸ De Bres, La Grange, and the city council again met with members of the lesser nobility on 22

¹⁰⁴ Crew, *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm*, 9.

¹⁰⁵ Van Manen, *Guy de Bray*, 43. Charles Paillard refers to the manuscript *Besoigné des commissaires de Valenciennes* that mentions the names of Peregrin de la Grange (De Bres's co-pastor in Valenciennes), Franciscus Junius and Herman Modet of Antwerp. Paillard, *Huit mois*, 165–73.

¹⁰⁶ Paillard mentions “an alliance between the political interests and the religious interests, and this alliance alone could provide the means to resist Philip II.” Paillard, *Huit mois*, 166. Paillard also alludes to something that the Reformed churches could contribute that this dissertation will not explore: Whereas the nobles were able to provide military resources, they did not have the money for a military campaign. Such would have to be provided by “the rich Calvinist churches of Antwerp, Tournai, Valenciennes, and elsewhere.”

¹⁰⁷ Braekman, “Laaste Bediening in Valenciennes,” 265.

¹⁰⁸ Braekman, “Laaste Bediening in Valenciennes,” 273.

October.¹⁰⁹ According to Braekman, De Bres, unlike his co-pastor, favored military intervention by the Dutch nobles confederated in the Compromise, rather than by French Huguenot nobles.¹¹⁰ De Bres and La Grange, together with their church council, were also regularly meeting with the city government. The commissioners of the Governess even reported, relying on spy reports, that “nothing in the city council” was decided “without their [the Reformed ministers’] advice, will, and approval.”¹¹¹

The scene in these tense months before the siege and fall of Valenciennes was one of frantic diplomatic negotiations between De Bres, La Grange and other church leaders, the city government of Valenciennes, the confederation of lesser nobles, and several Dutch and French high nobles. De Bres’s central role in this diplomacy is evident from his two final published writings, his apology on behalf of the city, *A Short Declaration of the Affair of the people of the city Valenciennes*, published in December 1566,¹¹² and his appeal to the Dutch nobles for assistance, the *Remonstrance and Supplication of the people of the Reformed Church of the city Valenciennes*, written in December 1566 and

¹⁰⁹ Braekman, “Laaste Bediening in Valenciennes,” 275.

¹¹⁰ De Bres’s co-pastor, Peregrin de la Grange, was according to one witness encouraging the citizens of Valenciennes to enter into covenant with Louis of Bourbon, prince of Condé, and with admiral Gaspard de Coligny, lord of Châtillon, noblemen who had taken the Huguenot cause under their wings. See Pontus Payen, *Mémoires de Pontus Payen, Vol. I.*, ed. Alexandre Henne (Brussels: Société de l’histoire de Belgique, 1860), 244. According to evidence cited by Van Langeraad, Coligny did visit Valenciennes in October 1566. Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 73.

¹¹¹ Cited in Braekman, “Laaste Bediening in Valenciennes,” 272.

¹¹² Guido de Bres, *Declaration sommaire du fait de ceux de la ville de Valenciennes* (n.p., 1566). Although the author is not stated, there is scholarly consensus that this pamphlet was authored by De Bres. See e.g. Braekman, “Laaste Bediening in Valenciennes,” 278; Ruth Pieterman, Schimmel-Boonzaaijer, and E. Van Kempen, ed. and trans., *Gevangen om het Evangelie. Het verblijf van Guido de Brès in de gevangenis en de gesprekken die hij daar voerde: Een vertaling van Procedures tenues à l’endroit de ceux de la religion du Pais Bas, 1568 en enkele andere geschriften* (Barneveld: Stichting heruitgave werken Guido de Bres, 2010), 181; Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, CXI – CXIV.

published early in 1567.¹¹³ According to Braekman, De Bres assigned the *Declaration Sommaire* to the lesser nobleman Philippe de Wingle, to deliver to the sympathetic high nobleman, the Count Egmont, and eventually to the Governess, Margaret of Parma.¹¹⁴

The *Remonstrance and Supplication* was explicitly addressed to the high nobles, the “lords, knights of the Order,” i.e. the Order of the Golden Fleece, the Council of State.¹¹⁵ It was a point-by-point defense of the city of Valenciennes against the accusation of rebellion made by the city’s royalist opponents.¹¹⁶ The final three pages of the printed document were a separate request, addressed to “the confederated lords and nobles,” i.e. the nobles covenanted in the Compromise of Nobles to obtain a moderation of the royal religious policies.¹¹⁷ It described the plight of the inhabitants, “declared rebels, exposed to be preyed upon and pillaged by their enemies, and thereby reduced to extreme desolation, and in apparent danger of total ruin.”¹¹⁸ To prevent such calamity, De Bres wrote, they were “entreating your lordships to help them by all legitimate means,” and also to present the document to the high nobles, the knights of the Order.¹¹⁹

¹¹³ Guido de Bres, *Remonstrance et Svypplication De Cevs De L'Eglise Reformee De La Ville De Valencenes, Svr Le Mandement De Son Altesse, Fait Contre Eux Le 14. Jour De Decembre, 1566*. N.p., 1567. This, too, is by scholarly consensus attributed to De Bres. See. e.g. Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, XCVII – CVII; Pieterman, ed., *Gevangen om het Evangelie*, 187.

¹¹⁴ Braekman, “Laaste Bediening in Valenciennes,” 278.

¹¹⁵ De Bres, *Remonstrance et Svypplication*, A 2 r.

¹¹⁶ Valenciennes was officially declared by the Governess to be in a state of rebellion on 14 December, 1566. Braekman, “Laaste Bediening in Valenciennes,” 279.

¹¹⁷ De Bres, *Remonstrance et Svypplication*, a r. The first page of the request to the confederated nobles is marked with a (lowercase) “a.” The final three pages had a separate heading: “Request of the people of the Reformed Church of Valenciennes, to the confederated lords and nobles, to present their remonstrance and supplication to our lords the knights of the order of the council of state.”

¹¹⁸ De Bres, *Remonstrance et Svypplication*, a v.

¹¹⁹ De Bres, *Remonstrance et Svypplication*, b r. I am numbering the final page “b,” although no number is printed.

Two things appear from these documents. First, De Bres was central in the diplomatic negotiations with the high nobles and lesser nobles in late 1566 and early 1567. Second, this was clearly not the first time he acted in this role. Rather, he appears confident and experienced, as his strategy to ensure delivery of the *Remonstrance and Supplication* to the high nobles of the Golden Fleece indicates.

Finally, that De Bres worked together with the Dutch nobility is corroborated by his testimony during his interrogation following his arrest by royal authorities on 31 March 1567.¹²⁰ In 1567, De Bres and other church leaders like Peregrin de la Grange, both in Antwerp and in Valenciennes were, at least through intermediaries, in contact with nobles like Brederode, Egmont, Hoorne, Wingle, Villers, the Duke of Aarschot, Louis of Nasau, and even the Prince of Orange.¹²¹ Although De Bres, according to his own testimony, did not want to involve the churches in collecting money for the raising of troops by Brederode, Louis of Orange and possibly the Prince of Orange, as requested by them through Gilles le Clerq, there can be no doubt that De Bres had long since thrown in his lot with these nobles.¹²² It is sufficient to point to Van Langeraad's conclusion from the official reports of De Bres's interrogation: It is "totally clear," Van Langeraad contends,

¹²⁰ See e.g. Charles Paillard, "Interrogatoires Politiques de Guy de Bray. Extraits." *Bulletin Historique et Littéraire de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 28 No.2 (1879): 59–67. Paillard's extracts are from the Royal General Archives of Belgium's *Papiers du Conseil des Troubles* file entitled *Information et justifications de Hainaut*.

¹²¹ Paillard, "Interrogatoires Politiques de Guy de Bray," 59–61, 64, 65. These contacts were often secret, as one would expect, for example the meeting between a deputation of citizens from Valenciennes, where De Bres ministered at the time, with the Count of Egmont and the Prince of Orange in Antwerp. Paillard, "Interrogatoires Politiques de Guy de Bray," 65.

¹²² Paillard, "Interrogatoires Politiques de Guy de Bray," 61–2. De Bres even knew the approximate numbers of infantry and cavalry to be recruited in Germany and in the Netherlands by Brederode. Paillard, "Interrogatoires Politiques de Guy de Bray," 63. During De Bres's ministry in Valenciennes, there was close co-operation between the city government and the church leaders, De Bres and Peregrin de la Grange, to decide upon strategic policy, such as the decision (advised by nobles like Hoorne) of Valenciennes to lock its gates and to refuse a royal garrison to enter the city. See Paillard, "Interrogatoires Politiques de Guy de Bray," 65.

that De Bres acted “upon the encouragement of several of the confederated nobles, especially of prince William of Orange.”¹²³ Prince William of Orange, it should be remembered, was the leading high noble opposed to the absolutism and religious policy of King Philip II, and he would soon emerge as the most eminent leader of the Dutch Revolt. That De Bres had indirect access to such a high personage as the Prince of Orange is already remarkable. That he steered his own course as a church leader in liaison with the Prince of Orange and other nobles would indicate that De Bres was active in the engine room, so to speak, of the nascent church-political alliance.

In brief, evidence shows that Dutch Reformed church leaders worked toward political protection and a church-political alliance with the Dutch nobles, and strongly suggests that De Bres was actively involved in these efforts.

De Bres’s Alliance and Confessionalization

To better understand the dynamics of the prospective alliance between Reformed church leaders and Dutch nobles, and to understand, for instance, what the respective parties expected from the partnership, it is helpful to view the formation of the alliance as an instance of *confessionalization*. This section will first look at what the process of church-political alliance building involves according to confessionalization theory, a theory that has become well established in Reformation historiography. Then, it will show why De Bres’s quest for a church-political alliance amounted to confessionalization, at least in a limited form. Finally, it will show how viewing De

¹²³ Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 71–2.

Bres's quest as a limited form of confessionalization can help to understand its dynamics and hence, ultimately, De Bres's view of religious liberty.

Confessionalization: Church-political Alliances on a Grand Scale

Confessionalization is a theory in Reformation scholarship that looks at the widespread building of church and political alliances throughout Europe from 1560 to 1650. It asserts a connection between churches' formulation of doctrines and confessions, and political rulers' building of early modern states during this period.¹²⁴

Confessionalization describes a process operating *on a European scale* similar to what this chapter has argued was operating, in a limited sense, *in the Netherlands*.

Confessionalization as an interpretative theory in early modern history was pioneered by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard in the 1980's.¹²⁵ Despite criticisms over the

¹²⁴ Schilling, "Confessional Europe," 641, 643. Other scholars have suggested earlier dates, as, for example, is apparent from the title of Harm Klueting, *Das Konfessionelle Zeitalter: 1525–1648* (Stuttgart: Ulmer, 1989). Note that the term "confession" has a wider meaning in confessionalization scholarship than simply a confessional statement.

¹²⁵ Some of the important studies include Heinz Schilling, *Konfessionskonflikt und Staatsbildung: eine Fallstudie über das Verhältnis von religiösem und sozialem Wandel in der Frühneuzeit am Beispiel der Grafschaft Lippe* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Mohn, 1981), esp. 15–49; Heinz Schilling, *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 205–300; Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling, *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung: wissenschaftliches Symposion der Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum und des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte 1993* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1995); Wolfgang Reinhard, "Zwang zur Konfessionalisierung? Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters," *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 10, no. 3 (1983): 257–277. A translation of this article appeared as "Pressures toward Confessionalization? Prolegomena to a Theory of the Confessional Age," in *The German Reformation: The Essential Readings*, ed. C. Scott Dixon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999). Introductions include Stefan Ehrenpreis and Ute Lotz-Heumann, *Reformation und konfessionelles Zeitalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002); Susan R. Boettcher, "Confessionalization: Reformation, Religion, Absolutism, and Modernity," *History Compass* 2, no. 1 (2004): 1–10; Ute Lotz-Heumann, "The Concept of 'Confessionalization': a Historiographical Paradigm in Dispute," *Memoria y Civilización* 4 (2001): 93–114; and Ute Lotz-Heumann, "Confessionalization," in *Reformation and Early Modern Europe: A Guide to Research*, ed. David Mark Whitford (Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2008).

past decades, many scholars still regard it as reliable and useful.¹²⁶ The theory describes how “based on their respective confessions of faith,” the traditions of Calvinism, Lutheranism, and Roman Catholicism (sometimes Anglicanism is included as a separate tradition) “developed into internally coherent and externally exclusive communities distinct in institutions, membership, and belief.”¹²⁷ In addition to this notion of “confessions,” the connection between the processes of “confession building” and early modern “state building” is central to the theory: on the basis of their confessional identities, various churches “entered into alliances with the early modern states” between the years 1560 to 1650.¹²⁸

Three definitions of confessionalization will make clear what scholars mean by the concept. Ronnie Hsia defines confessionalization as “the interrelated processes by which the consolidation of the early modern state, the imposition of social discipline, and the formation of confessional churches transformed society.”¹²⁹ Important in Hsia’s analysis of confessionalization is the structural parallels between the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the institutionalization of confessional beliefs, social control, and the link between church leaders and the early modern states.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ A useful summary of objections to confessionalization is presented by Lotz-Heumann, “Confessionalization,” 143–149 and Lotz-Heumann, “The Concept of ‘Confessionalization,’” 93–114.

¹²⁷ Schilling, “Confessional Europe,” 641. In addition to the actual confessions of faith themselves, these communities or organizations of believers holding to a certain confession are sometimes in confessionalization scholarship referred to as “confessions.” See Reinhard, “Pressures Toward Confessionalization?” 178.

¹²⁸ Schilling, “Confessional Europe,” 641.

¹²⁹ Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe, 1550–1750* (London: Routledge, 1992), 5.

¹³⁰ R. Pro-chia summarizes one of the finding formulations of the theory’s initial theses: “1. That the Reformation and Counter-Reformation were structurally parallel, with the Counter-Reformation expressing many ‘modern’ traits, such as individualism and rationality; 2. That confessionalization created social groups, ‘the three confessions,’ [i.e. Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism] by a variety of means, including the formulation of dogma, confessional propaganda, education, discipline, rituals, and language;

A second, similar definition is provided by Herman Selderhuis, who defines confessionalization as involving

that the public church's confessional identity, captured in normative texts and solid formulations (as to Calvinism one should think of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confessions . . .), would in turn, with the help of the government, promote and monitor the religious identity, and finally, it aspired – for example through education and popular culture – that believers would also internalize that identity.¹³¹

The importance of doctrinal confessions is noteworthy in this description, specifically the *Belgic Confession* of De Bres, as well as the role of the government in promoting and establishing the church, and the ambition of the internalization of that identity (a feature which is related to the notion of social discipline that will be discussed in chapter six).

A third definition is the shortest. Susan Boettcher describes confessionalization as “the ways an alliance of church and state mediated through confessional statements and church ordinances facilitated and accelerated the political centralization underway after the fifteenth century.”¹³² This definition underlines, once again, the importance of doctrinal confessions and the role of an alliance of political rulers and churches.¹³³

Confessionalization, then, sees the way in which church doctrine was sharply formulated (as most evident in church confessions) as part of a general social process,

3. That confessionalization strengthened political centralization when the early modern state used religion to consolidate its territorial boundary, to incorporate the church into the state bureaucracy, and to impose social control on its subjects.” Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation*, 3. These three theses are set forth in Reinhard, “Pressures Toward Confessionalization?” 173–192.

¹³¹ Selderhuis, *Handbook of Dutch Church History*, 160.

¹³² Boettcher, “Confessionalization: Reformation, Religion, Absolutism, and Modernity,” 1.

¹³³ However, the definition fails to mention “social disciplining,” which was an important shared aim that aligned the goals of church building and early modern state formation. See Lotz-Heumann, “Confessionalization,” 138. On the notion of “social discipline” or *Sozialdisziplinierung*, see e.g. Winfried Schulze, “Gerhard Oestreichs Begriff ‘Sozialdisziplinierung in der frühen Neuzeit’,” *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 14, no. 3 (1987): 265–302.

which specifically also involved political leaders.¹³⁴ It emphasizes integration between “doing politics” (focusing on objectives like enhancing the power of the state and enhancing external social discipline) and “doing theology” (focusing on objectives like developing comprehensive and consistent doctrinal confessions, as well as internalizing theological ideas to enhance social discipline) – what Jeffrey Watt calls a “conjunction among religious reform, social discipline, and state-building,”¹³⁵ or what Lotz-Heumann describes as interaction between “confession-building and state-building.”¹³⁶

Confessionalization theory thus suggests fruitful ways of looking at the relationships between church confessions, social discipline, religion, politics, and the rise of the early modern state during the Reformation.

De Bres’s Quest: Confessionalization in a Limited Sense

Was the quest of De Bres and other Reformed leaders for a church-political alliance an instance of this process of confessionalization? Yes, if confessionalization is understood in a limited or weak sense of the term.

¹³⁴ For an account of how this occurred in a specific location, see Heinz Schilling, “Between the Territorial State and Urban Liberty: Lutheranism and Calvinism in the County of Lippe,” in *The German People and the Reformation*, ed. Hsia, Ronnie Po-chia (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). On “confession building” or *Konfessionsbildung* see e.g. Ernst Walter Zeeden, “Grundlagen und Wege der Konfessionsbildung in Deutschland im Zeitalter der Glaubenskämpfe.” *Historische Zeitschrift* 185 (1958): 249–299.

¹³⁵ Jeffrey R. Watt, *The Long Reformation*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006, 12. Thomas Brady’s definition is very similar. See Thomas A. Brady Jr., “Confessionalization – the career of a concept,” in *Confessionalization in Europe, 1555–1700 Essays in Honor and Memory of Bodo Nischan*, ed. Nischan, Bodo, John M. Headley, Hans Joachim Hillerbrand, and Anthony J. Papalas (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), 4. With respect to central Europe, see Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation*.

¹³⁶ Lotz-Heumann, “Confessionalization,” 137.

Limited or Weak Sense of Confessionalization

By a “limited” or “weak” sense of confessionalization is meant a process resembling confessionalization, but not in its fullest sense: a process without all the rigorous features of the confessionalization operative in Germany from 1560 to 1650, for example, which Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard described. This chapter is arguing that the incipient alliance between the Reformed and the nobility in the Netherlands was an instance of confessionalization in this looser sense of the word.

Such a flexible approach to the concept of confessionalization is in line with recent trends in confessionalization scholarship. Recently, some confessionalization scholars have suggested enhancing the theory’s usefulness by adjusting the parameters of the original versions in order to take account of significant criticisms. Lotz-Heumann, for example, expresses confidence in the future of “a more flexible concept of confessionalization” as a research tool.¹³⁷ Because this chapter will only make minor use of the insights of confessionalization theory, it is sufficient for the purposes of this chapter to claim that De Bres’s and other reformers’ quest for a church-political alliance displayed *to some degree* the defining features of confessionalization, such as a “conjunction among religious reform, social discipline, and state-building” as well as an interaction between “confession-building and state-building.”¹³⁸ That is to say, for our purpose of better understanding the reasons for De Bres’s position on religious liberty, it

¹³⁷ Lotz-Heumann, “Confessionalization,” 137.

¹³⁸ Watt, *The Long Reformation*, 12; Lotz-Heumann, “Confessionalization,” 137.

is sufficient to recognize that dynamics of confessionalization, even in a limited sense, were visibly at work.¹³⁹

Dutch Confessionalization in the 1550's and 1560's?

Several scholars accept that confessionalization was at work also in the Netherlands, but they have not specifically considered the relatively early period which most concerns us, that of the late 1550's and 1560's.¹⁴⁰ What about confessionalization in the 1550's and 1560's? At least three possible objections might be raised against applying confessionalization theory in its fullest sense to the Reformation in the Netherlands in the late 1550's and 1560's, which would militate against accepting De Bres's involvement in the purported processes of confessionalization there. These three objections revolve around the issues of geography, institutionalization, and the failure of confessionalization in the Netherlands. Despite possible objections to confessionalization in the Netherlands, however, it seems safe to assert that at least in a limited sense of the word, the quest of

¹³⁹ To some extent, one can recognize also among the Reformed in the Netherlands the methods which Reinhard identifies by which large groups established their confessional identity: "1. A return to clear theoretical ideas; 2. The dissemination and establishment of new standards; 3. Propaganda, and the taking of measures against counter-propaganda; 4. Internalization of the new order through education and training; 5. The disciplining of adherents (in the narrower sense); 6. The practice of ritual; 7. The influencing of language." See Reinhard, "Pressures towards Confessionalization?" 177–183.

¹⁴⁰ See e.g. Schilling, "Confessionalization Europe," 646; "Die politische Bedeutung des Konfessionellen im Deutschen Reich und in der Republik der Vereinigten Niederlande. Oder: War die Konfessionalisierung ein 'Fundamentaltvorgang'?" in *Der Absolutismus—ein Mythos? Strukturwandel monarchischer Herrschaft in West-und Mitteleuropa (ca. 1550–1700)*, ed. Ronald G. Asch and Heinz Duchhardt (Köln: Böhlau, 1996); Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines: Confession and Community in Utrecht: 1578–1620* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), Kaplan even recognizes that the Dutch Revolt "end[ed] up associated with a particular confession," i.e. the Reformed church, but he minimizes the role of the Reformed in the run-up to the Revolt and by contrast emphasizes what he calls an "aconfessional cause – the defense of freedom, local autonomy, and the status quo." See Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 110. Scholars have long debated the relative importance of various causes (religion, nationalism, freedom, localism, etc.) in the Dutch Revolt. See e.g. Pettegree, "Religion and the Revolt."

De Bres and other Dutch reformers for an alliance was an instance of confessionalization, as responses to these three objections will show.

A first objection to viewing De Bres and other reformers' quest for an alliance as confessionalization might be that, in its rigorous form, the confessionalization paradigm fits only the German experience well.¹⁴¹ Admittedly, the Dutch quest lacked some of the salient features of the embracive confessionalization described by Schilling and Reinhard. For example, the Reformed church leaders were working towards an alliance with the Dutch higher and lesser nobles – not with the “state” in a narrower sense of the word, as was the case in Germany from 1560 to 1650. In fact, the incipient alliance between the Reformed churches and Dutch nobility in the Netherlands was really a movement *against* the state, because in the Netherlands the state of Habsburg Spain was increasingly centered in Philip II's monarchy. This monarchical state, as was seen earlier in this chapter, increasingly aimed to exclude the Dutch nobles from real power and to eradicate the Reformed religion. Does it make sense, then, to claim that Reformed confession-building and state-building were allied activities in the mid-sixteenth century Netherlands, as confessionalization theory holds? Surely in the Dutch context it only makes sense to talk of “state building” by the Reformed church-political alliance from the late 1560's or early 1570's, when royal hegemony in the Netherlands was openly rejected by the growing alliance of Reformed leaders and nobles, or, better yet, only from 1579, when the Union of Utrecht was laying the foundation of a separate state in opposition to Philip's monarchy?

¹⁴¹ Reinhard, “Pressures toward Confessionalization?” 172.

In response, it should be emphasized that the confessionalization paradigm has convincingly been shown to apply to European countries outside of the Holy Roman Empire, even if scholars often find it necessary to voice various *caveats*.¹⁴² In the case of some regions of France, for example, Philip Benedict has found that the theory does apply, although in a weakened form.¹⁴³ Similarly, Olaf Mörke has argued that, although the theory in its full sense cannot be applied to the Dutch Republic as a whole, a weaker form of confessionalization can still be recognized among individual religious communities.¹⁴⁴

Moreover, in the Netherlands the hostility of the state or monarchy in the late 1550's and 1560's – the monarchical state's escalating efforts to strangle Protestantism – does not imply that all Protestant processes of confessionalization were thereby excluded. Of course, whatever alliance-building De Bres, Marnix, Junius, Datheen, and other Reformed leaders aspired to, it had to take place *against* the wishes of the increasingly absolute monarchy. Yet it seems advisable to conceive of the process of confessionalization as operating on various political levels (urban, regional, principalities), without fixating upon that mysterious entity, the early modern state, which was arising in the sixteenth century. Also, scholars acknowledge that, at least in weak form, a process of confessionalization could be at work despite state opposition. Although not referring specifically to the Netherlands, Reinhard points out that “the

¹⁴² Heinrich R. Schmidt, *Konfessionalisierung im 16. Jahrhundert* (Munich: De Gruyter, 1992); Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation*; Cameron, *European Reformation*, 370–401.

¹⁴³ Philip Benedict, “Confessionalization in France? Critical Reflections and New Evidence” in *The Faith and Fortunes of France's Huguenots, 1600–85*, ed. Philip Benedict (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 312–17.

¹⁴⁴ Mörke, “Die politische Bedeutung des Konfessionellen.”

efforts toward confessionalization . . . made by noble elites had a political dimension, even if they were carried out in conflict with the ‘power of the state’ – or perhaps for that very reason.”¹⁴⁵ Likewise it has been suggested that among the Reformed in France confessionalization occurred “in defiance of state authority rather than under its patronage,”¹⁴⁶ and “in the absence, even when facing the hostility, of the state or its agents.”¹⁴⁷ Recent scholarship has argued that there could be what Lotz-Heumann calls “different constellations” of confessionalization, including

confessionalizing intentions by the state with no or little success; different forms of resistance and opposition to state-sponsored processes of confessionalization; different agents such as estates, urban elites, and the populace; and above all, various forms of confession-building; and the formation of confessional identities independent of state influence.¹⁴⁸

Thus, confessionalization could come in many shapes and sizes, including various weaker forms, and at least the weaker varieties of the process convincingly apply to the situation of the Reformed in the Netherlands despite the opposition of the Spanish Habsburg monarchical state. At least in a weak sense, De Bres was involved in promoting a version of what Schilling calls the “symbiosis of state and church, so typical of confessional Europe,” in other words, confessionalization.¹⁴⁹

A second objection would be that it is premature to speak of confessionalization in the early pre-institutionalized phase of the Dutch Reformation. After all, confessionalization in the proper sense of the word denotes “a process of self-definition

¹⁴⁵ Reinhard, “Pressures towards Confessionalization?” 182.

¹⁴⁶ Monter, *Judging the French Reformation*, 147.

¹⁴⁷ Farr, “Confessionalization and Social Discipline in France,” 291.

¹⁴⁸ Lotz-Heumann, “Confessionalization,” 149.

¹⁴⁹ Schilling, “Confessional Europe,” 659.

and institutionalization,” as Richard Muller defines it.¹⁵⁰ But one can hardly speak of “institutionalization” of Reformed identity in the Netherlands in the late 1550’s and 1560’s. In fact, the monolithic monarchical state of Philip II was doggedly *opposed* to allowing even the church or private society, let alone the state or public life, to assume a Reformed confessional identity. As a result, there was hardly even an organized Reformed church institution in the 1550’s! Because of this, pre-Revolt Netherlands was still a stranger to characteristic institutional effects of Reformed confessionalization, such as the phenomenon that “ecclesiastical institutions grew stronger, clerics mightier, religious practices more uniform,” or that Reformed schools and universities were founded, or that anti-Reformed publications were prohibited by law, or that Catholic worship practices were suppressed.¹⁵¹ Royal political control was simply too fervently Catholic and too comprehensive to tolerate heterodox institutionalization.

In answer, it should be noted that the lack of Reformed institutionalization in the 1550’s and 1560’s did not entirely preclude elementary forms of confessionalization. Despite royal and Catholic hegemony in the Netherlands in this period, some incipient features of Reformed confessionalization can be pointed out. There was, for instance, a tendency towards “consolidation and control,” both “control of church members by elites” and “individual self-control.”¹⁵² The church organization of the Reformed churches “under the cross” might have been illegal and undercover, but despite a lack of *visible* public character, they did assume a public character, at least from the 1560’s.

¹⁵⁰ Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725. Vol.1: Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2003), 63.

¹⁵¹ Kaplan, “Confessionalism and Popular Piety,” *Fides et Historia* 27, no. 2 (1995): 45.

¹⁵² Kaplan, “Confessionalism and Popular Piety,” 45.

Secret Reformed synods were held, for example in Armentières in 1563 and in Antwerp in 1566. These efforts at organization were reinforced with intellectual and material resources and institutional assistance, even the hosting of synods, in locations outside the King's reach, such as the cities of Emden and Wesel.¹⁵³ More importantly, efforts by Reformed church leaders (and some Reformed-leaning nobles) to form an alliance of Dutch nobles and Reformed churches were no less real for being secretive, and soon bore visible fruit, as the pivotal year of 1566, often called the “miraculous year” or *annus mirabilis*, revealed.

Additionally, although institutionalization was a natural effect of confessionalization in a fuller sense, it was not, especially in an early phase, a *sine qua non* for the dynamics of confessionalization to operate in the Netherlands. In other countries, too, early confessionalization did not soon produce institutional results. This becomes especially apparent if the start date of confessionalization in Europe is viewed flexibly. Kaplan, for example, traces the beginning of confessionalization elsewhere in Europe to the mid-1520's, and argues that the process only accelerated in the 1540's when it became obvious that attempts to reunite Catholics and Protestants would fail.¹⁵⁴ Reinhard, too, is prepared to recognize the beginning of confessionalization “as early as the 1520s.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ On the importance of the synod of Emden for Dutch church organization, see esp. Doede Nauta (ed.) *De Synode Van Emden, Oktober 1571. Een Bundel Opstellen Ter Gelegenheid Van De Vierhonderdjarige Herdenking* (Kampen: Kok, 1971). On the importance of the church in Emden for the Dutch “churches under the cross” more generally, see Andrew Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt: Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). On Wesel, see Jesse Spohnholz, “Confessional Coexistence in the Early Modern Low Countries,” in *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, ed. Tomas Max Safley (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 64. See also Jesse Spohnholz, *The Convent of Wesel: The Event That Never Was and the Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁵⁴ Kaplan, “Confessionalism and Popular Piety,” 45. Kaplan defines the time of confessionalization as “the period roughly between 1555 and 1648.”

¹⁵⁵ Reinhard, “Pressures towards Confessionalization?” 173.

The Dutch situation of an early phase of confessionalization without real institutional results is therefore not altogether unique, even though institutionalization was delayed in the Netherlands longer than elsewhere. Although in the Netherlands the Reformation met with fierce initial opposition and struggled to take root, here, no less than elsewhere, confessionalization roughly coincided with the Reformation, and eventually extended (in more characteristically institutional form) well into the seventeenth century.¹⁵⁶

A third objection that might be made against accepting confessionalization in the Netherlands and De Bres's role in it is that confessionalization in any full sense of the word was never successfully accomplished in the Netherlands, not even in the decades after De Bres's death and the formative years of the Republic.¹⁵⁷ In the Dutch Revolt, Kaplan argues, confessionalization did not succeed,¹⁵⁸ and even in the seventeenth century, "in Dutch society as a whole, confessionalization failed."¹⁵⁹

Yet this objection, too, does not negate the applicability of confessionalization to some of De Bres's efforts in the Netherlands. Surely the reality of the early dynamics of confessionalization should not be denied by a retroactive judgment of eventual success or failure. The fact that the connection between confession-building and state formation was not ultimately successful in the Netherlands does not negate all forms of confessionalization as a historical process. After all, confessionalization was an ambitious project. The project involved that church leaders spelled out in their confessions a vision of divine, personal, and societal order, including what role the church and the state should

¹⁵⁶ See Schilling, "Confessional Europe," 646, 669.

¹⁵⁷ See Watt, *The Long Reformation*, 12–13.

¹⁵⁸ Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 110.

¹⁵⁹ See Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*, 295.

play in society, and then, as Watt described it, they “embarked on an ambitious mission . . . of enforcing these confessions, an endeavor that included imposing social discipline.”¹⁶⁰ Such an ambitious mission could fail at many points, because it depended upon the successful enforcement of a theological vision as well as the successful imposition (and internalization) of social discipline. Success was by no means guaranteed. In fact, as a connection between confession-building and state formation, Lotz-Heumann points out that confessionalization was rarely successful anywhere!¹⁶¹

Accordingly, Schilling seems correct to claim that a process of confessionalization was at work among the Reformed in the Netherlands, despite the fact that “the [Reformation] movement did not achieve total reform of state and society” even in the northern Netherlands which, unlike the southern provinces (more or less modern day Belgium), was not soon reconquered by Philip II during the Dutch Revolt and thus saw a flourishing of the Reformed churches.¹⁶² It likewise seems justified to speak of the crystallization of an alliance of Reformed church and nobles, although in the late 1550’s and 1560’s this alliance was still weak, and was always a feeble thing compared to the successful and energetic alliance of “church and state” of Lutheran regions where confessionalization was epitomized. The Dutch situation was not altogether exceptional, either, because, as Schilling reminds us, when churches entered into alliances with the early modern states, the results “usually lagged far behind their aims.”¹⁶³ Thus, the lackluster nature of the alliance between Reformed church leaders and Dutch political

¹⁶⁰ Watt, *The Long Reformation*, 11.

¹⁶¹ Lotz-Heumann, “Confessionalization,” 149.

¹⁶² Schilling, “Confessionalization Europe,” 646.

¹⁶³ Schilling, “Confessional Europe,” 641.

rulers does not mean that the dynamics of confessionalization were absent in the 1550's and 1560's before the Dutch Revolt.

As a result, these objections are inconclusive and do not prevent us from identifying the process of church-political alliance building by reformers and nobles in the Netherlands as confessionalization, at least in a limited sense.

De Bres's *Confession* Evidence of Confessionalization

That the Dutch reformers' quest for a church-political alliance amounted to a form of *confessionalization* is corroborated by the role foreseen for De Bres's *Confession* and its associated documents. De Bres's *Confession*, along with a few other confessional statements, was central in the reformers' attempts to supply a suitable doctrinal or confessional statement that could serve as a charter for the alliance. Broadly speaking, this amounted to confessionalization, which as we have seen was defined by Boettcher as "an alliance of church and state mediated through confessional statements and church ordinances."¹⁶⁴

There are several indications from its content and its context that the *Belgic Confession* was one of the confessions at times considered to serve as a summary of the reformers' doctrine that could serve to win the support of the nobles. A first indication that the *Belgic Confession* was intended to supply the doctrinal charter for a church-political alliance is its very existence. As the previous chapter mentioned, De Bres and other Dutch reformers insisted upon their own confession for the Netherlands, despite

¹⁶⁴ Boettcher, "Confessionalization: Reformation, Religion, Absolutism, and Modernity," 1.

Calvin's preference that they use the French Confession.¹⁶⁵ Why did they forego the successful French Confession, but then use the French Confession to create a parallel confession that was almost identical in doctrine? A likely reason was political, suggesting the political aims of De Bres's *Confession*: after the long war between France and Spain, French influence in the Netherlands was suspect among the nobility. An ostensibly homegrown "Dutch" or "Belgic" confession would be more acceptable among the Dutch nobles.¹⁶⁶

A second indication was the expectation of the reformers regarding how the *Belgic Confession* would function. The *Belgic Confession* was even characterized by one intimately involved in its early history, Saravia, as a kind of political confession presented to the civil rulers.¹⁶⁷ That the Dutch reformers were expecting a political role for the *Belgic Confession*, perhaps analogous to the political role of the French Confession, is suggested by how important it was for the Dutch church leaders to obtain Geneva's imprimatur. In May 1566, the synod of Antwerp accepted, with slight modification, De Bres's *Confession*, and delegated Franciscus Junius to take it to Geneva "for approval," as Rotterdam calls it.¹⁶⁸ What the synod probably desired was the

¹⁶⁵ See Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 44.

¹⁶⁶ See e.g. Harm J. Boiten, "Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis," in *Confessies: gereformeerde geloofsverantwoording in zestiende-eeuws Europa*, ed. Mees te Velde and A. Bijlsma-van Bochove (Heerenvveen: Groen, 2009), 439.

¹⁶⁷ Bakhuizen van den Brink, *De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften*, 9. This refers to Saravia's letter of 13 April 1612 to Wtenbogaert. For criticism of Bakhuizen van den Brink's interpretation of Saravia's letter, see Gootjes, *The Belgic Confession*, 109.

¹⁶⁸ Rotterdam, *Verklaring Der Nederlandsche Geloofsbelijdenis*, 40. Junius recorded in his autobiography of 1595 that he took the *Confession* to "the brothers in Geneva, so that they would approve it to be printed, if they thought it was profitable, and that they would commend our institution to God in prayer." Kuyper, *D. Francisci Junii opuscula theologica selecta*, 26. The mission of Junius was likely not about arranging the printing of the *Confession* in Geneva, because printing could be done more conveniently at Antwerp or Rouen, which would bypass the risk and expense of smuggling hundreds of copies back from Geneva to Flanders.

approval and blessing of the Genevan leaders of the international Reformation movement upon De Bres's *Confession*.

A third indication that De Bres's *Belgic Confession* was to function as the charter of a Dutch church-political alliance are the hints of this function provided by De Bres's own writings. A first such hint is that the *Confession* proper was joined, as was discussed in chapter two, by the *Remonstrance to the Magistrates*, which was addressed "to the magistrates of Flanders, Brabant, Hainaut, Artois, Chatelenie de l'Isle and other surrounding areas."¹⁶⁹ This address already suggests the importance of political magistrates in the context in which the *Belgic Confession* was born.

Another hint of the *Belgic Confession*'s intended function in confessionalization efforts is its claim, in the first edition of 1561, to be "made by common consent by the believers who live in the Netherlands."¹⁷⁰ This claim strongly suggests that a future role was planned for the *Confession* which involved broad ecclesiastical approval before presentation to the rulers. Of course, by 1 November 1561, synodal approval or some other expression of "common consent" could not by any means yet be claimed.¹⁷¹ It was only in April 1563 at the synod in Armentières that the confession was for the first time adopted by an assembly of churches (and even so, the synod of Armentières was only a provincial synod hardly representing "common consent by the believers who live in the Netherlands").¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.iii r.

¹⁷⁰ *Confession* (1561)^C, a.i r.

¹⁷¹ See Braekman, "In dienst van het kerken 'onder het kruis'," 194.

¹⁷² See Gérard Moreau, "Les Synodes Des Églises Wallonnes Des Pays-Bas en 1563," *Nederlands Archief Voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 47, no. 1 (1965): 3 on article 1 of the of the Synod of Armentières (or "Bouton") of 26 April 1563.

Some might object that the possibility that such a route of confessionalization had originally been planned for De Bres's *Confession* is contradicted by the actual historical circumstances of the publication of De Bres's *Confession*. If De Bres and other leaders really intended to involve a synodal process, or at least to first circulate the *Confession* so that churches could study and revise and approve of the *Confession*, and then subsequently present it to political partners as a charter for confessionalization, why was the *Confession* so dramatically made public on the night of 1 November 1561? Why was there no effort to first present the *Confession* to representatives of the Dutch nobility?

The answer, it is suggested, is that whatever plans De Bres and other Reformed leaders might have had for the *Confession* were short-circuited by fast-paced events in 1561 – especially the dramatic turn of events in Tournai in 1561. In several cities in 1561, there was increased tension as public displays of Reformed allegiance began to surface. The decision to somewhat prematurely start printing the *Confession* might have been related to this, because it would seem, Gootjes argues, that the *Belgic Confession* was printed “with some haste, without being carefully checked out by either the printer or the author.”¹⁷³ After tense months of increasingly audacious Reformed preaching and the public singing of Psalms, and notwithstanding De Bres's advice against such *chanteries* as seditious and provocative, on 29 September 1561 hundreds of Reformed believers marched through the city streets singing Psalms, their numbers growing to thousands on subsequent nights.¹⁷⁴ The regent Margaret and her officials in Tournai responded with

¹⁷³ Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 32. Gootjes's evidence for this statement is the repetition of the “finally, we believe” at the beginning of Art.36 and of Art.37.

¹⁷⁴ Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*, 68; Jan C. H. De Pater, *De opkomst en de ondergang van het Calvinisme in de stad Doornik* ('s-Gravenhage: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1946), 8–9.

arrests and reprisals.¹⁷⁵ One Reformed pastor was executed and the royal investigators started tracking down a list of sixty suspected instigators.¹⁷⁶ The persecution and fervent hunt for culprits proved that De Bres's premonitions had been correct. As pastor of Tournai's secret Reformed congregation, however, De Bres subsequently realized that the upsurge in hostility demanded a swift apology for the Reformed faith, hence his decision to throw a copy of the *Confession* over the castle wall of Tournai in an effort to "move the authorities to greater mildness," as Van Manen put it.¹⁷⁷

To be sure, for a Reformed confession earmarked to serve as a constitutional framework for an alliance between church and political magnates, this was an unusual career. It was unlike the route followed by, for example, the French Confession, upon which, as we have seen, De Bres's *Confession* was closely modelled. The French Confession was first adopted and revised by the synod of French churches in Paris in 1559, and then presented to King Francis II in 1560.¹⁷⁸ Yet the *Belgic Confession's* anomalous route does not detract from its intended use for confessionalization. This is supported by the *Letter to the King* printed with the *Confession*, which mentions "the confession which we now deliver to you [the King]" – once again hinting that eventual presentation to the King, perhaps following the example of the French Confession, was envisioned.¹⁷⁹ Throwing the *Confession* over the castle wall was clearly an emergency measure motivated by the repressions following the *chanteries*, as De Bres's

¹⁷⁵ Spaans, "Reform in the Low Countries," 123.

¹⁷⁶ Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*, 71.

¹⁷⁷ Van Manen, *Guy de Bray*, 37.

¹⁷⁸ Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), 138–9.

¹⁷⁹ *Confession* a.v v.

accompanying hand-written letter makes clear,¹⁸⁰ and thus looks like a departure from the path De Bres had originally planned for it.¹⁸¹

One of De Bres's Letters Suggests Confessionalization

A final indication that De Bres's quest for an alliance amounted to a form of confessionalization is provided by De Bres's letter to the consistory of Antwerp of 10 July 1565. In his letter, De Bres mentioned that he had received correspondence from "Germans," possibly Lutheran nobles, and from the high nobleman Louis of Nassau, a Lutheran and brother of Prince William of Orange; this correspondence recommended, as was previously discussed with De Bres in Brussels, the formation of a united front between Lutherans and Calvinists in the Netherlands.¹⁸² The letter then urged the Reformed consistory of Antwerp to consider uniting with the Lutherans on the basis of the Wittenberg Concord of 1536.¹⁸³ Unity with the Lutherans offered the prospect of political protection, De Bres wrote:

My lord [Henri Robert de la Marck, the Duke of Sedan] instructed me to write to you, so that you will urgently consider the matter. Because we would want to agree with the Germans in one single confession of the main matters, in order to break entirely the power of the Pope. For if we are all united in doctrine, no one would be able to touch us without offending at the same time all of Germany, which would be good beyond measure for us, and it will also serve to shut the mouths

¹⁸⁰ For fragments of De Bres's letter to the commissioners of the Governness, see Braekman, *Guy de Bres: pages choisies*, 14–16.

¹⁸¹ See e.g. Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer, Vol.3b*, 554.

¹⁸² Reproduced in Braekman, *Guy de Bres: pages choisies*, 30.

¹⁸³ See e.g. Korteweg, *Guido de Bres*, 169. Reformed signatories of the confession included Bucer, Capito, and Musculus; Lutheran signatories included Melanchthon and Luther.

of those who say that we are not one, and by this means our poor country will be greatly comforted.¹⁸⁴

Evident in this paragraph are telltale signs of the dynamics of confessionalization: De Bres is acting as an intermediary between political rulers and church leaders (a high nobleman and the Reformed church leaders of the leading Dutch city of Antwerp). So important was a confessional foundation to obtain political protection against Catholic political power (“the power of the Pope”) that De Bres recommended considering subscription to the Lutheran-leaning Wittenberg Concord, even if some of its theology sounded “a little harsh” for Reformed ears.¹⁸⁵

The Aims of the (Confessional) Alliance and De Bres’s Shift

Since De Bres’s and the other reformers’ quest for a church-political alliance can be viewed as a form of confessionalization, it is now possible to draw upon insights of confessionalization theory. Confessionalization theory employs many scholarly insights, and can therefore provide a useful lens through which to view the religious and political dynamics of a church-political alliance. This potential to explain aspects of the historical interaction of religion and government prompts Dixon to praise the theory as “a powerful historiographical paradigm,” by which he means “a very useful way for historians to

¹⁸⁴ Braekman, *Guy de Bres: pages choisies*, 30. De Bres shows his willingness to bend over backwards to read the Lutheran confession in the most positive way for the sake of unity when he adds, “When they ask what system or what reformation of doctrine we want to bring about, it would then be very easy to respond to them. It is true that this *Concordia* sounds a little harsh when one first reads it, but one can understand it, on the whole, positively if one really wants to.”

¹⁸⁵ Braekman, *Guy de Bres: pages choisies*, 30. Confirming this priority of political protection, De Bres some years earlier in his *Letter to the King* accompanying his *Confession* apparently accepted the way in which Catholics sometimes described the Reformed as Lutherans.

gather their thoughts.”¹⁸⁶ This usefulness of confessionalization to “gather thoughts” makes it useful for our present purpose of exploring the dynamics of alliance building between Dutch nobles and Reformed church leaders in the Netherlands in the 1550’s and 1560’s. How, then, does viewing De Bres’s quest for a political alliance through the lens of the confessionalization paradigm help to explain his Constantinian shift from 1558 to 1565, and hence, ultimately, his advocacy of the political compulsion of religion? The value of confessionalization for understanding De Bres’s shift and ultimately his view of religious liberty is fourfold.

First, the paradigm underlines the importance of understanding De Bres’s thought as that of a pivotal actor in the dynamics of church/ruler alliance formation. This implies that De Bres’s quest for an alliance between the Reformed churches and political rulers, like that of other authors and promoters of Reformed confessions (Bullinger, Knox, Calvin, Beza, Chandieu, Junius), needs to be central in our explanation of De Bres’s advocacy of the political compulsion of religion in his writings, and especially in his *Confession*. After all, confessionalization emphasizes the central role of confessional statements (such as De Bres’s *Confession*) as charters for an alliance between church and magistrate.

Second, the confessional paradigm helps to conceive how De Bres’s insistence upon the duty of political rulers to wield their power on behalf of true religion and against false and idolatrous religion was *both* pragmatic *and* theological. It was *both* a calculated move to persuade reluctant Dutch nobles to deflect or resist the royal persecution of the

¹⁸⁶ C. Scott Dixon, *The Church in the Early Modern Age* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2016), 112. Dixon, for one, is confident that confessionalization is still a potent historiographical model.

Reformed, as has already been argued and as the next chapter will further demonstrate, *and* it was an entailment of De Bres's theological ideas. There were, as confessionalization theory shows, sensitive rational connections between, on the one hand, the reformers' ambitious project of transforming society also through concrete and even political means (i.e. through laws, governments, church reforms, family reforms, catechisms, schools, universities, church orders, liturgies, and church discipline), and, on the other hand, their theological ideas. Confessionalization, in other words, shows the eminently reasonable connections between concrete political reality and theological notions, and thus helps to avoid the extremes of over-emphasizing either *material* factors or abstract theological *ideas* in explaining the deployment of De Bres's Reformation agenda. As Cameron urges, extreme interpretations that claim people "pressed for the Reformation for *purely* socio-economic or, conversely, *purely* pious motives . . . are unlikely to satisfy."¹⁸⁷ Thus, confessionalization illuminates how material and theological considerations intertwined in the politico-religious dynamics of the sixteenth century Netherlands, which in turn shaped De Bres's advocacy of the political compulsion of religion. It thus confirms the previous chapter's plea for a political explanation of De Bres's ideas in addition to the explanation of continuity.

Third, confessionalization helps to explain why De Bres believed that political rulers should not only protect the Reformed believers, but also oppose Catholicism. This feature of confessionalization will be explored in the next chapter as part of the bigger question of how De Bres's apparent quest for a confessional alliance furthered his advocacy of the

¹⁸⁷ Cameron, *European Reformation*, 179.

political compulsion of religion. Chapter five will show that the dynamics of confessionalization followed what might be called an inner logic that encouraged enlisting political force to promote one doctrinal view and to restrict opposing views.

Fourth, whereas the advantages of political protection for the Reformed churches are obvious enough, confessionalization helps to understand what the Dutch nobles hoped to gain from an alliance with the Reformed. As Reinhard observed, churches in confessional Europe needed the help of the political authorities, “a help which was granted willingly, but not free of charge. The churches had to pay for it.”¹⁸⁸ What could the Reformed churches offer as payment? Two “crucial advantages” the early modern states hoped to gain from confessionalization which Reinhard points out are *social discipline* in society and church and *legitimacy* of the rulers’ monopoly of power.¹⁸⁹ Thus, whereas the Reformed church leaders were expecting political protection, the other party, the nobles, were expecting the church leaders to advance social discipline and to buttress political legitimacy.

Chapters six and seven will discuss the significance of the matters of maintaining social discipline, supporting the legitimacy of rulers, and defending the monopoly of power in the secular authorities for properly understanding De Bres’s view of the political restriction of religion. These chapters will show that Dutch nobles faced a crisis with respect to social discipline and political legitimacy, which threatened to produce a

¹⁸⁸ Wolfgang Reinhard, “Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State. A Reassessment,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 75, no. 3 (1989): 397.

¹⁸⁹ See Reinhard, “Pressures toward Confessionalization,” 183; Reinhard, “Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State,” 398.

still-born Reformed church-political alliance.¹⁹⁰ For De Bres, the legitimacy of political power (the “state,” one might call it) was rooted in its divinely ordained role to safeguard true religion and worship. The political restriction of religion was thus part of the very *raison d’etre* of political office or the “state” as De Bres conceived of it.

Conclusion

In the late 1550’s and the 1560’s, escalating persecution of Protestants in the Netherlands and new intellectual and practical perspectives from Geneva and France might have encouraged De Bres to view political power more optimistically. As a result, De Bres began to envision a church-political alliance between the Reformed churches and the Dutch nobles, and evidence also shows that De Bres was indeed involved in Reformed efforts to establish such an alliance.

This Dutch quest for a church-political alliance can be characterized as an instance of *confessionalization*, at least in a limited form. Recognizing De Bres’s quest for an alliance as a form of confessionalization allows confessionalization theory to illuminate the dynamics of the alliance that was unfolding between the Dutch reformed church leaders and the nobles in the late 1550’s and 1560’s. Specifically, confessionalization theory suggests a church-political reason as to why De Bres envisioned that political rulers should not only protect the Reformed believers, but also oppose Catholicism, as the next chapter will explore. Also, confessionalization theory suggests that the Dutch nobles

¹⁹⁰ Political legitimacy is related to social discipline but also to what Reinhard calls the monopoly of power.

would, in return, have expected from the alliance benefits like enhanced social discipline and political legitimacy, as chapters six and seven will more fully investigate.

Accordingly, the remainder of this dissertation will show in more detail how De Bres's support for the political or legal restriction of religious liberty was related to his vision of a church-political alliance, both because of his vision's theological underpinnings (such as that theologically, the political restriction of religion is a *raison d'être* of the state) and because of practical constraints.

CHAPTER 5

ASSAILING ANTICHRIST TOGETHER: POLITICAL PROTECTION AND COMPULSION OF RELIGION

The previous chapter demonstrated how De Bres and other Dutch reformers were working towards an alliance with the Dutch nobles. Confessionalization theory, it was noted, suggests the kind of advantages the two parties were hoping to receive from such an alliance: whereas the Reformed church leaders were expecting political protection, the other party, the nobles, was expecting the church leaders to advance social discipline and to buttress political legitimacy.

The remainder of this dissertation will further explore this insight in order to explain how confessionalization and the quest for a church-political alliance encouraged De Bres to advocate not only political protection for the Reformed churches but also political restriction of (the Catholic) religion. Four reasons are suggested why De Bres, in his quest for a confessional alliance, coordinated the political restriction of false religion with the protection of true religion. The present chapter will discuss the first two reasons: the “logic of confessionalization,” in other words, its competitive and exclusionary dynamics, and the challenge of overcoming the reluctance of the Dutch nobles to protect the Protestants. The remaining two chapters will discuss the third and fourth reasons,

concerning social discipline and the legitimacy and nature of the political office respectively.¹

Fighting Fire with Fire: The Logic of Confessionalization

The first reason why De Bres's desire for a church-political alliance that could offer protection to the Reformed probably encouraged his advocacy of the political restriction of religion was the competitive and exclusionary dynamics of church-political alliance building, the "inner logic" of confessionalization, so to speak. Note that the period that this chapter considers sometimes extends slightly beyond De Bres's death, because we are here concerned with identifying broader historical forces and trends.

The process of building confessional alliances involved, as Reinhard explains, that political rulers and church leaders collaborated in order to stake their claims in a fragmenting Christendom "by establishing a particular group conformity of religious doctrine and practice among their members" – members, that is, not only of the church but also of the body politic.² This envisioned conformity was exclusive. In other words, confessional church-political alliances aimed at the "shaping of socially exclusive religious identities" by enforcing, through religious and political means, the dominance

¹ Chapter six will discuss how, prompted by the need to safeguard the incipient confessional alliance, De Bres emphasized political restriction of Catholicism as necessary to allay rising civil disorder and Anabaptist influence. Chapter seven will investigate how De Bres responded to Anabaptist attacks on the legitimacy of political rule by appealing to an idea of divinely ordained office that entailed the political compulsion of religion. De Bres saw political restriction of religious liberty as part of the divinely ordained *raison d'être* of the political office, so that the legitimacy of political office logically presupposed its vocation of restricting false religion and idolatry.

² Reinhard, "Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State," 390.

of their own identities.³ From such premises, the political restriction of opposing religions necessarily follows. More concretely, the dynamics of confessionalization pitted the Catholic and Protestant religions against each other, allying confessions with political rulers, often the sovereign rulers of the early modern states – or, in the case of the Netherlands and France, various political magnates and power factions within the early modern states – as each group “sought to achieve their ultimate ambition, the triumph of the ‘true religion,’ theirs.”⁴ The result was an interweaving of confessional belief systems with politics that “legitimized, even demanded, conflict,” as Kaplan puts it.⁵

The Long Tradition of Protection by Restriction

This is not to argue that the emergence of exclusive church-political alliances at the start of the confessional age gave birth to ideals of the political compulsion of religion. Rather, the reverse was true: the sixteenth century’s burgeoning of confessional alliances resulted from efforts to apply to an increasingly fragmented Christendom an old ideal that had charmed princes and theologians since the time of Constantine, as will be mentioned below.

By the sixteenth century, it was already “conventional wisdom,” as Kaplan calls it, that religion was the “*vinculum societatis*, the chain of society that held it together.”⁶ Based upon this insight was another sixteenth century conventional wisdom: rulers must protect the *vinculum societatis*, the true religion which alone could chain society together

³ See Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 6.

⁴ Farr, “Confessionalization in France,” 285.

⁵ Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 11, 72.

⁶ Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 72.

and without which society would fall apart, by using political force to restrict divergent religions. Such ingrained societal ideals had deep roots in medieval and even ancient Christendom.⁷ In the fourth century A.D., claims the eighteenth century historian Edward Gibbon, Constantine and the leading clerics considered “the support of the orthodox faith . . . as the most sacred and important duty of the civil magistrate,” and imperial policy promptly departed from the political toleration of religion promised in the Edict of Milan.⁸ Sects not considered orthodox and Catholic, such as the Montanists, Novatians, and Marcionites, were at first excluded from “rewards and immunities,” and subsequently faced various punishments when an edict announced that the Christian emperor intended their “total destruction.”⁹ Eusebius cites Constantine’s letter to the heretics to explain why “it is no longer possible to tolerate the pernicious effect of [the heretics’] destructiveness.”¹⁰ An edict from 407 A.D. decreed heresy to be a public crime,

⁷ Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 72.

⁸ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Vol.3, ed. J. B. Bury (New York: F. DeFau, 1906), 332.

⁹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 332–3.

¹⁰ Here is an extract from the letter of Constantine, cited more fully by Eusebius: “How many are the falsehoods in which your idle folly is entangled, and how venomous the poisons with which your teaching is involved, so that the healthy are brought to sickness and the living to everlasting death through you. You opponents of truth, enemies of life and counsellors of ruin! Everything about you is contrary to truth, in harmony with ugly deeds of evil; it serves grotesque charades in which you argue falsehoods, distress the unoffending, deny light to believers. By continually sinning under a pretext of godliness you make all things foul, you wound innocent and pure consciences with deadly blows, you all but rob human eyes of daylight itself. . . Why then should we endure such evils any longer? Protracted neglect allows healthy people to be infected as with an epidemic disease. Why do we not immediately use severe public measures to dig up such a great evil, as you might say, by the roots? Accordingly, since it is no longer possible to tolerate the pernicious effect of your destructiveness, by this decree we publicly command that none of you henceforward shall dare to assemble. Therefore we have also given order that all your buildings in which you conduct these meetings are to be confiscated, the purport of this extending so far as to prohibit the gathering of assemblies of your superstitious folly not only in public but also in houses of individuals or any private places.” Stuart Hall and Averil Cameron, eds., *Eusebius' Life of Constantine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), 151–2.

“because any offence which is committed against divine religion involves an injury to all.”¹¹

The view that the defense of the true faith mandated the use of political force against divergent religions was still influential in the late Middle Ages. In 1215, an authoritative general council of the Catholic Church, the Fourth Lateran Council, declared,

We excommunicate and anathematize every heresy that raises itself against the holy, orthodox, and Catholic faith . . . Secular authorities. . . shall be admonished and induced and if necessary compelled by ecclesiastical censure, that as they wish to be esteemed and numbered among the faithful, so for the defense of the faith they ought publicly to take an oath that they will strive in good faith and to the best of their ability to exterminate in the territories subject to their jurisdiction all heretics pointed out by the Church.¹²

According to this declaration, both the church and the political authorities were involved in the same mission of protecting the “holy, orthodox . . . faith.” Significantly, the political rulers’ “defense of the faith” was seen as implying the extermination of “all heretics” in their territories. By this reasoning, protection of the true faith and the use of political force against unorthodox religion or heresy were two sides of the same coin.

The same view animated many rulers of Christendom in the centuries prior to the sixteenth. Emperor Frederick II, for example, legislated against heretics because they are “violent wolves” who want to “separate the flock” and “get inside the sheepfold of the Lord” and cause the “evident injury of the Christian faith.”¹³ It was to protect the true

¹¹ Cited in Bates, *Religious Liberty*, 135.

¹² H.J. Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* (St. Louis: Herder, 1937), 242–3.

¹³ James M. Powell, ed., *The Liber Augustalis or Constitutions of Melfi promulgated by the Emperor Frederick II for the Kingdom of Sicily in 1231* (Syracuse (New York): Syracuse University Press), 1971, 7–8.

Christian faith, then, that Frederick promulgated his laws against heretics: “Therefore we draw the sword of vengeance against them . . . Committed to the judgment of the flames, they should be burned alive in the sight of the people.”¹⁴ In this view, the restriction of false religion and the protection of true religion, far from being separate issues, were intrinsically connected. The punishment of “heresy” was how the political ruler was to protect the true church.

By the sixteenth century, the conviction that the use of political force against false religion serves to protect true religion was venerable with age. There seemed little reason to depart from the received wisdom of previous centuries. As Gregory asks, “Why fix what was not broken?”¹⁵ Thus King Philip II, for all his modern ideas about statecraft, was simply upholding what Van Nierop describes as “the traditional standpoint that the monopoly of the Catholic church should be maintained, if necessary with the use of force.”¹⁶ Likewise, as we have shown previously, De Bres and the Dutch reformers stood within a confessional tradition that stressed the rulers’ God-given duty to protect true religion and use political force to oppose false religion.¹⁷

Nevertheless, the sixteenth century confessional age did see the old idea of using political force against false religion newly energized and radicalized by the heightened competition occasioned by the loss of Catholic hegemony. In the Middle Ages, heresies sometimes managed to obtain local political and military support, as in the case of some

¹⁴ Powell, *Liber Augustalis*, 10.

¹⁵ Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 78.

¹⁶ Henk van Nierop, “Alva’s Throne – making sense of the revolt of the Netherlands,” in *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt*, ed. Graham Darby (London: Routledge, 2001), 36.

¹⁷ See chapter three.

communities of Cathars or Alpine communities of Waldenses.¹⁸ But Catholicism always remained disproportionately powerful and, through crusades and various political means, unorthodox religions could eventually be eradicated or at least successfully “contained and controlled.”¹⁹ The scale of the sixteenth century Protestant heresy shattered this Catholic hegemony. In many parts of Europe, Catholicism could no longer effectively draw upon a near monopoly of political and military power to effectively contain the Reformation. In regions where Protestant church-political alliances potentially rivaled the power of the Catholic aligned monarchies, the effect was that the stakes were raised, and competition flared more intense. But despite the mortal wound the Reformation had dealt Catholicism as a European politico-religious monopoly, political restriction of Protestantism continued to remain the attempted Catholic strategy because, as Gregory diagnoses, “after three centuries of largely effective containment, the willingness to kill was firmly situated in authorities’ assumptions about the exercise of power.”²⁰ Such willingness to kill could only elicit one response – it made Protestant confessional alliances all the more desperate to gain sufficient political power to deny Catholicism any foothold in Lutheran or Reformed territories.

Thus, as Kaplan explains, while the sixteenth century “inherited a tradition of Christian thought that legitimized intolerance,” it was the rise of fervent confessional exclusivity that “promoted intolerance to the status of an essential attribute of piety.”²¹

¹⁸ On the Alpine Waldenses, see Euan Cameron, *The Reformation of the Heretics: The Waldenses of the Alps, 1480–1580* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

¹⁹ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 78.

²⁰ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 78.

²¹ Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 47.

The notion that rulers should protect true religion by using political force against false religion was conventional and trusted. What was new was confessionalization's radicalizing impulse of fighting fire with fire.

The “Messianic Imperialism” of Spanish Catholicism

The long tradition of protecting true faith by political restriction of opposing views provided to sixteenth century church and political leaders the logic, or instinct perhaps, of reaching for political power to address intractable religious divisions. Unless judicial suppression was effective, however – in other words, unless the use of political force could eliminate or contain false religion as successfully as Catholic authorities could suppress heresies in the late Middle Ages, this could backfire. If suppression and containment did not succeed, the use of political force could entrench faith divisions politically and elevate religious conflicts into growing political ones. This would unleash a vicious cycle because, as Kaplan points out, “as long as religious and civil life remained closely intertwined, it was difficult for many people even to imagine a peaceful, well-ordered community that was divided by faith.”²² Yet solidifying the intertwining of religious and civil life was precisely what confessionalization aimed at, and the very attempt to remove faith divisions by political force could itself endanger peaceful and well-ordered community. In the sixteenth century Netherlands, this is precisely what happened.²³ This radicalizing potential of confessional division was further exacerbated

²² Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 11, 72.

²³ Once again, although some of the specific dates that will here be referred to occur after the death of De Bres in 1567, they form part of a long sixteenth century political-religious dynamic shaping the Dutch context which De Bres's vision of an alliance between law and religion attempted to address.

by an extreme strand of political Catholicism, what Geoffrey Parker terms Philip II's "messianic imperialism."²⁴

Spanish Catholicism was gripped by the messianic vision that God had called Philip II to the imperial task of extending God's kingdom on earth. This messianic belief, Parker explains, involved the firm conviction that God had called Philip to rule in order to accomplish God's purpose for the world, that God uniquely favored and protected him, and that God would intervene, even miraculously, to prosper him.²⁵ For Philip, his messianic calling produced the conviction that "he alone understood God's designs," so much so that he "obsessed about doing everything humanly possible to put them into effect."²⁶ His cause was God's cause, as he once reminded a royal official: "You are engaged in God's service and in mine, which is the same thing."²⁷ His calling also meant that he should, above all, pursue policies "that he believed God would favor," such as the eradication of Protestantism in the Netherlands.²⁸ Thus Philip strove to be the "Catholic King" *par excellence*, priding himself upon the title and calling himself "priest" of his people, even "*rex et sacerdos*, king and priest, just like his medieval forbears."²⁹ The priority of his government, the royal speeches declared, was to work "first and foremost for the things that concern the service of God, Our Lord, and the defense and conservation of His Holy faith and of the Catholic religion."³⁰

²⁴ Geoffrey Parker, *The World Is Not Enough: The Imperial Vision of Philip II of Spain* (Waco: Markham Press Fund, 2001), 22.

²⁵ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 30.

²⁶ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 22.

²⁷ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 21–2.

²⁸ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 30.

²⁹ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 37.

³⁰ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 29–30.

What the King's priority to the "defense and conservation" of the holy faith and Catholic religion implied for the Netherlands was that Protestantism should be eradicated. When the costs of the war against the Dutch rebels mounted in the 1580's, he confidently demanded funding for the war against the heretics from the pope "since this war is being waged solely for religion."³¹

This vision of messianic imperialism was enthusiastically shared by Philip's Spanish subjects, political vassals and ecclesiastics alike.³² Catholic writers and artists compared him with King Solomon or King David, a poet called him "God's pastor on earth," and art works pictured him in direct communion with God.³³ Many political writers in Spanish Europe propagated a messianic vision of the King and, together with theologians, emphasized that their monarch was both priest and king.³⁴ A cleric in the King's entourage reassured Philip that, "since Your Majesty fights for the cause of God, He will fight – as He has always done – for the interests of Your Majesty."³⁵ The Jesuit Pedro de Ribadeneira wrote a treatise showing that the cause of God, of King Philip, and of Spain, were the same.³⁶ Juan de Ovando, who was at once priest, inquisitor, and president of the King's council of finance (distinctions between church and state mattered little), assured

³¹ Cited in Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), 223.

³² Parker even notes that "with few exceptions most Spaniards shared the same extreme outlook as their monarch." Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 47.

³³ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 47.

³⁴ For example, the theologian Bartolomé Torres wrote in a tract sent to the King's senior ministers: "Princes, in their role as princes, possess the cure of souls. This means that it does not suffice for them to reign and rule the state in peace, but they are also personally obliged to strive to make their subjects good and virtuous Princes will have to give account to God, at the hour of their death and on the Day of Judgment, not only of themselves, but also of all their kingdoms and of all the damage that occurred through their weakness and negligence." Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 48.

³⁵ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 22.

³⁶ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 48.

the King that he sacrifices everything “serving Your Majesty, because it is the same as serving God.”³⁷ An important Catholic court preacher cautioned the King,

The holy bones of the Emperor your father are complaining and his spirit will demand God's punishment against you if you allow the loss of those provinces, without which Spain cannot live in safety. Your Majesty inherited not only your states and kingdoms from your ancestors, but also your religion, valor and virtue. I dare to say humbly to Your Majesty that you will forfeit the glory of God if God should lose his honor and his place over there [in the Netherlands] where Your Majesty is his lieutenant.³⁸

The King's policy of exterminating Protestantism in the Netherlands was, in this view, about the “glory of God” and about God's “honor and place” in the Netherlands, for which the King was merely acting as God's substitute.

Thus King, soldiers, vassals, writers, and ecclesiastics were united in a vision of messianic imperialism through what Parker calls a “remarkable ideological consensus.”³⁹ Guided by such a vision, the Catholic claims of the royal political establishment in the Spanish Netherlands were evolving into an airtight system: the royal politics of Philip II's Spanish court was Catholic politics, and the Catholic religion was the King's religion. It was increasingly impossible to challenge the established Catholicism of Philip II either as a religious system only or as a political system only. To attempt a merely theological challenge was impossible because, as Dixon points out, the Reformed faith “could only be supported in contravention of the anti-heresy edicts,” and that was therefore “by necessity a political act.”⁴⁰ To attempt a merely political challenge was impossible

³⁷ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 48.

³⁸ Letter from Fray Lorenzo de Villavicencio to Philip II, 6 October 1566, cited in Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 25–6.

³⁹ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 47.

⁴⁰ C. Scott Dixon, *Contesting the Reformation* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 109.

because the king's central political cause was the extermination of the Protestant heresy; thus, to obstruct the King's political aims was to aid heresy.

In this airtight system, the distinction between ecclesiastical and political leaders in the system of royal Catholicism largely disappeared. This is seen, for example, in the attitudes of the commissioners whom the King appointed to investigate heresy, such as Pieter Titelmans and Wilhelmus Lindanus. Lindanus pleaded for the large-scale removal of obstructive magistrates prone to tolerate Protestants, as well as for requiring that all new magistrates vow their loyalty to the doctrine of Trent. According to Lindanus's plan, Geert Janssen writes, "A restoration of Habsburg authority was intrinsically linked to a renewal of Catholic spirituality. New magistrates . . . should therefore swear an oath of loyalty to the Council of Trent. In this way loyalty to the Church of Rome would become inseparable from allegiance to the king of Spain and his government."⁴¹ Another example was Cardinal Granvelle, the King's much favored cleric who, as we have mentioned, so irked the nobles. Granvelle was devoted to crushing Protestantism not so much for the sake of Catholicism as for the sake of the integrity of the state. Granvelle is described by Van der Zwaag as a "typical enlightened renaissance prince."⁴² He was, according to historian Felix Rachfahl, a man without a trace of true piety and devotion, a cool man of business rather than of religious devotion. He was more inclined towards a state church than a hierarchical system in which the pope would be sovereign. Granvelle "hated the

⁴¹ Geert H Janssen, *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 120–1.

⁴² Klaas Van der Zwaag, Klaas. *Onverkort of gekortwiekt?: Artikel 36 van de Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis en de spanning tussen overheid en religie: een systematisch-historische interpretatie van een 'omstreden' geloofsartikel* (Heerenveen: Groen, 1999), 134.

heretic really because the heretic was a disturber of the present order.”⁴³ But even as the monarchists claimed that their own imperial politics was devoutly religious, they rejected Protestantism as more political than religious. Thus, the inquisitor Titelmans declared in December 1563 that the city of Tournai was “very inclined to tumult under the cover of religion.”⁴⁴ In the eyes of Catholic royalists, the Protestant religion was usually a cover for politics, while the monarchy’s overt politics was sincerely religious. According to this reasoning, the heretics’ religion was politics, while the Spanish Catholics’ own politics was religion.

As a result, it was becoming increasingly difficult for Dutch nobles or other magistrates to protect Protestant worship and belief without at the same time assaulting Catholicism as the heart of the royal politico-religious system. In the Netherlands, Philip II was willing to pursue the politicization of religion and religionization of politics to extreme ends, as is evident from his correspondence. In a letter to Pope Pius V in 1566, he wrote,

If possible I will settle the religious problem in those states [i.e. the Netherlands] without taking up arms, for I know that to do so would result in their total destruction; but if things cannot be remedied as I desire without recourse to arms, I am determined to take them up and go myself to carry out everything; and neither danger [to myself] nor the ruin of these states, nor of all the other which are left to me, will prevent me from doing what a Christian prince fearing God ought to do in his service, [and for] the preservation of the Catholic faith and the honour of the apostolic see.⁴⁵

⁴³ Felix Rachfahl, *Wilhelm von Oranien und der Niederländische Aufstand. Vol.2* (Haag: Marthinus Nijhoff: 1907), 145.

⁴⁴ Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*, 72.

⁴⁵Cited in Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries' Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 112–3.

Thus, even the “total destruction” of the Netherlands was not too high a price to pay for King Philip II’s religio-political ideal of extirpating Protestantism.

Similarly indurate was his sentiment elsewhere expressed to the Pope: “Rather than suffer the least damage to religion and the service of God, I would lose all my states and a hundred lives, if I had them; for I do not propose nor desire to be the ruler of heretics.”⁴⁶ The king’s refusal to be a “ruler of heretics” confronted the Dutch nobility and the Dutch reformers with a choice: either accept the king and his religion, or reject the king and his religion. Spanish royal Catholicism demanded everything or nothing, there was no third option, no *via media*. As heretics and rebels, Protestants forfeited all rights and privileges, and so for the Dutch nobility to protect such heretics and rebels was to reject at once the Christian faith and the King.⁴⁷

The King was never to depart from such adamancy. Even in 1585, when the Dutch Revolt was well underway, Philip insisted that the outlawing of all Protestant religion was an absolute precondition for any political settlement in the Netherlands:

The first step . . . must be to admit and maintain the exercise of the Catholic religion alone, and to subject themselves to the Roman Church, without allowing or permitting in any agreement the exercise of any other faith whatever in any town, farm, or special place set aside in the fields or inside a village . . . And in this there is to be no exception, no change, no concession by any treaty of freedom of conscience . . . They are all to embrace the Roman Catholic faith and the exercise of that alone is to be permitted.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Pius V. Papa, and Luciano Serrano. *Correspondencia diplomática entre España y la Santa Sede durante el pontificado de S. Pio v. Por D. Luciano Serrano*. Madrid: Junta, 1914, 316 cited in Helmut G. Koenigsberger, “The Statecraft of Philip II.” *European Studies Review* 1 no. 1 (1971): 11.

⁴⁷ See Duke, *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Low Countries*, 116.

⁴⁸ Cited in Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, 223.

This messianic imperialism made it impossible to protect Reformed Protestantism without assaulting royal Catholicism, because it amalgamated Catholic political designs with the centralizing tendencies of the Habsburg royal court. It certainly makes clear why Catholicism evoked a “fight fire with fire” response from its Reformed opponents.⁴⁹

What Kaplan observes about the 1570’s would have been largely true even by the beginning of the 1560’s, that “the widespread association of Catholic worship with Spanish allegiance generated irresistible pressures” to suppress Catholicism.⁵⁰

The Dutch nobles certainly faced such pressure to suppress Catholicism if they wanted to shield Protestants from the fury of the King. Since medieval times, Catholic doctrine had maintained that political rulers who refused to act against heretics could be deposed by the pope. As the Fourth Lateran Council put it, “if a temporal ruler . . . should neglect to cleanse his territory of this heretical foulness,” he faced not only excommunication, but the pope could “declare the ruler's vassals absolved from their allegiance and may offer the territory to be ruled by Catholics, who on the extermination of the heretics may possess it without hindrance and preserve it in the purity of faith.”⁵¹ Accordingly, Dutch nobles who protected Reformed worship would risk a legitimacy crisis if many of their subjects remained Catholic and heeded a papal deposal.

⁴⁹ This dynamic of reaction is eloquently expressed, if somewhat exaggerated, by Pieter Geyl, who regrets the Calvinists’ embracing religious compulsion and confessional theology: “It is hardly an inspiring spectacle to see the victims of persecution themselves casting out that spirit of tolerance and anti-confessionalism which was a heritage of the Netherlands people, and which could substantiate the justice of their cause in the struggle against Spanish oppression. But do men for their struggles trust to justice alone? Against the might of the enemy the confusion attendant on well-meaning individualism would have been powerless, and just as Catholicism had done at Trent, so Protestantism had to arm itself with order and unity of belief. No more efficient weapons can be imagined than that of stern Calvinism.” Pieter Geyl, *The Revolt of the Netherlands: 1555–1609* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1958), 81.

⁵⁰ Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*, 12.

⁵¹ Schroeder, *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary*, 243.

Some distrust of Catholicism for such political reasons was justified, judging by the response of many Catholics to the first years' successes of the Dutch Revolt. In Amsterdam, after the ascendancy to power of Rebel magistrates, thousands of fervent Catholics remained "firmly committed to the Church of Rome and aligned with the Habsburg government," Janssen contends.⁵² Such Catholics resented the religious freedom now exercised by Protestants, and openly rejected the republican and Reformation-minded authorities as "an illegitimate, heretical regime."⁵³ Even in the late 1550's and 1560's, many Dutch nobles probably suspected that multitudes of Catholics across the Netherlands would always reject Protestantism as heresy and would remain, as Janssen puts it, "loyal to the Habsburg monarchy and the Church of Rome" – as indeed many did when the Revolt established authorities sympathetic to the Reformation.⁵⁴ The experience of the first decade of the Revolt "seemed to prove that it was utopian to suppose different religions could co-exist peacefully," as Van Nierop observes.⁵⁵

In light of the political pressures upon nobles who were sympathetic to the Reformation to suppress Catholicism, it must have become obvious to De Bres and other Reformed leaders by the 1550's that they needed to promote a degree of political restriction of Catholicism, if their political alliance with Dutch nobles was ever to

⁵² Janssen, *Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile*, 1.

⁵³ Janssen, *Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile*, 2.

⁵⁴ Janssen, *Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile*, 2.

⁵⁵ Van Nierop, "Alva's Throne – making sense of the revolt of the Netherlands," 45. According to Jonathan Israel, there was by 1573 a decisive "rejection of toleration" by Dutch rulers favoring the Revolt, and in the years thereafter, "few among the regents, or in Dutch society more widely" would defend the idea of the political toleration of religious liberty. Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 273. Israel is probably overstating the case for a "decisive rejection," as the protection of a degree of religious liberty by Art.13 of the Union of Utrecht of 1579 shows. (See Kossman, *Texts Concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands*, 169–170.) Yet, despite such statements of religious liberty, Kaplan points out that "by the end of 1581, every city and province that remained in the Revolt had outlawed Catholicism." Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*, 12.

materialize. Since King Philip II, as Geoffrey Parker puts it, “mobilized the [Catholic] devotions of his subjects in support of his messianic goals,” it was unavoidable that Dutch nobles could only protect the Reformed believers, or heretics, at the cost of confronting Catholicism itself, at least to some extent.⁵⁶ As Kaplan points out, King Philip’s “equation of orthodoxy and obedience, dissent and rebellion,” served to “legitimize his religious foes, and polarize politics along confessional lines.”⁵⁷ It was the King’s “confessional and absolutist aspirations” that elicited “in response a fusion of political and religious opposition.”⁵⁸

Thus, the dynamics of confessionalization were visibly at work, and the threat posed by religio-political enemies invoked, in turn, a religio-political response of relying upon the political power of secular authorities, as Gregory describes.⁵⁹ Accordingly, De Bres and the Dutch reformers would have had little choice but to seek the restriction of Catholicism in their search for a confessional alliance and in their struggle to break the political stranglehold on their religion by the Catholic religio-political establishment. The radicalizing dynamic of confessionalization in the starkly divided Netherlands steered relentlessly in that direction.

⁵⁶ Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 34.

⁵⁷ Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 110.

⁵⁸ Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 110.

⁵⁹ Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 131. As confessionalization theorists repeatedly point out, the vision of magisterial protection of the church as part of the alliance of church and civil magistrate was part of the Catholic and Lutheran confessions too. For example, the 25th Session of the Council of Trent (3 and 4 December, 1563) in chapter twenty of its “Decree on Reformation” contained paragraphs in which “the immunities, liberty, and other rights of the church are recommended to secular princes.” James Waterworth, ed., *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent, Celebrated Under the Sovereign Pontiffs, Paul III, Julius III and Pius IV* (London: C. Dolman, 1848), 275.

However, the need to totally reject royal Catholicism did not need to be all bad news, politically speaking, as would have been clear even in the 1560's. Protecting Calvinism and opposing Catholicism could promise all sorts of opportunity for a nobility that Pettegree describes as "discontented and alienated. . . consumed with the issue of their own exclusion from power."⁶⁰ If they played it right, the nobles could configure political power differently by cutting back Roman Catholic political pretensions – something that De Bres had insisted was very necessary already in *Baston*. The aristocrats in France who backed the Huguenots had recently challenged the hegemony of the Guise party by embracing Calvinism. This furnished the Dutch nobles with an example of how protecting the Reformed and disestablishing Catholicism could work to their own advantage: by a "realignment of power loyalties which . . . embraced the growing religious divisions" they could "tap the growing strength of the Calvinist communities" to challenge the power of the monarch and the Catholic "monopoly of patronage."⁶¹ De Bres, we shall note below, was astute enough to hint to the Dutch nobles how backing the Reformed religion against royal Catholicism offered such real attractions and rewards.

In sum, the dynamics of confessionalization as they unfolded in the shadow of Philip II's messianic imperialism argued against the political toleration of Catholicism. For most of the Dutch Reformed, the sixteenth century struggle for Protestant and Reformed religious freedom seemed to necessitate that "the monopoly of the Catholic church . . . be replaced by that of the reformed church," as Van Nierop describes it.⁶² It was simply

⁶⁰ Andrew Pettegree, "Religion and the Revolt," in *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt*, ed. Graham Darby (London: Routledge, 2001), 73.

⁶¹ Pettegree, "Religion and the Revolt," 72.

⁶² Van Nierop, "Alva's Throne – making sense of the revolt of the Netherlands," 45.

a matter of what Kaplan calls “political and military exigency.”⁶³ As Reinhard explains, in early stages of state-building “religious toleration would not pay,” because in the sixteenth century “tolerant states were powerless states.”⁶⁴ Hence the radical political disestablishment of Catholicism would have appeared necessary for the protection of Protestantism, because in their life-and-death battle with one of Europe’s most vigorous Renaissance monarchs, Dutch nobles were not going to protect Protestantism if it meant hinging their political futures on a powerless state. Accordingly, to a large extent Dutch confessional *Realpolitik*, radicalized by the imperial messianism of Philip II, practically dictated that the political protection of Reformed Protestantism should involve the political restriction of Catholicism.

Political Restriction of Catholicism in De Bres’s Writings

De Bres’s writings reflect a growing conviction that the political suppression of false religion and idolatry was essential to end Catholic persecution of Protestants in the Netherlands. This movement in De Bres’s writings was related to the movement in De Bres’s thought traced out in chapters two and three. As already shown, in 1555 De Bres combined a high view of religious liberty with a low view of political government. Over a period of roughly five years, however, De Bres moved to a significantly lower view of religious liberty and a significantly higher view of political government, a movement which solidified over a further period of five years, as evidenced by his last major work,

⁶³ Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*, 12. Kaplan adds, “It was a remarkable turn of events, given how few of the Dutch were then Calvinists.”

⁶⁴ Reinhard, “Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State,” 398.

Racine (1565). Remarkably, as we saw in the previous chapter, this movement in De Bres's thought coincided with a hardening of Roman Catholic attitudes toward Protestantism and an escalation of persecution of Protestants.

The "fight fire with fire" dynamics of confessionalization helps to explain how escalating persecution intersected with De Bres's growing conviction of the necessity of the political compulsion of religion: The relentlessness of the Catholic persecution acted as an acid that corroded De Bres's earlier confidence that true doctrine itself, unassisted by political force, would convince the perpetrators to end the persecution of believers in the Netherlands. Departing from his apparently more naïve view of 1555, by the late 1550's and in the 1560's De Bres began to see Catholic persecution not so much as the toxic product of a mix of theological errors, but as an illegitimate political usurpation by the Catholic church and thus as a struggle for power. The divinely ordained remedy for such militant idolatry was the political power of the faithful prince who was zealous for the true service of God. Hence the solution was not so much theological dialogue as stirring up political rulers – namely, the Dutch nobility – to obey their divine callings and to assert their divinely assigned monopoly of the power of the sword even in such purportedly religious matters as the identification of heresy. In other words, the exercise of political force in religious matters appeared increasingly essential to De Bres to end Catholic political usurpation and religious persecution, as we have already pointed out in the previous chapter.

To track this change in De Bres's writings, one must start by noting that, concomitant with De Bres's earliest championing of religious liberty, De Bres also maintained the hope that true theology itself, unassisted by political force, would convince Catholics to

end their persecution of the Protestant heretics. *Baston* shows how the initial phase of De Bres's interaction with the Catholics aimed at progress through dialogue. Confidence in reason and persuasion was an architectonic feature of *Baston* which not even the changes introduced in the 1558 and 1559 editions could erase. For example, in a sentence in the preface already quoted earlier, De Bres pines for "a public examination of our doctrine, side by side with theirs, before all the world, so that everybody can know who are the despisers and enemies of the Fathers."⁶⁵ Likewise, *Baston* confidently cited Lactantius's challenge in his *Divine Institutes*:

If they have any confidence in philosophy or in eloquence, let them arm themselves with their disputations, let them overcome or vanquish us if they can with the words that we speak, let them approach to do battle together, and to examine every single point.⁶⁶

Such appeals to reason and a request for debate are sprinkled throughout *Baston*. Elsewhere he writes, "If their reason be good, let it be brought forth, and we are ready to hear it."⁶⁷ The dedicatory letter in *Baston* declares that its dialectical purpose was to provide the readers "with the weapon with which they also combat you, namely the ancients."⁶⁸ "They" clearly refers to the Roman Catholic Church leaders, the book's primary target.⁶⁹ By providing a theological and intellectual defense of the truth, De Bres's book was intended to aid the Protestants to "achieve victory over your enemies . . .

⁶⁵ *Baston* (1555), vii v.

⁶⁶ *Baston* (1555), 185 v.

⁶⁷ *Baston* (1555), 186 v.

⁶⁸ *Baston* (1555), iv r.-v.; *Baston* (1565), 3.

⁶⁹ It is puzzling that Jean Crespin in his *Procedures Tenues* of 1568 states, without giving reasons, that De Bres's book *Le Baston* was an anthology of the ancient doctors which he made "against the Anabaptists, whom he always vigorously opposed." Pijper, *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, vol.8, 497. Actually, very little of *Baston* seems to apply to the Anabaptists.

and also to stop their mouths.”⁷⁰ This confidence in intellectually and theologically addressing and challenging the arguments of his Catholic opponents is also seen in how the chapters of *Baston* were designed to respond to the books of his opponent, Grenier.⁷¹

It was by such purely intellectual means, then, that De Bres originally intended that “the reign of Jesus Christ would be advanced, and that of the devil and of the unbelievers would be destroyed and abolished.”⁷² Reason and debate, he thought in 1555, would advance the kingdom of Christ and abolish the kingdom of Antichrist – in sharp contrast to his slightly later *Confession* of 1561, which entrusted advancing the kingdom of Christ and the destruction of the kingdom of antichrist to the power of the civil magistrate.⁷³

A different tone becomes manifest, however, in the pro-compulsion changes already discussed at length.⁷⁴ Validating Gregory’s observation that religio-political hostility invoked a religio-political response and an appeal to the political power of secular authorities, De Bres’s change of attitude coincided with the escalation of Catholic

⁷⁰ *Baston* (1555), iv r. – v.

⁷¹ The eighteen chapters of the 1555 edition of *Baston* were somewhat rearranged and expanded in subsequent editions of *Baston*. The 1558 edition added three chapters at the beginning of the book: God and his attributes, Christ and his attributes, and the attributes of the Holy Spirit. The 1559 edition added another two chapters: Chapter ten on Baptism was added between the chapters on the church and on confession. A final chapter, chapter twenty-three on “The civil magistrate and its power,” followed the chapter on persecuting magistrates. The chapter division did not change after the 1559 edition.

In the first edition, *Baston* (1555), the chapters were: The Lord’s Supper (fol.1), confession to God and auricular confession (fol.21), the power to bind and unbind (fol.24), free will (fol.26), merit, good works, and justification by the law (fol.37), the law (fol.69), purgatory (fol.76), honoring of the saints (fol.91), the sole mediatorship of Christ (fol.100), whether images are permitted in the church-buildings (fol.106), fasts and foods (fol.120), marriage (fol.128), vows (fol.134), the church, how it can be known, and its authority (fol.136), sacred Scripture “and why all may read it” (fol.157), the assemblies and congregations of believers (fol.181), “why one cannot constrain a person to believe by force,” (fol.185), and “that the magistrates who persecute the believers under the guise of religion will be punished with eternal punishments.” (fol.198).

⁷² *Baston* (1555), iv v.

⁷³ *Confession* (1561)^F, 21; (1561)^C, 33.

⁷⁴ See chapter two.

persecution and increasing intransigence among Catholic theologians on the broader European scene. This is not to suggest that such views of De Bres, or, for that matter, the other Reformed leaders, were *merely* reactionary. Rather, as in the relation between the “Reformation” and the “Counter-Reformation” more widely, it would make sense to view the hardening Catholic and Reformed attitudes as “slightly dislocated parallel processes,” as Reinhard describes them.⁷⁵

Dissonant with the overall appeal to reason and debate was De Bres’s insertion in the final chapter of *Baston* (1559) of the section entitled “Despite what has already been said, the heretics should be punished by the civil magistrate, even with death, if the case requires.”⁷⁶ If one remembers that a central argument in *Baston*’s is how Scripture and the ancient church fathers reveal that not the Protestants but the Catholics are, in fact, the real heretics, these ripples reveal a deeper shift taking place in De Bres’s strategy of dealing with Roman Catholic opposition. As chapter two showed, De Bres’s departure from his earlier position became evident in *Baston* in 1558 and 1559, as well as in his *Confession* and its related documents of 1561, and culminated in *Racine* of 1565. Since more than reason and scriptural proof was necessary to end the intensifying persecution of Protestants by Catholics, De Bres was accepting the necessity of compulsion in religious matters.

⁷⁵ Reinhard, “Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State,” 384.

⁷⁶ *Baston* (1559), 339. Similar changes in the 1558 and 1559 editions of *Baston* have been pointed out in chapter two. For example, the title of the chapter on religious compulsion, “That nobody ought to be compelled by force to believe” (literally, “why one should not constrain a person by force to believe” in *Baston* (1555), 185 and in *Baston* (1558), 305 or 376 depending on the edition) is slightly modified in later editions by the addition, “however, convinced heretics should be punished by the magistrate.” (Lit. “however, this does not mean that convinced heretics should not be punished by the magistrate.”) *Baston* (1559), 322; *Baston* (1561), 322; *Baston* (1565), 500.)

De Bres's intention to do battle against Catholicism is seen in the *Confession* itself, as several scholars acknowledge, as well as in the two documents accompanying the *Confession*.⁷⁷ In the *Letter to the King*, ostensibly addressed to King Philip II but, as previously mentioned, probably intended primarily for the ears of the Dutch nobility, De Bres laments "the ingratitude of the world, that, instead of receiving with thanksgiving the Word of its Master, its Shepherd, and its God, hardens her to oppose the Word."⁷⁸ The gravity of this crime is not reduced by the long duration in which the world has lived in its error.⁷⁹ Indeed, he adds, "the world of unbelief willfully resists, through prescription based on long time, Him who has made the ages and before whom everything is like the present."⁸⁰ These references to Catholicism's centuries-long established error and contemporary ungrateful hardening against Reformed doctrine express an exasperation unlike the 1555 eagerness for an opportunity to present Reformed doctrine and justify it in light of Scripture and the church fathers.

The tone in another of the documents accompanying the *Confession* might even be called militant. In De Bres's hand-written letter to the Commissioners of the Governness of 1 November, 1561, he warns,

We can hardly hold the people under the discipline of patience any longer, so that they do not rise up, seeing that you do not cease to daily drag good people into your prisons. We greatly fear that a terrible evil

⁷⁷ On the *Confession* itself, see e.g. Boiten, "Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis," 447.

⁷⁸ *Confession* (1561)^C, a.xi r. Chapter three argues that the intended primary audience of the *Letter* was the Dutch nobility.

⁷⁹ *Confession* (1561)^C, a. xi r.

⁸⁰ *Confession* (1561)^C, a. xi r..

is coming, and that many who are rejoicing about present developments will come to cry for it.⁸¹

In other words, Reformed resentment was growing, and a confrontation was looming which those who were persecuting the Protestants might still regret. Gone from this letter are the earlier appeals for dialogue. Although De Bres reassures the Governness's commissioners that the Reformed would "leave vengeance to him to whom it belongs, that is to God," he immediately warns, "He [God] will repay it on the head of all those who persecute us." Even as De Bres denies any intention to intimidate, it is hard to miss the veiled threat that a new phase of the conflict was approaching:

Do not put your trust in soldiers, or similar things, but keep in mind that many who now show a friendly face, and are relying for their income on your money, will turn their backs on you when you really need them. We do not say this to terrify or intimidate anyone, but only because we want to encourage you to incline your hearts to peace, for your own good and for the benefit of our King.⁸²

Unless persecution ceased soon, De Bres was saying, the Catholic royalists were risking a military conflict, and their confidence about the outcome of such a conflict might be misplaced.

A militant tone is also heard in Art.36 of De Bres's *Confession*, specifically in its call for the political restriction of false religion:

For this purpose He [God] put the sword in the hand of the Magistrate to punish the wicked, and to protect the virtuous and good people. And their office is not only, to restrain and watch over the political (domain), but also over the church matters, to remove and overthrow all idolatry and false worship of God, to destroy the kingdom of the Antichrist, and to advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, to ensure the

⁸¹ "Epitre aux Commissaires de la Gouvernante." Reproduced in Braekman *Guy de Bres: pages choisies*, 14–16, esp. 16.

⁸² Braekman, *Pages choisies*, 16.

preaching of the Word of the Gospel everywhere, so that God be honored and served by everyone as He has required it by his Word.⁸³

Two matters about these sentences are striking. First, De Bres employs martial language: “removing/abolishing,” “overthrowing,” “destroy,” “the kingdom of the Antichrist” and “advance . . . the kingdom of Christ.” Not only the context but also the language of Art.36 validates Hsia’s observation that confessionalization could “mobilize resistance to the consolidation of princely power,” and that the “struggles between princes and cities, central government and estates, and different political factions, were often played out in confessional confrontations.”⁸⁴ Second, De Bres coordinates the opposition to false religion and the protection of good religion. The office of the civil magistrate is described in a twofold way: “to punish the wicked” and “to protect the virtuous and good people,” and this same twofold task is observed with respect to the magistrate’s duty to “restrain and watch over . . . the church matters.”⁸⁵

The coordination of the political duty to oppose false religion and to protect true religion is thus a more specific instance of De Bres’s general view of the task of the magistrate to “punish the wicked” and “to protect the virtuous and good.” Confirming this view is De Bres’s statement in *Racine*: “The office of government consists in protecting the church in peace against the oppressors, and this it cannot do without using

⁸³ *Confession* (1561)^F, 21; (1561)^C, 33. The 1566 version reads, “For this purpose he put the sword in the hands of the Magistrate to punish the wicked, and to protect the good people. And their office is not only to have regard to and to watch over the (civil) policy, but also over the sacred ministry to expel and overthrow idolatry and false worship of God, to destroy the kingdom of the Antichrist, and to advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, to ensure the preaching of the Word of the Gospel everywhere, so that God be honored and served by everyone as He has required it by his Word.” *Confession* (1566), 20 r.

⁸⁴ Hsia, *Social Discipline*, 6.

⁸⁵ The reference to “church matters” was changed in the 1566 text, as discussed in chapter four.

the sword against the wicked.”⁸⁶ Since false religion and idolatry is for De Bres the worst sort of wickedness, it follows that the true church should be protected against its oppressors, i.e. Catholicism, by political force.

Accordingly, the magistrate has, on the one hand, the task of opposing false religion – to “remove” (or, one might translate, “abolish”) and “overthrow all idolatry and false worship of God,” and “to destroy the kingdom of the Antichrist.” On the other hand, the magistrate also has the duty “to advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, to ensure the preaching of the Word of the Gospel everywhere.” De Bres thus sees the political duty of opposing and abolishing false religion as coordinated with, and intrinsically related to, the political duty of protecting and advancing true religion. The active destruction of false worship and idolatry (Catholicism) is the means by which the political ruler advances the true religion and preaching of the Word (the Reformed faith).

Overcoming Inertia: Nobles Between Christ and Antichrist

De Bres might have had a second reason for linking the political compulsion of (false) religion to the protection of (true) religion, related to his first reason and likewise rooted in his vision of a political alliance. The Dutch reformers faced the immense challenge of overcoming the inertia of the Dutch nobility, an inertia that was an obstacle to a church-political alliance. De Bres apparently tried to prod the reluctant Dutch nobles to enter a confessional alliance by stressing that God expected political rulers to oppose and restrict the Catholic religion, as well as by hinting that their fulfilment of this God-

⁸⁶ *Racine*, 832.

given duty of opposing false religion and idolatry would serve the nobility's own political interests.

By the late 1550's and 1560, the inertia of the Dutch nobility had become a major obstacle to the hope of activating political rulers for the kind of confessionalization that would offer protection to Reformed believers. The higher nobility, especially, were notoriously unmoved by the plight of their subjects and the ravages caused by the king's policies. In 1567 the scholar Hubert Languet famously lamented that "Belgium was . . . destroyed by the foolishness and the cowardice of the high nobles."⁸⁷ Reformers like Jean Crespin and one of the few high nobles openly favoring Calvinism, Hendrik of Brederode, who was also with De Bres at the conference of nobles and church leaders at St.Trond on 14 July 1566, condemned the passivity, self-centeredness, and "nonchalance" of the nobles and their constant failure to act decisively to protect Protestant believers (and the Netherlands more widely) against the King's excesses.⁸⁸ Not all the nobles were equally affected, but all vexed the Dutch population by their failure to attend to the desperate pleas of their subjects. Even William of Orange later noted in his *Apology* how he had long endured the accusation that "I displayed softness against the opposition [the loyalist court of Philip II], that I was too unresolved, and that I am the cause of the destruction of the land, because I realized too late that the enemy needed to be expelled and destroyed."⁸⁹

⁸⁷ "Belgium esse plane eversum Procerum stultitia et ignavia non ignores." Hubert Languet, *Epistulae ad Camerarium*, July 1567, p.68, cited in Robert Fruin, *De Tachtigjarige oorlog* ('s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1908), 251. According to Fruin, by *procures* Languet clearly intended the higher nobility, the knights of the Golden Fleece, rather than the lesser nobles of Compromis, whom he always called *nobiles*.

⁸⁸ See the citations in Fruin, *De Tachtigjarige oorlog*, 251.

⁸⁹ William of Orange, "De Apologie," in Coos Huijsen, Geerten Waling, P. Jobse, Arendo Joustra, José Bernard, and L. Lubberding, *De geboortepapieren van Nederland: de Unie van Utrecht, de Apologie van*

The paralysis of the Dutch nobles also captured the popular and artistic imagination. Once again, we are here interested in the climate of the age rather than exact chronology. An anonymous engraving of 1569 depicts the unmoved Dutch high nobles amidst the torture and execution of King Philip II's oppressive policies.⁹⁰ The provinces of the Netherlands are shown as seventeen chained maidens, roped to the Spanish throne by cords around their necks, humiliated and enslaved.⁹¹ The nobles and members of the States General are pictured standing by immobile, in the form of statues, "fixed on stone pedestals" as James Tanis describes them, their fingers on their lips indicating their refusal to speak out against the oppression.⁹² Clearly, as Henk van Nierop points out, "the poor ladies can expect little help from them [the magistrates]."⁹³ This engraving, condemnatory not only of the royal persecution inflicted by Philip II's "Iron Duke," Alva, but also of the Dutch nobility's inaction, must have appealed to popular sentiment. It reappeared in artistically improved forms, still depicting the same scene complete with the immobile Dutch higher nobles, from 1569 onwards (see *Figure 1*).⁹⁴

Willem van Oranje en het Plakkaat van Verlating in hedendaags Nederlands (Amsterdam: Elsevier Boeken, 2014), 95.

⁹⁰ Anonymous, "The Throne of the Duke of Alva, I," 1569, engraving, 22.5 x 28.5 cm (Stichting Atlas van Stolk, Historisch Museum, Rotterdam) in *Images of Discord: A Graphic Interpretation of the Opening Decades of the Eighty Years' War*, ed. James Tanis and Daniel Horst (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 50.

⁹¹ Tanis, *Images of Discord*, 50–1.

⁹² Tanis, *Images of Discord*, 50–1.

⁹³ Van Nierop, "Alva's Throne – making sense of the revolt of the Netherlands," 29.

⁹⁴ Anonymous, "The Throne of the Duke of Alva, II." [1569], engraving, 28.5 x 40 cm (Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent, Utrecht) in *Images of Discord: A Graphic Interpretation of the Opening Decades of the Eighty Years' War*, ed. James Tanis and Daniel Horst (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 52. It was still reappearing in the engraving by Willem Jacobszoon Delff in 1622, see Willem Jacobszoon Delff, "The Throne of the Duke of Alva, III," 1622, engraving, 42 x 57 cm (Stichting Atlas van Stolk, Historisch Museum, Rotterdam) in *Images of Discord: A Graphic Interpretation of the Opening Decades of the Eighty Years' War*, ed. James Tanis and Daniel Horst (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 62.

Although these artworks purport to criticize Alva, their real target was likely King Philip II. Modern readers should keep in mind that sixteenth century dissidents often long tried to maintain the myth of the innocence of the monarch (whether Charles IX in France, or Philip II in the Netherlands) and that his evil advisers and foreigners carried all the blame (the Guises in France, or Alva).⁹⁵ The inertia of the nobility in the face of royal absolutism and Roman Catholic influence that the artworks depict had become a crisis long before the arrival of Alva, which helps to explain the popularity of these artistic themes in later decades. In fact, in the anonymous engraving reproduced here (see *Figure 1*), Alva's presence is anachronistic. He appears together with Cardinal Granvelle, who was in fact recalled by King Philip II from the Netherlands in 1564, several years before the arrival of Alva. One could also argue, of course, that perhaps it is Granvelle's presence in the engraving rather than Alva's that is anachronistic, but even so the point would remain: the picture does not intend a careful chronology, but portrays a crisis dynamic of noble passivity, royal absolutism, and Catholic influence that existed in the Netherlands in the early second half of the sixteenth century. Such artworks, therefore, well capture the popular resentment against the passivity of the nobles even during De Bres's lifetime.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ A.A. van Schelven, *Het "heilige recht van opstand"* (Kampen: Kok, 1920), 22–3.

⁹⁶ Other artists portrayed the same message differently. A theme portrayed earlier by artists Willem van Haecht (1552–1577) or Marten van Cleef (1527 – 1581) resurfaced in a painting from 1579 attributed to Hieronymus Wierix, depicting the scene of oppression in 1567. See [Hieronymus Wierix], "The Sleeping Lion," [1579], engraving, 19.8 x 31.8 cm (Stichting Atlas van Stolk, Historisch Museum, Rotterdam) in *Images of Discord: A Graphic Interpretation of the Opening Decades of the Eighty Years' War*, ed. James Tanis and Daniel Horst (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 45. In "The Sleeping Lion," a lion representing the power of the Dutch nobility is shown sleeping while wolves ("foreign thieves") and a fox ("Spanish officers") plunder the land. The inscription reads, "When one wrote 1567, 'twas a shame that the lion remained asleep so long." Tanis comments that the allegorical print "bewails the detriment caused the Netherlands by refraining so long from taking action against the Spanish oppression." Tanis, *Images of Discord*, 44–45.

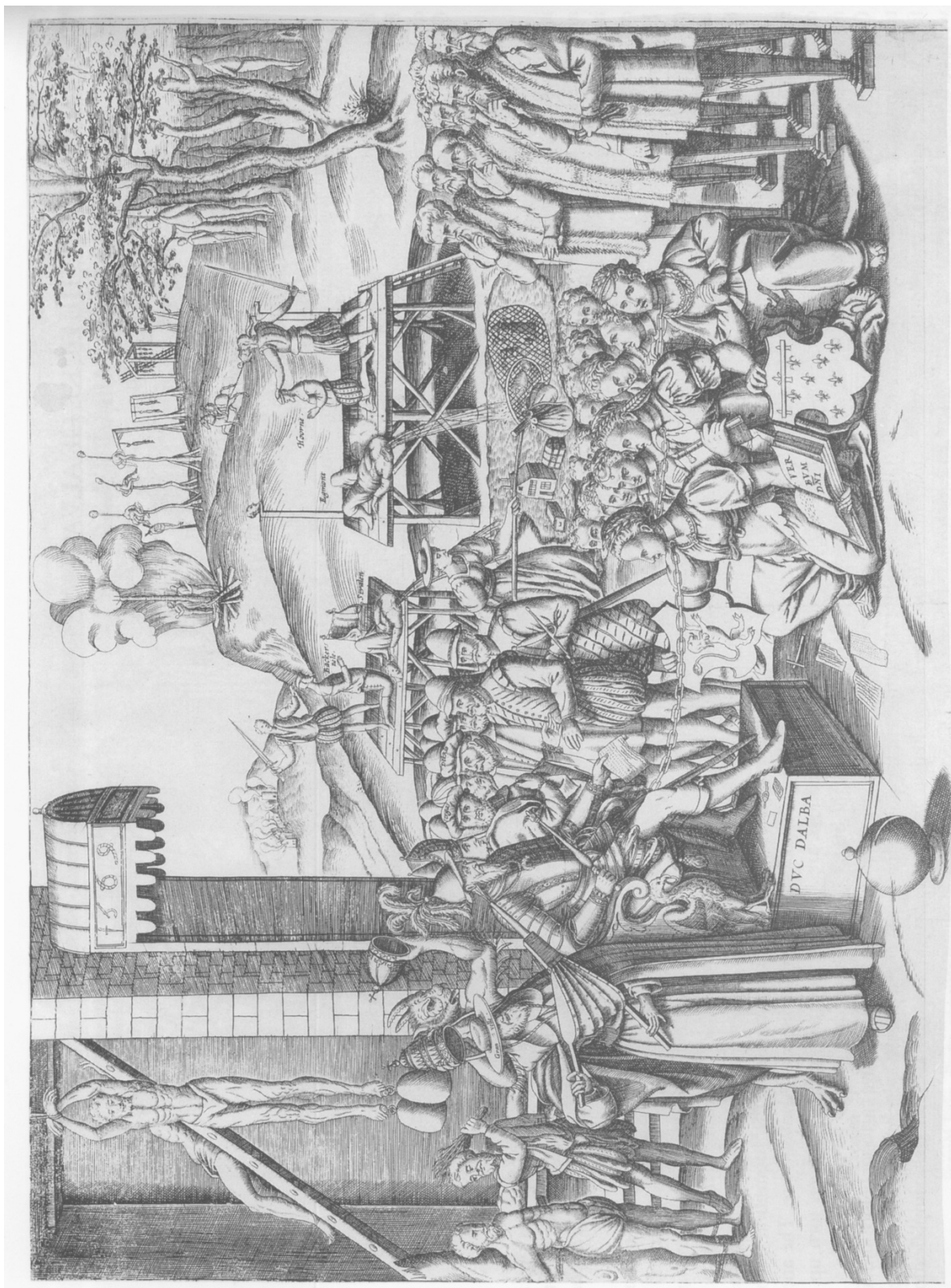


Figure 1. Anonymous, “The Throne of the Duke of Alva, II” [1569], engraving, 28.5 x 40 cm, Rijksmuseum Het Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.

In brief, reformers like De Bres faced the frustrating torpor of the Dutch higher nobles that contrasted with the zeal of the French aristocrats who shielded the Huguenots. Van Schelven diagnoses a “lack of moral health and energy” that affected the Dutch aristocracy.⁹⁷ Only by 1566 had what Pettegree calls “a loose . . . coalition which bound together the Reformed and their allies in the nobility” been formed.⁹⁸ But even so, the zeal of most of the nobility was but sputtering. After an auspicious start in the “miracle year,” the *annus mirabilis* of 1566, the League of the high nobility began to fall apart when the Protestant iconoclasms of August 1566 produced a backlash from the royal authorities.⁹⁹ By 1568, the year after De Bres’s death, however, the first flames of the Dutch Revolt were leaping up, and the leading role taken by a handful of high nobles like William of Orange showed that the apparently unflinching loyalty of the nobility to their king could be disrupted.

More than political and theological reasons played a part in this disruption. For example, a sizeable minority of the nobles or their families were themselves Protestants. This included a few high nobles, like Brederode, and a substantial number of the lesser nobles. In December 1565, about 450 lesser nobles united in a league, the Compromise of Nobles (*Verbond der Edelen*).¹⁰⁰ A number of these nobles presented a petition to the Governess, Margaret of Parma on 5 April 1566, in order to persuade her to cease the religious persecution of Protestants, hinting at armed resistance if she failed to do so.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Van Schelven, *Willem van Oranje*, 97–8.

⁹⁸ Pettegree, “Religion and the Revolt,” 76.

⁹⁹ See Pettegree, “Religion and the Revolt,” 76.

¹⁰⁰ As explained in chapter 2, I am estimating the figure of 450 based on the comments of Van Nierop, “Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands,” 88.

¹⁰¹ Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*, 78–80. See Kossman, *Texts concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands*, 62–5.

Van Nierop estimates that roughly half of the signatories, slightly more than 200, were Protestant; of this number, a large proportion would have been Reformed. Likely more than 100 nobles would, therefore, have favored protection of their own Reformed religion, and a group more than twice as large would have favored protection of certain forms of the Protestant religion and Protestant worship more generally. In addition, even many of the Catholic nobles had Protestants in their families. For instance, a few of the high nobles, including Hoorne, Brederode, and William of Orange, had Lutheran spouses. It is easy to see why these nobles “took a keen personal interest in a more moderate policy,” as Nierop commented.¹⁰²

By all accounts, however, the number of nobles who were themselves Protestant or who had Protestant ties was a minority. Until at least 1566, De Bres still faced the uphill battle of trying to activate the nobility to assume the task of protecting the church. What could possibly make a confessional alliance attractive enough for the Dutch nobles to risk sticking their necks out – even quite literally, as in the case of Counts Egmont and Horne, beheaded in 1568 by King Philip’s Alva for sedition and rebellion?¹⁰³

De Bres, as was mentioned at the beginning of this section, attempted to woo languid political magnates into protecting the Reformed church, and perhaps to encourage and embolden the few Reform-minded high nobles to continue and step up their efforts, in two ways. First, he portrayed opposing false religion and idolatry as the rulers’ inescapable duty assigned by God. It was, together with their task of ensuring external peace and order, their main duty. We have already observed how this appears from

¹⁰² Van Nierop, “Nobility and the Revolt of the Netherlands,” 88.

¹⁰³ Charles Victor de Bavay, *Le procès de comte d’Egmont, avec pièces justificatives, d’après les manuscrits originaux trouvés à Mons* (Brussels: Muquardt, 1854), 322.

Art.36 of the *Belgic Confession*. The reason why God expected the magistrate to “restrain and watch” not only over political matters “but also over the church matters” was “so that God be honored and served by everyone as He has required it by his Word.”¹⁰⁴

Protection of the Reformed church was, consequently, not an option left to the choice of rulers such as the Dutch nobles; rather, it was what the honor and service of God demanded of those to whom He had given the sword. As Martin Van Gelder explains,

the government, as the protector of both tables of Moses' law, had a second principal task, which was to fight idolatry and to foster the true predication of God's word. This argument, already presented by Veluanus and later also by de Bray [De Bres], Moded, Aldegonde and others, was incorporated in the 1561 Confession of faith and therefore seemed to represent the view of the mainstream of Dutch Reformed Protestantism. An important consequence of this view was that the government had a duty to fight heresy.¹⁰⁵

Thus, according to Art.36 of the *Confession* and what Van Gelder describes as “the view of the mainstream of Dutch Reformed Protestantism,” it was the government’s duty to oppose idolatry and false religion. It follows that since God had assigned government this duty, those who, like King Philip II, were promoting idolatry and persecuting the true church were acting in total breach of their divine duty and contradicting the very *raison d’être* of their divine appointment.

This inference is indeed suggested in De Bres’s *Letter to the King* that preceded the *Confession*, which directly associates “idolatry, the false worship of God” with the kingdom of the Devil.¹⁰⁶ The result, as chapter two argued, was that the Dutch nobles could not escape choosing sides. Their divine duty was clear. The final sentences of the

¹⁰⁴ *Confession* (1561)^F, 21; (1561)^C, 33. See also *Confession* (1566), 20 r.

¹⁰⁵ Van Gelderen, *Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 106.

¹⁰⁶ *Confession* (1561)^C, a.x v.

Letter reiterated the correlative duties of protecting the (Reformed) church and opposing the false worship of the Catholic Church, emphasizing for the benefit of the nobles the King's failure to satisfy God's requirements: "It belongs to you, Sir . . . that you oppose the errors . . . It belongs to you to protect the innocence of those who have been more oppressed than heard in their just cause. In this manner, the Lord will bless and preserve you."¹⁰⁷ By connecting the Lord's preservation and blessing to fulfillment of this duty, the letter reminded Dutch nobles who read it that God will judge their (and the King's!) disobedience in this matter.¹⁰⁸ The same reasoning underlies the final call to action of the *Remonstrance to the Magistrates*: "Begin then, our lords, to protect our cause, and begin to investigate our innocence that is suppressed by the fraud, the contumacy and the violence of our adversaries, so that the Lord for whom the life of his servants are good and precious does not pour his wrath out upon you."¹⁰⁹

All of this is given additional eschatological force by the somber warnings of Art.37 of the *Confession*. At the final judgment, De Bres writes, the innocence of persecuted believers will be made known and "their cause, which is now condemned by many judges and magistrates as heretical and impious, will then be known to be the cause of the Son of God."¹¹⁰ None could have failed to connect such a sentence with the Dutch Protestants who were constantly persecuted for heresy. By contrast, the punishments of hell were destined for their persecutors, whom no reader in the Netherlands would have failed to

¹⁰⁷ *Confession* (1561)^C, a.ix.v.

¹⁰⁸ See chapter two above.

¹⁰⁹ *Confession*, (1561)^C, d.vii. v.

¹¹⁰ *Confession* (1561)^C, 34–5.

connect to oppressors like King Phillip II. The innocent believers will at the final judgment see

the terrible vengeance which God will execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed, and tormented them in this world, and who will be convicted by the testimony of their own consciences, and become immortal, but for this purpose, to be tormented in that everlasting fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels.¹¹¹

By invoking the austere contrasts of true and false religion, the kingdom of Christ and of the Devil, God's judgment and blessing, heaven and hell, De Bres's writings left no room for neutrality. As De Bres portrayed it, political rulers, to use Oliver O'Donovan's description from another context, could give no "neutral performance," because "either they accommodate to the energy of the divine mission, or they hurl themselves into defiance."¹¹²

Second, in addition to appealing to divine duty, De Bres tried to overcome the Dutch nobility's inertia by appealing to their own self-interest. This he did by asserting their monopoly of governmental authority over against papal competitors. De Bres argued that the pope and the Catholic church had to be stripped of their magisterial power, as chapter three showed. In this he followed reformers like Calvin, who claimed that the pope had illegitimately usurped the power of the sword to exercise jurisdiction even over earthly kings, thus establishing the kingdom of the Antichrist, so that secular princes should again assume what God had given to them in the first place.¹¹³

¹¹¹ *Confession* (1561)^c, 34–5.

¹¹² Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 217.

¹¹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.11. See Vonk, *De Voorzeide leer, Vol.3b*, 557–8, who connects Calvin's teaching with De Bres's.

In line with this, De Bres in Art.36 of the *Confession* mentions as recipients of the power of the sword “kings, princes, and magistrates” – but, like most Reformed confessions, explicitly excludes the pope and the Roman Catholic hierarchy from the legitimate exercise of political power.¹¹⁴ A characteristic Protestant appeal for secularization is echoed in the final sentences of Art.36: “Moreover, everyone, of whatever state, quality, or condition he may be, is obliged to be subject to the magistrates; to pay tribute [tax], to show due honor and respect to them, and to obey them.”¹¹⁵ By insisting that people of “whatever state, quality, or condition,” that is, including all the religious orders, should be subject to the magistrates, obey them, and pay taxes, De Bres was voicing the magisterial battle cry of the Reformation.¹¹⁶ The *Confession* affirmed the Protestant rejection of the Catholic Church’s magisterial claims, claims that had been maintained in law and religion since the late Roman Empire, or at least since Pope Gregory VII near the end of the eleventh century reasserted but supercharged the late ancient privileges of the Church. Thus, De Bres in Art.36 implicitly rejected such Gregorian claims to the “independence of the clergy from secular control,” and “the ultimate supremacy of the pope in secular matters, including the authority to depose emperors and kings,” as Harold Berman describes them.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ *Confession* (1561)^F, 21; (1561)^C, 33.

¹¹⁵ *Confession* (1561)^F, 21–2; (1561)^C, 33.

¹¹⁶ Similar sentiments were voiced several decades earlier by another Reformer for a season active in the Netherlands before his martyrdom in Antwerp, William Tyndale. Tyndale rejected any claim by monks, friars, bishop, or Pope to “except them from the sword of the Emperor or kings, if they break the laws.” The reference in Scripture to “higher powers,” he explained, intended “temporal kings and princes unto whom God hath given the sword to punish whosoever sinneth,” and therefore excluded ecclesiastical lords: “There is no power but of God (by power understand the authority of kings and princes). The powers that be, are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth power resisteth God: yea though he be Pope, bishop, monk or friar.” Tyndale, *Obedience of a Christian Man*, 40–1.

¹¹⁷ Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1983), 87. Colin Morris explains the connection between the Gregorian

Furthermore, by mentioning in Art.36 that people of “whatever state, quality, or condition” were required to pay tax, the glitter of increased tax revenue was dangled before rulers willing to protect the true (Reformed) church and oppose the false (Roman Catholic) church. The promise of increasing fiscal revenue by stripping the Catholic orders of their privileges was one of the effective political trump cards of the Protestant Reformation. Even in the Netherlands, De Bres was not the first to play it. Long before De Bres’s *Confession*, Tyndale expressed astonishment at the audacity of the Catholic “spirituals” who “desire . . . to be excepted from tribute, toll or custom, that they would not bear pain with their brethren, unto the maintenance of kings and officers.”¹¹⁸ By this time, Dutch nobles would have been well aware how European princes had enriched their coffers when they monopolized the power to tax and when they confiscated Catholic church properties on a large scale; even Geneva provided an example.¹¹⁹ The politically

reformations and the late ancient privileges: “Since the time of the late Roman Empire the clergy had enjoyed extensive legal privileges. One of the striking features of the period from 1050 to 1200 was a determined effort to extend the rights and revenues, an enterprise undertaken not only by the self-seeking, but by the reformers and spiritually minded men. Their expectations were shaped by the canons composed in the ninth century by pseudo-Isidore, which we know to be an imaginative statement of ecclesiastical claims but which they believed to be the law of the early church. Behind this lay the belief that Christ’s work in the world was essentially the business of the clergy, and if they were to direct the ambitious programme for Christendom . . . the need for resources was enormous. There had to be the revenue to provide and maintain magnificent great churches and numerous local ones, and there had to be legal safeguards if the clergy were to do justice and maintain equity in a world of powerful lords.” Colin Morris, *The Papal Monarchy: The Western Church from 1050 to 1250* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 387.

¹¹⁸ Tyndale, *Obedience of a Christian Man*, 41.

¹¹⁹ On the widespread expropriation of ecclesiastical properties by secular authorities, see Christopher Ocker, *Church Robbers and Reformers in Germany, 1525–1547: Confiscation and Religious Purpose in the Holy Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) and Henry J. Cohn, “Church Property in the German Protestant Principalities,” in *Politics and Society in Reformation Europe: Essays for Sir Geoffrey Elton on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Geoffrey Rudolph Elton and E. I. Kouri (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987). With respect to Geneva, William Monter describes how introducing the Reformation “radically expanded” the public finances when the city government of Geneva took over the revenues of the Prince Bishop and began to “track down all the ancient sources of revenue, the tithes and tolls and annuities, and to collect them herself.” Statistics show that when Geneva was “‘secularized’ with a vengeance in 1536 . . . one immediate result was an astronomical increase in municipal revenues.” Monter concludes that this “secularization” was “profitable in Geneva, as in many other European states from the tiniest German

savvy Dutch nobles of the mid sixteenth century needed little reminder that secularization in this sense could be similarly profitable in the Netherlands. All it would take was to protect the true (Protestant) church and eradicate the idolatrous false (Roman Catholic) church. Opposing idolatry and the kingdom of the Antichrist could be a sensible fiscal policy.

It was not only in the *Confession* that De Bres promoted such secularization and asserted the divine monopoly given to secular princes of the power of the sword. Already in *Baston*, De Bres resented the medieval popes who “troubled” Christendom by seeking to restrict the jurisdiction of secular monarchs.¹²⁰ It is, however, particularly in Art.36 of the *Confession* and in its accompanying documents that the political rulers are encouraged to assert sovereignty over the so-called usurped power of the Catholic Church.¹²¹

De Bres explicitly connected this sovereignty to the magistrate’s task of reforming religion. In the *Remonstrance to the Magistrates* following the *Confession*, in a passage already quoted and discussed at some length, De Bres emphatically rejected the limitation of the magisterial jurisdiction in terms of a “two swords” division.¹²² At the very least,

principality to Henry VIII’s England.” E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (New York: J. Wiley, 1967), 156.

¹²⁰ In *Baston*, De Bres historically connects the cruel practices of the present Catholic hierarchy with Pope Gregory VII, who, as mentioned above, became well known for his strong stance against secular princes. Gregory, in De Bres’s citation from the decision of the synod of Worms of 1080, is said to have not only “turned upside down the ecclesiastical order” and “troubled the reign of the Christian empire,” but also “preached . . . the stake/burning and . . . homicide.” *Baston* (1555), 143 r.

¹²¹ Once again, De Bres was in this resembling many reformers. One of the first reformers active in the Netherlands, Tyndale, also resented how “the Pope . . . has usurped the right of the Emperor.” Tyndale, *The Obedience of the Christian Man*, 47. Tyndale therefore encouraged the King “to rid his realm from the wily tyranny of the hypocrites and to bring the hypocrites under his laws.” Tyndale, *Obedience of the Christian Man*, 184; see also 181–2, 189–90.

¹²² “Most of the old teachers [of the church] thought that it was not permitted to the magistrate to touch the conscience of a man by forcing and constraining him to believe. For the material sword is given in the

De Bres was rejecting the medieval “two swords” theory, and pushing back against late medieval Roman Catholic political pretensions.¹²³ Hence De Bres’s call to the civil magistrates to come into their own and not to allow themselves to be made “simply the executors and servants of the sentences, judgments and convictions of monks, priests, holders of benefices, church doctors.”¹²⁴ On the basis of this divine monopoly of magisterial power given to the secular ruler, De Bres issued his wake-up call for the nobles in *Remonstrance* to arise and protect the Protestant church: “O virtuous and magnanimous lords, how long will you . . . not resist the violence of his [the persecuted believer’s] opponents, that both accuse and convict him?”¹²⁵ This amounted to an appeal to the nobles (the “virtuous and magnanimous lords”) to resist the enforcement of Catholicism (the “violence”) by the Spanish court of Phillip II. It was inspired, no doubt, by the example which Dixon describes of those “Lutheran and Reformed polities” where “the secular authorities dismantled the Catholic Church and built a Protestant Church in its place.”¹²⁶

In sum, De Bres’s writings, especially the *Confession* and its accompanying documents, stressed political rulers’ duty to oppose false religion and idolatry (i.e. Catholicism) and to protect the true church (i.e. the Reformed faith). At the same time,

magistrate’s hand to punish thieves, robbers, killers, and others who upset this human polity. But as to religion and what pertains to the soul, only the spiritual sword of the Word of God should and can effectively set it right, by distinguishing between [false] zeal and [that] religion which nobody can maintain together with [notions of] sedition and disturbance of the [civil] polity. **But we are satisfied not to follow them in this respect, and not to believe these good doctors.**” *Confession* (1561)^C, d.v. v. Emphasis added.

¹²³ See chapter two, which suggested that it was unlikely that De Bres was rejecting the more ancient Gelasian doctrine.

¹²⁴ *Confession*, (1561)^C, d.v. r.

¹²⁵ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.iv. v.- d.v. r.

¹²⁶ Dixon, *The Church in the Early Modern Age*, 117.

they denied the possibility of neutrality, and invited the secularization of Catholic fiscal and political interests in ways that would have appealed to the nobles' penchant for power and financial income. As a result, De Bres was inviting the Dutch nobles to use their political power to compel in matters of religion and worship in order to counteract Catholic power.

Conclusion

We have seen so far that there can be little doubt that De Bres endeavored to ensure the survival of the persecuted Reformed churches, daily threatened by tempests, as he described it.¹²⁷ Initially, perhaps, there was hope that God would grant miraculous relief and open the eyes of King Philip II to see the truth of Reformed doctrine, or raise up a new reformation-minded king, a King Josiah like England's Edward VI, to replace Philip. By 1555 such divine intervention had not materialized, and De Bres was expecting little good from political power, as chapter two described. Somewhere around 1558, however, De Bres was starting to view political power more expectantly. Political power, it was starting to appear, could promote rather than threaten the survival of the Reformed churches in the southern Netherlands – especially if political power was viewed according to vibrant constitutional theories and practical models as decentralized and potentially opposed to the absolutizing King's designs, as chapter four suggested. Associated with De Bres's move toward a more positive view of political government was his move toward a favorable view of the political compulsion of religion, as chapter

¹²⁷ *Racine*, a.ii v.

two showed. As a result, once De Bres accepted that the political power of nobles could protect the Reformed against royal Catholicism's political threat to their existence, the die was cast on the issue of the political compulsion of religion. It would have been hard for De Bres to conceive of the political protection of Calvinism (which was what he hoped a church-political alliance would accomplish) without involving, as inherently related, the political restriction of Catholicism – this was precisely what political protection involved, in the medieval and sixteenth century tradition of protection by restriction. After all, the conviction that the use of political force against false religion was precisely how political rulers protected true religion was by the sixteenth century esteemed and long established, as we saw in this chapter.

This chapter also analyzed two reasons that made it even more sensible for De Bres to so coordinate the political protection of the Reformed and the political restriction of non-Reformed (especially Catholics): the competitive religio-political dynamics of confessionalization, and the challenge of overcoming the inertia of the Dutch nobles.

This is not to suggest that these reasons directly caused De Bres to adopt the political restriction of religion that he otherwise would not have adopted. Rather, these reasons reinforced the inseparability of the political restriction of religion and political protection. They made the *political* restriction of competing religions seem even more naturally and commonsensically involved in the *political* protection of the Reformed religion by a *political* alliance. In other words, these reasons manifested De Bres's theological conviction that using the sword against false religion in defense of true religion was

essentially the purpose of the sword – the divinely ordained purpose of the sword as a divinely ordained office.¹²⁸

The next two chapters will note further ways in which De Bres's vision of a confessional alliance cemented the political compulsion of religion into the very idea of political protection: the need for the Reformed churches to safeguard the church-political alliance and respond to the issues of social order and political legitimacy.

¹²⁸ See chapter seven.

CHAPTER 6

SAFEGUARDING THE ALLIANCE

The previous chapter suggested ways in which De Bres's advocacy of the political compulsion of religion was furthered by his vision of a confessional alliance with Dutch nobles. The next two chapters will extend this explanation. The present chapter contends that De Bres attempted to safeguard the incipient confessional alliance when social disorder threatened to jeopardize it. As part of this attempt, De Bres justified the principle of the political restriction of religion.

The chapter's argument that De Bres's defense of social order and political rule involved the political restriction of religion is arranged along three points. First, the chapter will consider how by the late 1550's, the Netherlands were facing rising social unrest, and how social discipline, together with political legitimacy (which will be more fully considered in the next chapter), were becoming critical concerns that the Dutch nobles might have expected to be addressed by a confessional alliance with the Reformed. Then, it will examine the additional challenge that Anabaptism posed to De Bres and the Dutch reformers. The nobility's fear that Anabaptism endangered social order, as well as the potential corrosion of political legitimacy by Anabaptist critiques, required a response by De Bres and the Dutch Reformers in order to justify the nobles' intention to build an alliance with the Reformed churches. Finally, this chapter will discuss three ways in which De Bres responded to the rise of Anabaptism and its apparent threat to social order: he attacked Anabaptist theology as a heresy; he sharply distinguished Anabaptism, which he condemned as irreparably seditious, from politically

submissive Reformed Protestantism; and he contended that politically protecting Reformed Protestantism and politically suppressing Catholicism would defuse the danger of Anabaptism and radicalism.

Social Discipline and Social Order

As the discussion of confessionalization in the previous chapter pointed out, two “crucial advantages” that political rulers in early modern states hoped to gain from confessionalization were *social discipline* and *legitimacy* of the rulers’ political power and its monopolization.¹ Improved social discipline and a shoring up of political legitimacy was what Reinhard termed the “payment” that political rulers expected in return for their participation in a confessional alliance.² Churches in a confessional alliance could be expected to contribute to social discipline and political legitimacy in exchange for the political and military protection that they would receive.

This *quid pro quo* by the churches was not at all given begrudgingly. Sixteenth century church leaders were themselves committed to ideals of social discipline and social and religious order, and also took a keen interest in promoting the legitimacy of ecclesiastical and political leadership.³ This religious emphasis upon social discipline,

¹ See Reinhard, “Pressures toward Confessionalization,” 183; Reinhard, “Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State,” 398.

² Reinhard, “Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and the Early Modern State,” 397.

³ See e.g. Gerhard Oestreich, Brigitta Oestreich, and Helmut Georg Koenigsberger, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Schilling, “Confessional Europe,” 661; Schulze, “Gerhard Oestreichs Begriff ‘Sozialdisziplinierung in der frühen Neuzeit’.”

wider scholarship has recognized, was intimately connected with religious visions of interior discipline.⁴

A case in point is the quest for order and discipline by the popular Neo-Stoicism of the sixteenth century. Justus Lipsius, for example, contributed to a flourishing of Neo-Stoicism, promoting Stoicism's inner discipline of mind and soul.⁵ Even the early Calvin reflects this attraction of Stoicism's vision of inner and external order for humanist scholars, as seen in his commentary on Seneca's *De Clementia*. Seneca's Stoic ideas might even have supplied, some scholars believe, "a classical basis for Calvin's later Genevan program."⁶ According to Balke, Stoic principles later guided Calvin's "political concepts and practices."⁷ The potential of Stoicism (or Neo-Stoicism) to shape Reformed thought was significant, since governments were understandably interested to see their populations become "obedient, pious, and diligent subjects," as R. Po-chia Hsia describes it. In Calvinist territories, Hsia contends, "state building and Neo-Stoic philosophy went hand-in-hand."⁸ Similarly, Kaplan delineates a passion for "discipline and order, consolidation and control" in the wake of the Reformation.⁹

⁴ See e.g. John Bossy, *Christianity in the West: 1400 – 1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁵ See e.g. Mark P. O. Morford, *Stoics and Neostoics: Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Adriana McCreia, *Constant Minds Political Virtue and the Lipsian Paradigm in England, 1584–1650* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016); Margaret J. Osler, *Atoms, Pneuma, and Tranquillity: Epicurean and Stoic Themes in European Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). An example of one of his popular works that re-emphasized the Stoic virtues was Justus Lipsius, *De Constantia* (Antwerp: Christopher Plantin, 1586).

⁶ Ford Lewis Battles and André Malan Hugo, *Calvin's Commentary on Seneca's De Clementia* (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 129.

⁷ Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 24. See also André Malan Hugo, *Calvijn en Seneca: Een inleidende studie van Calvijns Commentaar op Seneca, De Clementia, anno 1532* (Groningen: Wolters, 1957); and Josef Bohatec, *Calvins Lehre von Staat und Kirche, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Organismusgedankens* (Breslau: Marcus, 1937), 37–43.

⁸ Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation*, 2.

⁹ Kaplan, "Confessionalism and Popular Piety," 45.

Even those who doubt confessionalization theory cannot fail to recognize the significance of such phenomena as inner and outer (social) discipline, order, and control in the dynamics of the Reformation. As Dixon points out, the universality of the Reformation's concern for discipline and for "imposing order" in the church and in society, is obvious and recognized by many historiographical paradigms: "social disciplining, the reform of popular culture, Christianization and the disciplinary revolution."¹⁰ Widely recognized by many paradigms, too, is that this central concern with morality was placed "within the context of the rise of the state or the civilizing process as a whole."¹¹

Yet confessionalization theory does offer a benefit, in that it presents a working model to conceive of how this connection between inner (spiritual) order and external (social, political) order was propagated. It demonstrates how social discipline, still connected with inner discipline, was mediated by the alliances between church and magistrate. Church leaders labored to precisely define Christianity in their confessions, and then sought alliances with magistrates to enforce these confessions and impose social discipline.¹² For clergy and political rulers alike, a confessional alliance was what Gregory describes as a "win-win scenario" of increased social discipline:

Not only would rulers discharge their God-given duties conscientiously; they would also get subjects who were more obedient, more disciplined, and less immoral. What city council, territorial prince, or royal sovereign could object to that? For their part, members of a better educated, more austere, more diligent clergy would have

¹⁰ Dixon, *The Church in the Early Modern Age*, 119.

¹¹ Dixon, *The Church in the Early Modern Age*, 119.

¹² Watt, *The Long Reformation*, 11. Reinhard suggests that Reformed and Lutheran churches had additional reason to frequently invoke the assistance of the political apparatus of a city or region to help enforce their new standards, because they lacked the Catholic Church's rigid organization. Reinhard, "Pressures towards Confessionalization?" 179.

unprecedented, committed secular power at their backs in their efforts to instill orthodox beliefs and behaviors.¹³

In the Netherlands, these were precisely the advantages that a confessional alliance between Dutch reformers and the nobility seemed to promise. The potential advantages were becoming crucial in the late 1550's and 1560's when the Netherlands were becoming what has been called a "cauldron of discontent."¹⁴

From the side of the churches, the concern with social discipline was usually connected with inner discipline and rooted in more profound commitments to a theological order.¹⁵ Reinhard calls this commitment the "clarity of firm convictions" which found expression in confessional formulations. After spelling out their visions of theological order in their confessions, churches were interested in "internalization of the new order through education and training."¹⁶ It goes without saying that as the new order was internalized, social consequences would follow as individual behavior changed. In other words, individual self-control would produce social spin-offs. However, churches were also interested in more directly enforcing the social aspects of their theological vision. This could happen through disciplining its adherents, through control of members by elites and through such practices as church visitation and church discipline. It could also happen, in a wider sense, through enforcement by political powers.¹⁷ Philip Gorski has even argued that the Reformation brought a "disciplinary

¹³ Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 157.

¹⁴ Patrick Williams, *Philip II* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 119.

¹⁵ See Dixon, *The Church in the Early Modern Age*, 119.

¹⁶ Reinhard, "Pressures towards Confessionalization?" 178.

¹⁷ Reinhard, "Pressures towards Confessionalization?" 178. See also Kaplan, "Confessionalism and Popular Piety," 45.

revolution” and that, whether from below (through individual and church and societal transformation) or from above (through magisterial transformation), a main goal was “the creation of a more disciplined polity.”¹⁸ Significantly, at least in the early stages of the Reformation (one might think of the 1550’s and early 1560’s in the Netherlands as still in this stage), the “key carriers” of this disciplinary revolution were “Protestant clerics and reformist magistrates.”¹⁹

From the side of the political rulers, by contrast, the concern for social discipline was rooted in the desire for political control and political legitimacy. Political leaders were willing to grant churches protection and special privilege, often even an ecclesiastical monopoly, in order to enhance those churches’ influence and their theological confessions and thereby promote social order and reinforce their own political legitimacy. Such a partnership with the church promised to “align a sense of political identity and religious commitment, and to mold dutiful, obedient, and pious subjects,” as one scholar describes it.²⁰

Never were political rulers in greater need of the churches’ assistance to promote social discipline than when civil disorder was threatening political hierarchy. Such was precisely the situation of the Netherlands in the 1550’s and 1560’s. Social and political unrest in the Netherlands had long been sprouting in response to the government’s oppressive religious policies. By the late 1550’s and early 1560’s it was becoming apparent that something had to give. As both Cardinal Granvelle and De Bres were

¹⁸ Philip S. Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution Calvinism and the Rise of the State in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), xvi.

¹⁹ Gorski, *The Disciplinary Revolution*, xvi.

²⁰ Peter Marshall, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 9.

predicting by 1561, unless the government changed its course, a revolution was to be expected.²¹

There were clear signs that revolutionary pressure was building in the late 1550's. Execution of Protestant heretics was beginning to arouse such public anger that many urban governments preferred to flout Charles V's and Philip II's rigorous anti-heresy decrees rather than to further antagonize their local populations. In several cities, defiant populations frustrated the authorities' attempts to execute heretics. Crowds rioted in Valenciennes in 1562, and in Antwerp in 1564 the executioner himself barely escaped with his life.²² *Hagenpreken* or hedge-preaching became widespread. These open air Calvinist preaching assemblies outside the city limits have been described as "part religious service, part demonstration against a regime whose authority was swiftly ebbing away."²³ In July 1562, many attending a *hagenpreek* in Boeschepe brandished firearms to prevent possible arrest. Such open defiance perturbed the political authorities, but was only the beginning of a growing trend of armed pilgrimages to *hagenpreken*, and possibly even the "official start of armed resistance" in the Netherlands.²⁴ With frequency armed Protestants raided prisons and liberated the heretics awaiting execution.²⁵ The high point of the civil unrest was the eventful year of 1566 when, starting in Steenvoorde on August 10, waves of iconoclasm washed through the country from Antwerp in the south to the

²¹ See Van Schelven, *Willem van Oranje*, 102. See e.g. De Bres's *Letter to the King* and his handwritten letter to the Commissioners of the Governness, discussed later in this chapter.

²² Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, 63.

²³ Pettegree, "Religion and the Revolt," 75.

²⁴ M. F. Backhouse, "The Official Start of Armed Resistance in the Low Countries: Boeschepe 12 July 1562," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte - Archive for Reformation History*, 71 (1980): 199.

²⁵ Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, 63. Some historical instances are given in Backhouse, "Official Start of Armed Resistance in the Low Countries," 198-9.

area surrounding Groningen in the north.²⁶ In scenes of resistance that sent shock-waves throughout the political establishment, gangs and sometimes crowds of Protestants entered cathedrals and other Catholic places of worship, smashed statues, icons, and other church objects which they associated with idolatry, and in many cases caused extensive damage. Philip's strong-armed response, his Spanish generals' invasion of cities like Tournai and Valenciennes in 1567 and the arrival of the "Iron Duke," Alva, in 1568 pushed back Protestantism – but the Dutch Revolt had only begun.

Political resentment was not at all confined to the lower strata of society. Peter Arnade describes a rising "wave of dissent" against the central government that also affected the Dutch nobility and urban governments.²⁷ As already observed, discontent was initially concentrated among the lower nobles and magistrates; most high nobles were still trying to stay aloof.²⁸ The lesser nobility's sympathy with some of the reasons for the unrest is seen in their first petition ("Request") presented to the Governess on 5 April 1566, wherein they urged her to relax the anti-heresy edicts: "There are clear indications everywhere that the people are so exasperated that the final result, we fear, will be an open revolt and universal rebellion bringing ruin to all the provinces and plunging them into utter misery."²⁹ The petitioned appealed to the "manifest" nature of "the extent of the danger that menaces us" and reminded Princess Margaret of the "disasters and calamities which usually spring from such rebellions."³⁰

²⁶ Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*, 90.

²⁷ Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*, 9.

²⁸ See chapter seven.

²⁹ Kossman, *Texts concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands*, 63.

³⁰ Kossman, *Texts concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands*, 64.

The growing disorders, Pettegree remarks, “would have shaken the will of any urban government in the sixteenth century.”³¹ In fact, even some of the higher nobles were perturbed. Concerned high nobility formed a League early in 1562 to push for the removal of one of the main protagonists of religious persecution, King Philip’s confidant, Cardinal Granvelle, and in 1564 they succeeded.³² The efforts of the Prince of Orange and the Counts of Egmont and Horne to pressure the Governess and the King for greater leniency in their religious policy have already been discussed in chapter four. As mentioned there, in 1564 William of Orange pleaded in the Council of State for the cessation of the religious persecutions. This burgeoning concern of the high nobility for greater religious toleration was likely motivated more by alarm than by high principle. As De Pater interprets their motivation, “For the vast majority of the nobles, their anxiety over the rising unrest among the population because of the government decrees [suppressing Protestantism] as well as over the social disorder was a greater spur to action than their religious convictions.”³³

The King shared the nobility’s anxiety about political disorder but had a stock solution at hand. In a hardline letter from the Segovia Woods on 17 October 1565, he urged the Governess of the Netherlands to step up punishment of the restless Protestants in order to protect “my authority and yours, and . . . the service of God,” since “the daring increases daily” and “so much liberty is taken that we must fear most dangerous

³¹ Pettegree, “Religion and the Revolt,” 74.

³² Darby, *Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt*, xiv.

³³ De Pater, “De Pater, “Geloofsbelijdenis en de religievrede in de phase van het verzet tegen Spanje,” 197.

consequences.”³⁴ To circumvent the increasingly riotous crowds, Phillip was mulling whether heretics “ought not to be executed in secret in some way,” although he liked the idea of a “a public execution [which] also serves to set an example.”³⁵ Notwithstanding, Europe’s so-called “most Catholic king” remained unshaken in his confidence of God’s favor upon his rule.³⁶ What the situation now called for above all, he insisted, was nerve; perhaps he reprimanded wavering nobles in words like those which he later used to dismiss doubts over God’s favor upon the Armada’s plans to attack England: “I have dedicated this enterprise to God . . . Pull yourself together and do your part!”³⁷

However, many of the Dutch nobles were by now doubting whether more rigorous persecution of heresy would save the day. It was Phillip’s religious policy, after all, that was eliciting the growing religious and political dissidence that was undermining the nobility’s own respectability. Subjects bemoaned the nobility’s unwillingness to control the Spanish monarch and the nobles’ apparent connivance at his destructive policies, as we have noticed when considering how several artists depicted the grandees’ pillared immobility.

The rising threat of rebellion placed the Dutch aristocrats between the devil and the deep blue sea, since also undermining their political security was the King’s policy of centralizing and absolutizing the monarchical state by eroding the power of the nobles.³⁸ Phillip II’s expansion of royal power in the Netherlands came at the expense of the rights

³⁴ Kossman, *Texts concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands*, 54.

³⁵ Kossman, *Texts concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands*, 55.

³⁶ See Woodward, *Philip II*, 51.

³⁷ Philip II to Medina Sidonia, cited in Parker, *Imperial Vision of Philip II*, 23.

³⁸ Van Nierop, “Alva’s Throne – making sense of the revolt of the Netherlands,” 44.

and privileges of other rulers such as the noble magnates, the lesser nobility, various levels of magistrates and provincial and urban rulers.³⁹ The King even obstructed the meeting of the traditional Dutch assembly of rulers, the States-General,⁴⁰ in his attempt to “reduce the States-General and the Dutch grandees to political subordination” as one scholar describes it.⁴¹ Such were the calculated moves of an increasingly absolute monarch in an increasingly absolute state, who strategically deployed university trained lawyers in the royal administration to emphasize Roman law principles such as *princeps legibus solutus* (“the ruler is not constrained by laws”) that favored an absolute ruler.⁴² In January 1567 the royal government required all vassal nobles to swear a new oath of allegiance that they would serve the king “towards and against all . . . without limitation or restriction.”⁴³ Van Nierop points out that “such unconditional loyalty was very different from anything the nobles had previously sworn.”⁴⁴ The threat that the Dutch nobles faced from above, in addition to the one from below, is epitomized by Alva’s

³⁹ See Williams, *Philip II*, 114; Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation*, 82 ff.

⁴⁰ Huijsen, *Geboortepapieren van Nederland*, 138.

⁴¹ Woodward, *Philip II*, 62.

⁴² Jean Bodin, too, ascribed to the sovereign “*summa in cives ac subditos legibusque soluta potestas*,” (“the highest power over citizens and subjects, free from the (constraints of) laws.”) See Jean Bodin, *Les six livres de la république* (Paris: Jacques du Puys, 1576) and Jean Bodin, *Six books of the commonwealth*, transl. M.J. Tooley (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967). Oestreich comments, “The formula *legibus solutus*, which occurs in Justinian’s *Corpus Juris*, belongs to Roman private law. The sense given to it by Bodin is taken to be that the prince was free of any legal constraints which were not supported or derived from the law of God and nature. The controversy over the meaning of the phrase *legibus solutus* and for or against the formula itself began long before Bodin’s *Les six livres de la république* appeared” *Neostocism and the Early Modern State*, 258. On the reception of Bodin in the Netherlands, see Jan Machielsen, “Bodin in the Netherlands,” in *The Reception of Bodin*, ed. Howell A. Lloyd (Leiden: Brill, 2013). A good discussion of Bodin’s view as it relates to those of Grotius and others is found in Thomas Erskine Holland, *The Elements of Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882), 39.

⁴³ Cited in Henk van Nierop, “The Nobles and the Revolt,” in *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt*, ed. Graham Darby (London: Routledge, 2001), 54.

⁴⁴ Van Nierop, “The Nobles and the Revolt,” 54.

ominous remark in 1571, “*non curamus privilegios vestros*’ (we are not concerned with your privileges).”⁴⁵

Caught between rising popular dissent and an absolutizing monarch, for the higher nobility the issue of legitimacy, whether divine or constitutional, was becoming contentious. By comparison, the King’s position seemed secure. To be sure, he had as much reason to fear a revolution as nervous high nobles like Egmont, Horne, and William of Orange.⁴⁶ It was no secret that Philip was the driving force behind the highly unpopular religious policy that was destroying commerce and tearing the country’s social fabric apart. But the King’s star was rising even as the fortunes of the nobles were waning. Theologically, his claim to divine legitimacy seemed secure: Philip II, more vigorously than other European monarchs, claimed to be God’s vicar, and in the minds of many Catholics he was substantiating this claim by his zealous enforcement of Catholicism.⁴⁷ By contrast, the nobles’ claim to divine legitimacy was less direct, and if they should openly attempt to protect heretics, their fitness to fulfil God’s mandate of political office would be widely questioned. Their dilemma was that openly resisting the King was unthinkable, yet pinning their future on the favor of the very King whom they wanted to restrain would be self-defeating. In the meantime, tremors of social revolution were growing in the political hierarchy, and time was running out.

Facing the unfolding of such a predicament, several concerned Dutch nobles were edging towards a confessional alliance, as chapter four explained. If a confessional

⁴⁵ Cited in Darby, “Narrative of Events,” 18.

⁴⁶ Williams, *Phillip II*, 114.

⁴⁷ See Martin van Gelderen, “From Domingo de Soto to Hugo Grotius. Theories of monarchy and civil power in Spanish and Dutch political thought, 1555–1609,” in *The Origins and Development of the Dutch Revolt*, ed. Graham Darby (London: Routledge, 2010), 153.

alliance would help them by improving social discipline and by shoring up their political legitimacy – that is, in critical ways help them to survive politically – the price of antagonizing the established royal Catholicism by protecting the Reformed might not be too high after all.⁴⁸

The Crisis of Anabaptism

At this seemingly auspicious time for a confessional alliance between Dutch nobles and Reformed churches, the prospects of an alliance were threatened by another development: the rise of Anabaptism. By the 1550's, Anabaptism was experiencing something of a renaissance in the Netherlands.⁴⁹ From the south to as far north as Friesland, the number of Anabaptists was growing.⁵⁰ Antwerp, perhaps the major center of Reformed church organization, also became the bridgehead and the center of gravity for Anabaptism in the southern Netherlands.⁵¹ For De Bres, Anabaptism was the most significant hindrance to the Reformation.⁵² The sharp growth of Anabaptism was creating

⁴⁸ See Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 131–2.

⁴⁹ Decavele, *Dageraad van de Reformatie, Vol.1*, 435–516. See also Balz, *Theologische Realenzyklopädie, Vol.24*, 479.

⁵⁰ For example, H. Ten Boom calculates that twelve to fifteen percent of the population in Rotterdam were Anabaptists in 1585, compared with twelve percent Calvinists, at most twelve percent Catholics, and possibly three to six percent Lutherans. H. Ten Boom, *De reformatie in Rotterdam, 1530–1585* (Amsterdam: Bataafsche leeuw, 1987), 180–1. Sigrun Huade opines that the Reformed in the Netherlands overtook Anabaptism in terms of numbers and influence only towards 1560. See Sigrun Huade, “Anabaptism,” in *The Reformation World*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (London: Routledge, 2004), 253.

⁵¹ Johan Decavele, *De dageraad van de Reformatie in Vlaanderen (1520–1565), Vol.2: Indices en Bijlagen* (Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1975), 436.

⁵² See Gottlieb Blokland, *Geloof alleen!: protestanten in België: Een verhaal van 500 jaar* (Antwerpen and Apeldoorn: Garant, 2016), 72; Willem Van't Spijker, “De Bres en Andere Contra het Anabaptisme,” in *Guido de Bres: zijn leven, zijn belijden*, ed. Emile Braekman and Erik de Boer (Utrecht: Kok, 2011), 230.

“an extreme and urgent necessity,” De Bres warned.⁵³ His anti-Anabaptist treatise, *Racine*, published in 1565, was written to assist the Dutch Reformed believers against this threat, he wrote, “because the sect of the Anabaptists is greatly multiplying and producing new errors every hour.”⁵⁴ To his dismay the Netherlands were “infected with this pestilence of the Anabaptists,” and they were “gaining ground daily” in Germany and England and, unless God mercifully intervened, would begin to do so in France.⁵⁵

The “extreme and urgent necessity” created by the growth of Anabaptism that so distressed De Bres, this section will contend, was more than a threat of doctrine and church leadership, although it was primarily that. It was also a threat to the realization of the church-political partnership which De Bres was working toward.⁵⁶ This second threat, it will be seen, was in some ways related to the first.

That the growth of Anabaptism would imperil the confessional alliance might seem surprising. On a surface level, one might have expected that the growth of Anabaptism in the 1550’s and 1560’s would have furnished further incentive for the nobility to ally themselves with the Reformed. After all, the goals of social discipline and political legitimacy (the prime attractions of a confessional alliance for political rulers, as Reinard pointed out) became even more critical in times of political unrest – and many Dutch rulers would have regarded the growth of Anabaptism a reason to fear greater political unrest, as will appear below.⁵⁷ As Gregory contends, the sixteenth century specter of

⁵³ *Racine*, a ii r – v.

⁵⁴ *Racine*, a ii r – v.

⁵⁵ *Racine*, a ii v, a iii v.

⁵⁶ See chapter seven.

⁵⁷ See Spaans, “Reform in the Low Countries,” 121.

revolution added pungency to the need for confessional alliances because political rulers “had to control religion lest the revolutionary potential of *sola scriptura*, so disturbingly manifest already in the German Peasants’ War of 1524 - 1526, threaten political hierarchy and social order.”⁵⁸

Anabaptist Stigma of Rebellion

However, the growth of Anabaptism had the opposite effect, and in fact had the potential to derail a confessional alliance. One reason was that the seditious stigma of Anabaptism tended to contaminate the Reformed, too. The Peasants’ War and the revolutionary Anabaptist kingdom at Münster in 1534–5 had “tainted the Anabaptist movement with the odium of violence and rebellion,” as Samme Zijlstra puts it.⁵⁹

Unfortunately for the Reformed, some political rulers connected them with Anabaptism and civil unrest. A significant example, because of his high rank, is William of Orange, who warned his brother, Louis of Nassau, against the Calvinists because they were troublemakers.⁶⁰ (Much later, the Prince of Orange himself became Reformed.)

⁵⁸ Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 131–2, 149.

⁵⁹ Samme Zijlstra, “Anabaptism and tolerance: possibilities and limitations,” in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. R. Po-chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 112; Tom Scott, *The Early Reformation in Germany: Between Secular Impact and Radical Vision* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 194.

⁶⁰ Guillaume Groen van Prinsterer, *Archives ou correspondance inédite de la maison d'Orange-Nassau. Première série. Vol.2* (Leide: S. et J. Luchtmans, 1835), 158. Orange’s distrust of Anabaptism was not soon set aside. When Orange negotiated on 2 September 1566 with the Governess to permit Calvinist and Lutheran worship in Antwerp, he refused to extend this privilege to the Anabaptists. Guido Marnef, “Multiconfessionalism in a Commercial Metropolis: The Case of 16th Century Antwerp,” in *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, ed. Thomas Max Safley (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 77–8. However, once the Dutch Revolt was underway, Orange, in contrast with Marnix of St. Aldegonde, was prepared to extend full toleration to the Anabaptists. See Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer, Vol.3b*, 625.

To some extent it was plausible to suspect a connection between the Reformed and the Anabaptists. Until the 1550's, there was much fluidity between Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anabaptist branches of Protestantism in the Netherlands, not only among laity but also among the leadership.⁶¹ Additionally, the growth of Anabaptism coincided with a growth in Calvinism, at least in important centers like Antwerp.⁶² More ominously, by the late 1550's and the 1560's the growth of both Anabaptism and Calvinism coincided with growing political unrest. Likewise, both Anabaptists and Calvinists were by the 1560's secretly organizing underground "churches under the cross," a shadowy existence which made it easy to suspect mutual influences.⁶³ Perhaps most importantly, suspicion was fueled by Catholic critics who kept the fearful memory of the Münster revolution alive and played upon the rulers' fears by arguing that the Reformed, Lutherans, and Anabaptists were all birds of a similar feather. Thus one Catholic theologian, Pierre Frarin, reminded the rulers in 1565 of how "by the wicked occasion and fault of these Reformers," 130,000 men were slain within three months in Germany.⁶⁴ Therefore, rulers should "learn by other men's dangers, loss and harm, what hangs over your own heads" – namely, the "terrible flame of discord and rebellion."⁶⁵ Indeed, the Protestants will

⁶¹ See Samme Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden: geschiedenis van de dopersen in de Nederlanden 1531–1675* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2000), 72–3.

⁶² Johan Decavele, "Historiografie van het zestiende-eeuws Protestantisme in België," *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 62 (1982): 18.

⁶³ Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of the Reformation*, 61–87. This is why the reformer Philip of Marnix campaigned to legalize public assemblies for the Reformed because, he said, being forced underground, their secret meeting conveyed "an affinity with conspiracies or secret machinations against the King or the commonwealth." See Van Toorenenbergen, J. J., ed., *Philips van Marnix van St. Aldegonde Godsdiensige en kerkelijke geschriften, Vol.1* (s Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1871), 85.

⁶⁴ Peter Frarin, *An Oration Against the Unlawfull Insurrections of the Protestantes of our time, under pretence to refourme religion. Made and pronounced in Latin, in the schole of Artes at Lovainne, the xiii of December. Anno 1565* (Antwerp: Ioannis Fouleri, 1566), j viii r.

⁶⁵ Frarin, *An Oration Against the Unlawfull Insurrections of the Protestantes*, k ii r.

“break . . . all God and man’s laws, and most desperately cut the throat of every Christian man they meet, when they perceive that they have the stronger side.”⁶⁶ Frarin warned the rulers, “You have heard what they have done elsewhere, you understand thereby what you yourselves also ought to fear.” He advised them to “tread out therefore and quench the sparks of this fire now while you may.”⁶⁷

To charge Protestants with seditiousness was by the 1560’s a familiar Catholic accusation. As Brad Pardue points out, when Thomas More in his 1529 *Dialogue Concerning Heresies* blamed the Peasants’ War of 1524–5 and even the 1527 Sack of Rome on the Protestants, “he was repeating in the English language arguments that were already well-worn on the Continent.”⁶⁸ Luther and Tyndale were repeatedly pressed to deny that they encouraged such revolution.⁶⁹ In the first edition of his *Institutes*, Calvin already protested against the slander that the Reformed “looked to no other end than to subvert all orders and civil governments, to disrupt the peace, to abolish all laws, to scatter all lordships and possessions – in short, to turn everything upside down!”⁷⁰ Calvin’s short answer was, “Elijah taught us what we ought to reply to such charges: it is not we who either spread errors abroad or incite tumults; but it is they who contend

⁶⁶ Frarin, *An Oration Against the Unlawfull Insurrections of the Protestantes*, k ii r.

⁶⁷ Frarin, *An Oration Against the Unlawfull Insurrections of the Protestantes*, k ii v.

⁶⁸ Brad C. Pardue, *Printing, Power, and Piety: Appeals to the Public During the Early Years of the English Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 156.

⁶⁹ Pardue, *Printing, Power, and Piety*, 157.

⁷⁰ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion* [1536], ed. Ford Lewis Battles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 2.

against God's power."⁷¹ De Bres, as will be more fully discussed below, also vigorously denied such a charge.⁷²

Likewise, portraying the Reformed Protestants as Anabaptists in the late 1550's and 1560's was inaccurate, because it obscured the distinction between Anabaptists and other Protestants (Lutherans and Calvinists) who had become quite distinct by the late 1550's. Similarly, it blurred the boundary between the revolutionary Anabaptists of the 1530's and the Anabaptists of the 1540's and 1550's. Such an obfuscation of distinctions for political purposes had been a tried-and-tested church political strategy in the Middle Ages, as Ford Lewis Battles points out.⁷³

To deliberately confuse all these groups was effective propaganda, but it was unfair on both accounts. The Reformed were not Anabaptists, as reformers continually stressed, and as Calvin already underlined already in his *Institutes* of 1536.⁷⁴ Even if the Anabaptists shared a common origin with the Reformed Protestants, De Bres wrote, they were quite distinct; though they "went out from us," they were not "of us," he insisted, alluding to 1 John 2:19's description of the antichrists.⁷⁵ Also, it was not true that the Anabaptists of the 1550's and 1560's harbored Münsterite tendencies, except for small

⁷¹ Calvin, *Institutes* [1536], 12.

⁷² See e.g. his *Letter to the King in Confession* (1561)^c, a.iii r.

⁷³ "In church history it had long been characteristic of the supporters of the establishment not to differentiate too precisely between moderate and radical critics." Calvin, *Institutes* [1536], xxxix.

⁷⁴ See e.g. the dedicatory letter to King Francis I in Calvin, *Institutes* [1536], 2, 12–13; and Battles's remarks on xlvi. On Calvin's exasperated battle against these charges, see e.g. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 47; Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 25–6; Bruce Gordon, *Calvin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 57, 59. Gordon writes that Calvin was "outraged by the suggestion that the evangelicals were either Anabaptists or seditious." Gordon, *Calvin*, 57.

⁷⁵ *Racine* a vii v.

splinter groups.⁷⁶ The leading mainstream Anabaptist in the Netherlands from the 1540's was Menno Simons who, according to Decavele, likely played a major role in the Dutch Anabaptist revival of the period.⁷⁷ Menno's immense influence is important, because his mainstream branch of Anabaptism was a peaceful and submissive one.⁷⁸ The early Mennonites of northern Europe were "ethically strict, peaceful, politically obedient believers who repudiated the legacy of Münster," as one modern scholar describes them.⁷⁹ That is to say, mainstream Anabaptists in the Netherlands had by the mid 1540's been transformed into a docile, pietistic community.⁸⁰ No less a historian than Johan Huizinga has marveled that "a religion whose zealots were responsible for fanatical excesses in Amsterdam and Münster should have subsided so gently into decorous piety and that many disciples of Menno in the Northern provinces, in Haarlem and in Amsterdam, became the most peaceful citizens of all."⁸¹

⁷⁶ On anti-Anabaptist rhetoric, see Dale Jonathan Grieser, "Seducers of the Simple Folk: The Polemical War against Anabaptism (1525–1540)" (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1993).

⁷⁷ Decavele, *Dageraad*, Vol.2, 436.

⁷⁸ See e.g. Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente*, 478–8. See also Friesen, *Menno Simons* and Cornelius Krahn, *Dutch Anabaptism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968).

⁷⁹ Michael Driedger, "Anabaptists and the Early Modern State: A Long-Term View," in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700*, ed. John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 526.

⁸⁰ Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente*, 245. Decavele writes of the followers of Menno, "The persecuting authorities still saw the Mennonites as the heirs of the revolutionary Anabaptists of the 1530's, and kept attaching to Anabaptism the odium of an anarchistic sect endangering the established order, but after 1550 not a shred of any seditious inclination can be found amongst them. Anabaptism had developed into a purely pacifist movement, by absolutely accepting that the government – however godless – were instituted by God, and by submitting with extreme patience in times of bitter persecution. The Anabaptists were entirely uninvolved in the social upheaval in the Western quarter since the beginning of the 1560's, and also during the Iconoclasm did not become involve in any form of violence." Decavele, *Dageraad van de Reformatie*, Vol.1, 515.

⁸¹ Johan Huizinga, Pieter Geyl, and F. W. N. Hugenholtz, *Dutch Civilization in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Collins, 1968), 51.

Yet despite their overt pacifism, Anabaptist theology and practices unsettled the political establishment. The Anabaptists were politically suspect because of what has been called their “rejection of the sinful world and its unchristian authorities,” as well as practices like their refusal to bear arms or to take solemn oaths even in judicial proceedings.⁸² Similarly, their “disavowal of secular authority” and refusal to hold public office apparently undermined the political body.⁸³ Their critique of the magisterial church and their dismissal of infant baptism also profoundly challenged the social order.⁸⁴ These Anabaptist critiques, Gary Waite points out, amounted to an attack on the “whole *corpus christianum*” and on the “medieval concept of a united Christian commonwealth.”⁸⁵ Scholars have identified an implicit attack on the post-Constantinian *corpus christianum* in Menno Simon’s theology. According to Abraham Friesen, for example, to achieve Menno’s goal of not merely reforming the existing church but restoring the original New Testament church, he needed “to undo the Constantinian revolution; he would have to reverse the continental shift that had taken place in the fourth century between church and state.”⁸⁶

The implications of this attack on the theological foundations of the medieval *corpus christianum* was, in a profound sense of the word, revolutionary. It represented what Dixon calls a threat to the magisterial order.⁸⁷ This perceived Anabaptist threat to the

⁸² Marnef, *Antwerp in the Reformation*, 86.

⁸³ Scott, *Early Reformation in Germany*, 194.

⁸⁴ Scott, *Early Reformation in Germany*, 194.

⁸⁵ Gary K. Waite, *David Joris and Dutch Anabaptism, 1524–1543* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990), 10.

⁸⁶ Friesen, *Menno Simons*, 321.

⁸⁷ Dixon, *The Church in the Early Modern Age*, 145.

magisterial order had the potential to discredit also the Reformed because of how they were being associated with the Anabaptists – which would mean that the Reformed were unsuitable for an alliance intended to promote social order and political legitimacy.

Credibility of the Reformed Churches

There was another reason why the rise of Anabaptism posed a threat to the slowly materializing confessional alliance between Dutch Reformed churches and the nobles: the growth of Anabaptism undermined Reformed attempts to position themselves as the leaders of the Reformation movement in the Netherlands.⁸⁸ Anabaptism challenged the Reformed churches' leadership in several ways. Numerically, Anabaptist groups like the Mennonites possibly outnumbered the Reformed, especially in Holland and the north, from the 1550's until 1566.⁸⁹ More subtle than the issue of numbers was that of spiritual authority. Anabaptists derogated the spirituality of the Reformed churches. According to Anabaptists like Menno Simons, the Reformed ministry was compromised to the point of illegitimacy. Menno Simons wrote to one of De Bres's mentors, Maarten Micron, in 1556 accusing the French speaking churches of the Netherlands of deceit and faithlessness.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ For how the Reformed churches often sought to establish their leadership in the Netherlands during this period, see e.g. Crew, *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm*, 3, 7.

⁸⁹ See Pettegree, *Europe in the Sixteenth Century*, 183; Decavele, *Dageraad van de Reformatie, Vol.1*, 435–515.

⁹⁰ Menno writes in his letter to Martin Micron of 1556, “Thirdly, because your brethren, the Walloon church, as they are called, have at Frankfort in their publications vowed against us, which two things we did not know so clearly heretofore as we do now. Since I plainly see that there is nothing but deceit, faithlessness, bloodthirstiness, and perverseness found among the children of men wherever one may turn himself, and since nothing counts or can count for so little on earth as the praise of Christ and the salvation of souls, therefore I will let Babylon, with its false preachers, impure doctrine, idolatrous baptism and Supper, together with its false religion, and impenitent, vain, easy life, be Babylon. . . Once more, I will let Babylon be Babylon.” Leonard Verduin, ed., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, 1496–1561* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1956), 939.

Elsewhere, he charged Reformed ministers with being hirelings who were ministering for money, “unfaithful servants,” “Balaamites, who love the reward of unrighteousness,” “prophets which eat at Jezebel’s table,” and “priests of Jeroboam, who, contrary to the example of Christ Jesus and his holy apostles, hire themselves, for an annual stipend, to an unevangelical service of impenitence.” Their ministry, he claimed, was “in all respects, without power, spirit, repentance and regeneration,” and their service was “vain labor and mockery.”⁹¹ For Menno Simons, church-political partnerships – exactly what Dutch reformers like De Bres were promoting – were harmful to the church, blinded the supposed watchmen, and turned the purported spiritual leaders into instigators of persecution.⁹² Indeed many Anabaptist leaders criticized other Protestant ministers for accepting salaries from the civil authorities and appealing for government protection.⁹³ According to Menno Simons, magisterial church leaders, even some Dutch Calvinists, were becoming partners in unbiblical and oppressive magisterial systems, and he thundered against the “bloodthirstiness” of the magisterially empowered churches, a

⁹¹ Menno Simons, *A Reply to a Publication by Gellius Faber, Second Part*, trans. John Funk (Elkhart, IN: John F. Funk and Brother, 1871), 31.

⁹² Simons writes, “O that God would grant that the blind watchmen of this world, I mean the preachers and theologians, may sound their horns to a right tone and at a proper time, or that they would let them hang on the walls, in order that they may not therewith, tyrannically call out the deadly, murder cry, nor longer deceive the carnal, blind world, nor instigate the rulers and magistracy to the destruction and murdering of the saints, like hounds pursuing the roe.” Menno Simons, “The Cross of Christ.” In Menno Simon, *The Complete Works of Menno Simon, Part 1* (Elkhart, IN: John F. Funk and Brother, 1871), 186.

⁹³ See Velanaus, “Der Leke Wechwyser (1554),” in Cramer, S., and F. Pijper, eds., *Bibliotheca reformatoria neerlandica. Geschriften uit den tijd der hervorming in de Nederlanden. Vol.4. Leerstellige en stichtelijke geschriften van Ioann. Anastasias Veluanus e.a.* (’s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1906), 335. Even Reformed ministers influential in the Netherlands were involved in this practice, and Micron and À Lasco, who both sharply debated Menno Simons, had received government salaries while ministering in the Stranger Churches in London. See Pettegree, *Foreign protestant communities in sixteenth century*, 35.

veritable “Babylon” with its “false preachers, impure doctrine, idolatrous baptism.”⁹⁴ Even the “Calvinistic” churches persecute the truth and the true Church of Christ.⁹⁵

It must have been clear to De Bres that if this cynical view of the ministry of the Reformed churches was to become widespread among Dutch Protestants, the Reformed churches’ credibility as leaders of the Dutch Reformation movement and thus their future role in a church-political alliance would be doomed. Additionally, the denunciation of the Reformed ministry by the growing Anabaptist movement suggested that if increasing numbers of Protestants moved into the orbit of Anabaptism, they would choose to move beyond the disciplining influence of the preaching or oversight of the Reformed church. This, too, suggested that the credibility of the Reformed churches as the leading group among the Protestant movement in the Netherlands, and consequently their desirability as a partner in a confessional alliance, was at stake.

Earlier, in the 1540’s, Dutch Protestants did not easily warm to Calvin’s message, and his political solution of “exile or martyrdom” was unpopular in places like Tournai and Valenciennes.⁹⁶ Now, by the late 1550’s and during the 1560’s, when prospects for Calvinism had much improved, Anabaptism risked jeopardizing things: At the very time when the Dutch nobility needed to be reassured that they could bank on a confessional alliance that would improve social discipline and enhance their political legitimacy, the rise of Anabaptism would have threatened the Reformed churches’ perceived ability to deliver.

⁹⁴ Menno Simons. “Epistle to Martin Micron, 1556” In Verduin, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 939.

⁹⁵ Simons, “Reply to Gelsius Faber,” 96.

⁹⁶ Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*, 19.

Responding to Anabaptism

How did De Bres respond to the various threats which Anabaptism's reputation for social unrest posed to a confessional alliance? Three responses will be discussed in this chapter, all of which facilitated an acceptance of the political compulsion of religion. First, De Bres launched a broadside attack against Anabaptism, dedicating his longest treatise, *Racine*, to exposing its false teaching as heretical.⁹⁷ Second, De Bres positioned the Dutch Reformation as a profoundly conservative and politically compliant movement distinct from and opposed to the Anabaptists whom he rejected as radicals and revolutionaries. Third, De Bres ascribed the growth of Anabaptism to the political rulers' failure to protect the Reformed religion and to expel Catholicism.

Exposing the Anabaptist Heresy

De Bres attempted to stem the growth of Anabaptism and to establish the position of the Reformed churches as the leaders of the Protestant movement in the Netherlands by vigorously attacking the theological errors of Anabaptism. Although pointedly denouncing Anabaptism as a "heresy" did not directly encourage the political compulsion of religion, it did emphasize theological boundaries in traditional ways, indirectly encouraging political compulsion of religion. Worried by the success of Anabaptism, De Bres's prime concern became, as Vonk so vividly describes it, keeping the Reformed

⁹⁷ *Racine* contains more than 450 folio pages, which is far longer than *Baston*, which contains just over 200. The most important study of De Bres's attitude toward the Anabaptists is the essay already mentioned, Braekman, "Guy de Brès et la Propagande anabaptiste."

churches out of the powerful “maelstrom of Anabaptism.”⁹⁸ The success of Anabaptism had the potential to shipwreck the kind of Reformation in the Netherlands that De Bres was longing to see.⁹⁹ De Bres’s alarm is evident in his 1565 letter to the consistory of Antwerp: “I am very grieved by how, as I’m told, the Anabaptists are greatly seducing our people. I pray you, most beloved brothers, to diligently guard against this evil, so that you may give an account that your hands are clean from the blood of those who have been committed to your charge.”¹⁰⁰

As this violent language indicates, De Bres sensed that the struggle against Anabaptism amounted to a battle for the soul of the Protestant Netherlands. The theology and even the legitimacy of the Reformed churches was at stake, as is evident from how De Bres was galvanized by the Anabaptists’ practice of impugning Reformed church leadership. As Crespin described it, the Dutch Anabaptists “decried the [Reformed] ministers of the gospel” and wanted to “abrogate” their order in the church.¹⁰¹ This incensed De Bres. He described Menno Simon’s vehemence and those of earlier Anabaptists as “smoldering with their fondness for maligning and disparaging the ministers of the gospel.”¹⁰² Like wolves, he said, such false Anabaptist teachers are

⁹⁸ Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer*, Vol.3b, 585.

⁹⁹ Van’t Spijker, “De Bres en Andere Contra het Anabaptisme,” 230.

¹⁰⁰ De Bres’s letter to the consistory in Antwerp, 10 July 1565, reproduced in Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, vi.

¹⁰¹ Jean Crespin, *Histoire de vrays Tesmoins de la vérité De L’Evangile, Qui de leur sang l’ont signee, depuis Jean Hus iusques autemps present* (Geneva: Jean Crespin, 1570), 83 r – 83 v. Elsewhere, Bullinger fumed that the Anabaptists reject “our church” as a “false church, offensive to God” while, in fact, it was “the only church truly pleasing to God, and the congregation of Christ.” Heinrich Bullinger, *Der Widertöufferen Ursprung, Fürgang, Secten, Wäsen, fürnemme und gemeine jrer Leer Artickel, ouch jre Gründ und warumm sy sich absünderind unnd ein eigne Kirchen anrichtind* (Zurich: Mertzen, 1560), 78 v.

¹⁰² *Racine*, 3–4.

always targeting the ministers of the true church.¹⁰³ Similarly, the Anabaptists “do not recognize the true church,” but rather “condemn all others and view only themselves as pure and holy.”¹⁰⁴ In fact, they “falsely and unjustly slander the Christian church by their untruths.”¹⁰⁵ Elsewhere he complains that they have attempted to put forth every possible argument “to denigrate us and to show that we are not the church of Christ.” But the only thing they have accomplished by this behavior was “to dismember and divide the church of God, and the holy assembly.”¹⁰⁶ As a result, De Bres soon became an avowed enemy of Anabaptism, as scholars have long recognized.¹⁰⁷ Jean Crespin wrote in 1568 that De Bres “always vigorously opposed” the Anabaptists.¹⁰⁸ De Bres himself boasted that the Anabaptists could testify that “they have no greater enemy in the world than we [the Reformed].”¹⁰⁹

In De Bres’s mind, Anabaptist theology was worse than destructive and seductive – it was a heresy. His 1561 *Confession* explicitly rejected the “heresy of the Anabaptists who deny that Christ assumed human flesh” in Art.18, and Art.34 repudiated the “error of the Anabaptists who . . . condemn the baptism of the little children of the believers.”¹¹⁰ His

¹⁰³ *Racine*, 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Racine*, a vii r.

¹⁰⁵ *Racine*, a vii r.

¹⁰⁶ *Racine*, 65.

¹⁰⁷ Pijper describes it as De Bres’s “holy war against Anabaptism.” S. Cramer and F. Pijper, eds. *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica: Geschriften uit den tijd der hervorming in de Nederlanden, Vol.8* (’s-Gravenhage: Nijhoff, 1911), 467; S. Blaupot ten Cate, *Geschiedenis Der Doopsgezinden in Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht En Gelderland* (Amsterdam: P.N. van Kampen, 1847), 45; P.N. Kruyswijk, *Guido de Brès, een blik in de geschiedenis der reformatie in de zuidelijke Nederlanden* (N.p., 1897), 18.

¹⁰⁸ Jean Crespin, *Procedures tenues*, in Cramer and Pijper, *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica, Vol.8*, 497.

¹⁰⁹ *Racine*, a ii v.

¹¹⁰ Art.18 and 34 of the *Confession*. See *Confession* (1561)^C, 13, 29. Significantly, the first edition of the *Confession* did not mention the Anabaptists in Art.36.

anti-Anabaptist treatise, *Racine*, stated in its subtitle that it aimed to refute the arguments by which the Anabaptists “are accustomed to trouble the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to seduce the naïve.”¹¹¹ The Anabaptists were inflicting “great damage to the church of Christ.”¹¹² If Anabaptist ideas prevailed in the Netherlands, “the commonwealth and the religion would be in a wretched and miserable condition.”¹¹³

Racine focused on two major doctrinal errors of Anabaptism, at least in its Mennonite variety, which De Bres had previously identified in the *Confession*: their doctrine of the incarnation of Christ and of baptism.¹¹⁴ The charge of “heresy” soon becomes a refrain in *Racine*. De Bres starts the first chapter by comparing the Anabaptists with “other heretics.”¹¹⁵ Like Satan himself, the Anabaptists twist the holy Scriptures.¹¹⁶ They hypocritically flaunt their holiness, like the Cathars, those “old heretics,” who also “thought themselves pure and holy.”¹¹⁷ They are, like all false prophets, wolves in sheepskins.¹¹⁸ Like the Pharisees, they are filled with affected holiness and spiritual pride, and do not have the true Christ as their head – the true Christ who was, after all, incarnated and became a true man, who was a true “seed of David,” despite the Anabaptist denials of his incarnation.¹¹⁹ Worse than this, the Anabaptists are antichrists

¹¹¹ *Racine*, i r.

¹¹² *Racine*, a iii v.

¹¹³ *Racine*, 19.

¹¹⁴ *Racine* is divided into three books. The first book deals with the origins of Anabaptism (p.1–125). The second deals with the incarnation and nature of Christ (p.127–498). The third treats baptism, civil government, vows or oaths, and the incorruptibility of the soul (p. 499–903).

¹¹⁵ *Racine*, 1.

¹¹⁶ *Racine*, a iv r.

¹¹⁷ *Racine*, a v r.

¹¹⁸ *Racine*, a v r.

¹¹⁹ *Racine*, a v v.

according to the definition of the apostle John (1 John 4:3), because “they deny that Christ has come in the flesh.”¹²⁰ They are “the church of Satan.”¹²¹ They are accursed by God, “even if they were as holy as the angels,” because they deny Paul’s teaching that Jesus was Christ from the seed of David according the flesh, and is the Son of God according the Spirit.¹²² From the first pages of *Racine* until its very last page, De Bres maintained that the Anabaptist doctrines were “pernicious heresies.”¹²³

Thus, depicting the Anabaptists as “heretics,” “false prophets,” “wolves in sheepskins,” “antichrists,” “accursed by God,” and “the church of Satan” at a time when Anabaptists were bearing the brunt of the severest punishments for heresy in the southern Netherlands,¹²⁴ and while some theologians were questioning the use of political force against heretics,¹²⁵ was a politically conservative strategy in favor of the *status quo*. It redrew the theological boundaries in a way that many political magistrates would have found reassuring: although the label “heretic” did not properly apply to Calvinists and Lutherans, despite what the Catholic royalists had always maliciously claimed, heresy

¹²⁰ *Racine*, a v v.

¹²¹ *Racine* 64.

¹²² *Racine*, a v v.

¹²³ *Racine*, 903.

¹²⁴ Aline Goosens calculates that although Anabaptists formed the minority of those formally prosecuted, they were more severely treated. In Antwerp between 1530 and 1577, only 26.8% of those criminally prosecuted for heresy were Anabaptists, but of the 275 death sentences handed down, 87% of those executed were Anabaptists. Aline Goosens, “Karel V en de Onderdrukking van de Wederdopers,” *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*, 27 (2001): 26. See also Piet Visser, “Mennonites and Doopgezinden,” in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521–1700*, ed. John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 316; George Huntston Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Kirksville, Mo: Truman State University Press, 2000), 1178–9. One reason for this imbalance might be that Anabaptism’s main support came from the lower social strata, the *kleyne luyden*, which made them especially vulnerable, Marnef argues, with the result that the political authorities could persecute them without “tearing the fabric of urban society.” Marnef, *Antwerp in the Reformation*, 86.

¹²⁵ See esp. Sébastien Castellio, *De Haereticis, an sint persequendi, et omnino quomodo sit cum eis agendum* (Magdeburg [Basel?]: George Rausch, 1554).

was still as objectionable as always, and the unpopular Anabaptists belonged to that class. As Crew explains, Reformed ministers wanted to show “that if a circle could be drawn around the members of the social order which would exclude those who were criminals, enemies of that order and that system of values, the circle should be drawn around themselves and the established authorities and it should exclude the Anabaptists.”¹²⁶ Crew’s observation is insightful and helps to explain the lengths to which De Bres went in order to classify the Anabaptists as “heretics.” Perhaps for the same reason, De Bres emphatically denied that the Anabaptists are true martyrs, because true martyrs suffer “for righteousness, for the truth, and for the Name of Christ.” The Anabaptists, however, are not suffering for the teachings of Christ, “but for a teaching of the antichrist.”¹²⁷ De Bres was stressing solidarity and the limits of the departure from the *status quo* that would be tolerated – and the Anabaptists were to be excluded, being beyond the perimeter of this social solidarity.

Notwithstanding their heretical traits, De Bres did not approve of the present government policy of executing the Anabaptists:

Certainly, the princes and kings are not adhering to a good course by extirpating this sect. They put these poor simple people to death, of whom the greater part is deceived. They should rather follow the good kings, like Hezekiah and Josiah, who first cast all idolatries from their territory, and at the same time reformed the true religion. Therefore, they should have the true Apostolic doctrine preached publicly, and when this is done, I believe that there would no longer be need for so much fire to put to death these poor, simple, seduced people. One would have to assemble the Anabaptists to a public dispute to gain them for Christ. In this way, we shall quickly see that this sect and many others will disappear in the distance, like mist before a fine and bright sun. Because these good folk do not willingly come into the

¹²⁶ Crew, *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm*, 179.

¹²⁷ *Racine*, a vi r.

light, for fear that they may be revealed. May God give by his grace that this may happen very soon, so that we may all worship God in the Spirit and in truth, united in heart.¹²⁸

This passage forms the main piece of evidence for Braekman's sanguine assessment of De Bres's views of Anabaptism. It is, Braekman writes, "a beautiful page of toleration, which shows that in this century filled with violent passions, there was nevertheless an oasis of good sense and balance."¹²⁹ This poses the question: was De Bres advocating an approach to Anabaptism that amounted to what Braekman calls "toleration"?¹³⁰ If he was, that would contradict the present argument that De Bres's depiction of Anabaptism as a heresy indirectly encouraged the political compulsion of religion.

A careful reading of this passage from *Racine* suggests insufficient grounds for Braekman's conclusion. While De Bres is clearly rejecting the vehemence of the sixteenth century persecution of Anabaptists, he is not raising any principled objection to the punishment of heretics, Anabaptists or otherwise. In addition to the cruelty and scale of the Catholic persecutions, which De Bres consistently opposed, his disagreement stated here with the harsh policies of "kings and princes" was more pragmatic or utilitarian than essentially tolerant.¹³¹ In the preceding paragraph in *Racine*, in the sentence right before the above citation, De Bres described Anabaptism as "a doctrine of the Antichrist," and denied that the Anabaptists who were executed for their faith were

¹²⁸ *Racine*, a vi r. The word De Bres uses here translated "extirpate" is *extirper*, the same word that appears in Art.36 of the Belgic Confession to describe the task of the civil government against idolatry and false religious service.

¹²⁹ Braekman, "Guy de Bres et la Propagande Anabaptiste," 27.

¹³⁰ The anachronism of evaluating sixteenth century views in terms of "tolerance" and "intolerance" has been pointed out by scholars like Van der Zwaag, as mentioned in chapter one.

¹³¹ As discussed in chapter two, De Bres already in *Baston* (1555) objected to the cruelty of the Catholic persecutions. See e.g. *Baston* (1555) viii r. - v., ix r. - x v., 185 r. - v., 188 v. - r., 189 r., 190 r.

true martyrs.¹³² Elsewhere in *Racine*, De Bres repeatedly stated that Anabaptism was a heresy, theirs was not the true gospel, and they were not true “evangelicals.”¹³³ Rather, Anabaptists, like other heretics, were perverters of Scripture,¹³⁴ they were the “church of Satan” and followers of Satan,¹³⁵ and “strange spirits” inflicting “great damage to the church of Christ.”¹³⁶ Hence, De Bres’s prayer that God would grant that everyone might “worship God in the Spirit and in truth, united in heart,” cannot be interpreted as a nostalgic wish for toleration of Anabaptists. It is simply expressing the wish and confidence that large numbers of Anabaptists would one day, through non-violent means such as public disputes, be fully converted to the Reformed view.

To be sure, De Bres wanted the majority (“the greater part”) of Anabaptists, the naïve (“deceived”) followers of Anabaptism, to be spared violent punishment. But leniency for the deceived followers of false religion (as distinct from the deceptive leaders) was by no means a rare oasis in sixteenth century thought – although it certainly contrasts with the inflexible cruelty of the policies of Charles V and Philip II. Even in the twelfth century codification of heresy by Gratian, those regarded as deceived by heresy were treated more gently than those who were, according to Augustine’s definition, deliberately persisting in false teaching. As a result, Gregory points out that “inquisitorial proceedings were designed to sift defiant heterodoxy, which was heresy, from mere ignorance or confusion, which was not.”¹³⁷ Internationally, the reformers also distinguished between

¹³² *Racine*, a vi r.

¹³³ *Racine* a vii v.

¹³⁴ *Racine* a iv r.

¹³⁵ *Racine* 64, a iii v.

¹³⁶ *Racine* a iii v.

¹³⁷ Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 76.

the excusable ignorance of the common folk and the more blameworthy seduction of souls by the heretical leaders and “false prophets.” Calvin, for example, enumerated three levels of error and taught that the magistrates, whom he regarded as the “guardians and protectors of religion,” were not to “promiscuously execute all those who have offended.” Rigorous punishment was reserved only for “patent impiety.”¹³⁸

As for how the patently impious should be treated, De Bres’s quoted passage in *Racine* offers no guidance. That is to say, he does not spell out how rulers should eventually deal with recalcitrant Anabaptists who still refuse to forsake their deceptive teachings notwithstanding the Reformed preaching of the “true Apostolic doctrine” and notwithstanding other remedies like public disputes. It does not follow from De Bres’s plea for leniency for the “poor, simple, seduced” Anabaptists, therefore, that their unrepentant leaders and teachers should also escape legal punishment. Even if “so much fire” was unnecessary in dealing with Anabaptism, perhaps a little was still necessary in order to deal with recalcitrants, like Menno Simons.

No more can be deduced from the text of this passage than that De Bres was rejecting the sixteenth century’s wholesale punishment and cruel treatment of Anabaptists. The passage does not warrant the inference that De Bres advocated the “toleration” of Anabaptism, to use Braekman’s term. In fact, other passages in *Racine* suggest that De Bres might well have had the punishment of unyielding Anabaptists in mind. In the chapter on the authority of the civil government, De Bres defends as biblically legitimate

¹³⁸ John Calvin, *Declaration pour maintenir la vraye foy que tiennent tous Chrestiens de la Trinité des personnes en un Dieu. Contre les erreurs detestables de Michel Servet Espagnol. Ou il est aussi monstré, qu’il est licite de punir les heretiques: & qu’ à bon droict ce meschant a esté excuté par iustice en la ville de Geneve* (Geneva: Jean Crespin, 1554), 48.

the execution of not only murderers and those who assault their parents, but also of idolaters, since they are put to death by government “according to God’s commandment, written in his Word.”¹³⁹ The “idolaters that prayed to the golden calf and were executed by Moses and his group” is given by De Bres as example of such legitimate exercise of the death penalty.¹⁴⁰ Remarkably, the twin sins of idolatry and making golden calves are attributed to the Anabaptists in two earlier passages in *Racine*. The first is in an aside in *Racine*’s historical overview of Anabaptism, where De Bres likened the Anabaptists to Jeroboam, “who invented a new religion and a church according to his fancy, to tear the people away from the true church which was in Jerusalem, and to divide them” and “invented . . . two golden calves.” This, De Bres warned the Anabaptists, “will heap God’s judgment upon your heads.”¹⁴¹ Much later in the book, De Bres again accuses them of making golden calves. In the chapter on “the rebaptism of little infants,” De Bres connects the practice of rebaptism (“a wicked and diabolical doctrine”) with heresies like the Donatists, Novatians and Cathars, which “today’s Anabaptists” learned “in the school of all these heretics, to bring all these ancient errors back from the hell, to again trouble the world by them.” He then points out that “the laws of the Christian Emperors [of Rome] prohibited this rebaptism upon pain of a very serious punishment, even with the death penalty,” and directs his readers to the code of the Christian Roman emperor Justinian for more detailed information.¹⁴² Significantly he adds, “Do not be surprised

¹³⁹ *Racine*, 836–7. According to De Bres, such execution is authorized by texts like Exodus 22:18 and 20 and Romans 13:4.

¹⁴⁰ *Racine*, 837.

¹⁴¹ *Racine*, 65. See also the discussion in chapter three of De Bres’s advocacy in *Racine* of the political punishment of blasphemers and heretics of religion in, for instance on *Racine*, 816–7.

¹⁴² *Racine*, 754.

that the Christian emperors wanted to punish rebaptism so extremely,” explaining that all sorts of evil proceed from rebaptism: Effectively, those who rebaptize are crucifying Christ anew, trampling on the blood of Christ, dividing the church, and making a “golden calf” of rebaptism, “which they have newly forged after the example of Jeroboam . . . to divide the people and the church of God, and to make them err, and to draw them away from the Lord their God . . . This you are doing today, raising up again the golden calves, that were so many years ago taken down.”¹⁴³

Thus, these passages in *Racine* seem to approve the use of political force at least against some Anabaptists. Not only are some of the Anabaptists’ doctrines heresies, but some of their practices amount to the making of golden calves, a sin for which *Racine* advocates legal punishment. De Bres even offers a mild apology for the Christian Roman emperors’ political compulsion of religion by means of severely punishing the practice of rebaptism. Readers of De Bres’s book who connected such pronouncements might have drawn the conclusion that the political government can, and perhaps should, punish Anabaptists for some of their practices. This is hard to reconcile with a plea for what Braekman calls “toleration” of Anabaptists.

There are further reasons why the toleration of Anabaptism is an improbable message in *Racine*. Such toleration would go against the direction of De Bres’s thought from the mid-1550’s which was traced out earlier in this dissertation. It would, for example, sharply contrast with De Bres’s explicit statements in *Baston* (1559), and retained in subsequent editions, that rulers should use legal force against wrong religious doctrine

¹⁴³ *Racine*, 754–5.

“obstinately and maliciously” maintained.¹⁴⁴ In addition, the general toleration of Anabaptism would have been at variance with the views of some of the reformers who influenced De Bres, while we have already pointed out the great deal of continuity that existed between De Bres and mainstream Reformed thinking on the political compulsion of religion.¹⁴⁵ Significant among those that should be mentioned is Beza. Beza insisted in 1566, in two letters to the Dutch reformer Jean Taffin (who, as we saw, labored with De Bres to establish the confessional alliance) that religious liberty should under no circumstances in the Netherlands be given to the “sects of heretics” like “the Anabaptists, Mennonites, davidists” and others,¹⁴⁶ and he expressed alarm at reading Dutch tracts with “badly concocted ideas. . . taken word for word from Castellio,” that is, that argue for a large degree of religious liberty.¹⁴⁷ Franciscus Junius also endeavored to specifically exclude Anabaptists and other “libertarians” from those religions that should be politically tolerated.¹⁴⁸ Similarly, the politically connected Dutch reformer Philip of

¹⁴⁴ *Baston* (1559), 339. For the movement in De Bres’s thought, see chapter two and three.

¹⁴⁵ See chapter five. While we also know, as already discussed, that De Bres also read Beza, De Bres wrote in *Racine* that his anti-Anabaptist treatise was closely based on the work of Calvin, À Lasco, Bullinger, and Maarten Micron – he merely “gathered in the harvest behind them.” Changing the metaphor, De Bres added that his own contribution to the struggle against the Anabaptists was minor compared to those of these reformers: “I joyfully do my best to offer what little I can, knowing that God, in the edifice of the tabernacle, received not only the offerings of gold, silver, and precious stones as acceptable, but also those of them that, according to their ability, offered goat hair, sheepskins, oil, and bronze.” *Racine*, a iii r. According to Balke, there was much interaction between Calvin, À Lasco, Bullinger, and Micron to formulate responses to the thought of Menno Simons. Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 203. A Lasco and Micron debated Simons and corresponded with him. See Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, 202–3 and, for example, Verduin, *Complete writings of Menno Simons*, 835–943. On À Lasco’s role in the use of political force against Anabaptists, see J. P. Müller, *Die Mennoniten in Ostfriesland vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert: aktemässige kulturgeschichtliche Darstellung* (Emden: W. Haynel, 1887), 24–27.

¹⁴⁶ Hippolyte Aubert, *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze, Vol.7* (Geneva: Droz, 1973), 128. The text of the letters of 7 June 1566 and 14 August 1566 are in Aubert, *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze, Vol.7*, 127–8, and 204–5. See also De Pater, *De Gereformeerde Geloofsbelijdenis en de Religievrede*, 199.

¹⁴⁷ Bèze and Aubert, *Correspondance de Théodore de Bèze, Vol.7*, 205.

¹⁴⁸ See Van Gorp, *Reformatie in Brabant*, 100; Christiaan De Jonge, *De Irenische ecclesiologie van Franciscus Junius, 1545–1602* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 2008), 79.

Marnix, Lord of St. Aldegonde, argued that the Anabaptist religion should not be tolerated. The Anabaptists, after all, were breaking the *vinculum societatis*, the religious bond that held society together.¹⁴⁹ Sixteenth century Protestant attitudes, although more lenient than those of Catholics, did not extend toleration to Anabaptism.¹⁵⁰

Braekman might be correct about the existence of an “oasis of good sense and balance” in the violently passionate sixteenth century, but if the political toleration of Anabaptist religion is near the fountainhead of this oasis, reformers like Castellio, or the small group in the London strangers’ church around Adrian van Haemstede and Jacob Acontius, or even the Dutch minister Veluanus in his influential *Der Leke Wechwyser* are more recognizable palm trees than is Guido de Bres.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ See the discussion of the *vinculum societatis* in chapter five above. Marnix writes in a letter to Caspar van Heyden in 1577, “The prince [i.e., William of Orange] gave me great hope when I was in Middelburg, that those who will not perform the sacrament should be excluded from citizenship [*excludendos esse civitate*], or at least they are by no means to be formally admitted. It already was apparent that that could not be done, lest the churches be convulsed anew.” Marnix’s reason was: “I was urging that those people can be rejected, who were breaking the bond of all human society [*omnis humanae societatis vinculum abrumpant.*]” Toorenenbergen, *Marnix Geschriften*, Vol. 2, x. See also Van Gorp, *Reformatie in Brabant*, 100.

¹⁵⁰ Stayer comments that “although there were exceptions on both sides, Protestant rulers were more reluctant to shed Anabaptist blood than Protestant theologians.” James M. Stayer, “The Anabaptist Revolt and Political and Religious Power,” in *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*, ed. Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Redekop (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 58.

¹⁵¹ Veluanus writes, “They are beyond all measure acting bitterly against the poor Anabaptists. Even if one could kill all heretics, such people ought to be spared, because they have never been heretics. The sword of the emperor should punish such criminals who knowingly commit violence and injustice to the body, property, or honor, that is, that intentionally commit gross deeds against the Ten Commandments. But those who intend well, and have unknowingly been deceived, or are still bound in their conscience through ignorance so that they cannot easily accept better doctrine, these should in no way be executed. None can deny that the poor, blind Anabaptists are treated most unjustly in Brabant, Holland, and the region of Utrecht. If they hold on to their opinions, they are burned; if they lapse from Catholicism again, they must still die simply because they have transgressed the decree of the emperor.” Velanus, “Der Leke Wechwyser (1554),” In Cramer and Pijper, *Bibliotheca reformatoria neerlandica*, Vol. 4, 337–8. On Haemstede and Acontius see Grell, “Exile and Tolerance,” 180.

Blaming the “Anabaptists and Other Seditious People”

De Bres responded to Anabaptism in a second way that indirectly supported the political compulsion of religion. He sharply distinguished the Reformed from the Anabaptists and blamed solely the Anabaptists for seditiousness. This was an effective, and perhaps essential, strategy to allay the nobility’s suspicions and safeguard the fragile confessional alliance. But it also had the effect of reaffirming the centuries-old justification for the political compulsion of religion, which was the sixteenth century “conventional wisdom” discussed in the previous chapter, the belief that heresy is, at bottom, politically dangerous.

As we have noted, critics routinely charged the Reformers of being rebels and Anabaptists. Although Catholic opponents typically indulged in this accusation, it was not restricted to them: after the iconoclasm of 1566, Lutherans in the Netherlands accused the Reformed of being “*swermers en beeltstormers*” – not only “iconoclasts” but also “Schwärmer,” Luther’s contemptuous term for Anabaptist radicals.¹⁵² The potential of this perception to shipwreck the incipient confessional alliance between the Reformed and the nobles has already been described, and is obvious enough to need no further elucidation. It is hardly surprising that De Bres addressed it. In the first pages of *Racine*, De Bres declares that refuting this rumor was one of the intentions of the book: “Our persecutors, while they tyrannize and kill us, have maliciously spread the report about us

¹⁵² Robert van Roosbroeck, ed., *Kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht: over de troebelen van 1565 tot 1574 te Antwerpen en elders, Vol.1* (Antwerpen: De Sikkel, 1929), 122.

among surrounding nations, that we are all Anabaptists, rebels and disturbers of the public peace. The present book will serve to show the contrary.”¹⁵³

Distinguishing the Reformed from the Anabaptists, especially as regards their political theology, was not only an aim of *Racine* but was a concern of several of De Bres’s works.¹⁵⁴ As Vonk puts it, De Bres feared being viewed as an Anabaptist more than any other possible accusation.¹⁵⁵ De Bres objected in his *Remonstrance* that the opponents of the Reformed “libel us by saying that we are a seditious group and destroyers of the general welfare.”¹⁵⁶ In the *Letter to the King* he took exception to how the Reformed were called “disobedient rebels who desire nothing other than to destroy all political and civil rule and to introduce into the world confusion and disorder,” who were said to “desire. . . to rip the scepter from your hands.”¹⁵⁷ These false accusations of sedition and rebellion, De Bres maintained, were really calculated to move the government to violently spill the blood of the Reformed.¹⁵⁸ Without mentioning the Anabaptists explicitly, the 1561 *Confession* argued that it was not the Reformed but others who were guilty of such seditious sentiments: “Regarding this matter we denounce all those who want to reject the authorities and magistrates and subvert justice by introducing community of property, and confounding the good order which God has

¹⁵³ *Racine*, a ii v.

¹⁵⁴ The seventeenth century Martinus Schoock sees this accusation as one of the reasons for the writing of De Bres’s *Confession*: “Already in the year 1559 Guido de Bres, a most faithful man (verily, as earlier he had opened up, he has sealed the truth of the Gospel by his blood), foremost because the raving Anabaptists were regarded as being on the same page as the Orthodox by the inquisitors, started to draw up some articles of the orthodox unanimity.” Marten Schoock, *Liber de bonis vulgo ecclesiasticis dictis* (Groningen: Nicolai, 1651), 519–22.

¹⁵⁵ Vonk, *De Voorzeide Leer, Vol.3b*, 585.

¹⁵⁶ *Confession* (1561)^C, d.vi v.

¹⁵⁷ *Confession* (1561)^C, a iii r.

¹⁵⁸ *Confession* (1561)^C, a iii r, a x v.

established among persons.”¹⁵⁹ The 1566 *Confession* explicitly accused “the Anabaptists and other seditious people” of so rejecting the authorities and magistrates.¹⁶⁰

Other Dutch reformers also regularly protested that such accusations against the Reformed were a political ploy by Catholic monarchs to justify their anti-heretical clampdowns. For example, Marnix of St.Aldegonde in his apology for the events of 1566 complained that portraying the Protestants as dangerous political radicals had long been simply a pretext of their Catholic political opponents.¹⁶¹ Since the Dutch reformers perceived that the Catholics were purposefully confusing the Reformed with revolutionaries and the Anabaptists, their efforts at distinguishing themselves from the Anabaptists can be better understood as aimed at the potentially sympathetic Dutch nobles (who might be distracted by Catholic propaganda). The Spanish royal court was, after all, well informed through sophisticated intelligence services about the Reformed’s

¹⁵⁹ *Confession* (1561)^C, 33.

¹⁶⁰ *Confession* (1566), c iiiii v.

¹⁶¹ Marnix writes, “For as we have said previously, the principle motivation of these edicts have been the opinion that some had of Martin Luther, and other of his adherents, that they wanted to abolish all authority and government, both civil as ecclesiastical, and incite the people towards rebellion against the Magistrate, and to the total abandon of wicked acts, such as pillage, robbery, murder, killing one another, to destroy everything by fire and sword, and finally to live in the way of savage beasts, without any law or ordinance whatsoever. Thus, it was expressly declared in these same terms by the royal decree published by the imperial majesty and dated 8 May, 1521, to which all the others, which came afterward, respectively referred.” Marnix van St.Aldegonde, “Vraye Narration et Apologie des choses passes au Pays-Bas, touchant le fait de la religion en l’an 1566, par ceus qui font profession de la religion reformée au-dit pays.” In Van Toorenenbergen, *Marnix Godsdienstige en kerkelijke geschriften, Vol. 1*, 87. Marnix might as well have mentioned a similar royal strategy in France. On 1 February 1535, King Francis 1 of France presented a memorandum to the German Protestant princes to explain his reaction toward the Reformation movement in France. According to Ford Lewis Battle, “the sovereign attempted to justify to his Protestant allies the persecutions undertaken in France following the affair of the Placards, an act of anarchy and revolt against the internal order of the kingdom. The government not only had the right but the duty to take vigorous steps. The French Evangelicals, the memorandum asserted, unlike the German Protestants, were seditious persons in no respect different from the Anabaptists. Were not such persons quite justly put to death even in Protestant Germany?” Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian religion* [1536], xl.

activities and about subtleties in theological sentiment in various cities.¹⁶² This is evidenced, to mention but two examples, by the report of 10 January 1562 of the commissioners who investigated the library of De Bres, and who reported to the Governess that the evidence connected De Bres, his congregations, and his helpers with the “Calvinistic sect.”¹⁶³ Also, in the Governess’s decree of 14 December 1566, she accuses the city of Valenciennes of “rebellion” and immediately mentions that they wanted to celebrate a general Lord’s Supper “according to the sect of John Calvin [Fr. *celon la secte de Jehan Calvin*].”¹⁶⁴ Consequently, it was mainly for the sake of the potentially misled Dutch nobles that reformers like De Bres labored to sharply distinguish between the Reformed and the Anabaptists and to argue that, as Harm Boiten describes it, “the real rebels were the Anabaptists.”¹⁶⁵ Demonstrating the revolutionary tendencies of the Anabaptists would remove much of the suspicion hanging over the Reformed believers. It was for the purpose of reassuring the nobles of the reliability of the Reformed that, according to Van Manen, De Bres preached over the course of three weeks to the conference of nobles at St.Trond “on the unrest of the Anabaptists of Flanders and how he wished to prevent them.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² See e.g. Van Schelven, *Willem van Oranje*, 109. As Willem van’t Spijker observes, the correspondence between Philip II and Margaret reveals much detail about the Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anabaptists respectively. Van’t Spijker, “De Bres en Andere Contra het Anabaptisme,” 230.

¹⁶³ See the *Papiers d’Etat*, Correspondence de Tournay, 1561–1563, fols. 136–38, reproduced in Van Langeraad, *Guido de Bray*, 45–48. A copy of the commissioners’ letter also appears in the appendix in Gootjes, *Belgic Confession*, 197.

¹⁶⁴ Van Langeraad, *Guy de Bray*, xciii.

¹⁶⁵ See e.g. Boiten, “Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis,” 447.

¹⁶⁶ Van Manen, *Guy de Bray*, 44. Van Manen does not provide the source of his information about the contents of De Bres’s preaching.

How did De Bres substantiate his charge against the Anabaptists? Although, as the next chapter will show, De Bres perceived that the Anabaptist low view of the political office undermined the legitimacy and sanctity of political rulers, these were subtle theological points insufficient to ascribe the rising social unrest to the supposed rebelliousness of Anabaptists. De Bres, therefore, resorted to circumstantial evidence in order to establish the link between the Anabaptists of his day (even committed pacifists like Menno Simons) and sedition, by focusing on the historical link between the Anabaptists of Münster and later Anabaptists. In other words, based on what De Bres identified as the “root” (*racine*) of Anabaptism of his day, the revolutionary Anabaptism of Münster, he argued by association that even the group centered around Menno Simons was a threat to social order and political stability. This claim was given some plausibility by De Bres’s citation from one of Menno Simons’s works, which criticized civil government generally and expressed some sympathy for the people involved in the events surrounding the Münster debacle. “Your great teacher, Menno Simons, does not deny them as many of you do,” concludes De Bres, but instead was “not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters (that is, those of Münster and of Amsterdam).”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ *Racine*, 24. The work is Simons, Menno. *Een schoone ende profitelijcke vermanende ende bestraffende redene aen die overheyte, gheleerde, ende ghemeyn volck, aen die verdorven secten, ende aen die ghene die om des Heeren waerheyt daghelijcx vervolghinghe lijden moeten* [Antwerpen]: 1552. However, in another tract of 1552, translated as “A Pathetic Supplication to All Magistrates,” Menno condemns the Münsterites explicitly. He writes, “We strenuously disapprove of the Donatists, the Circumcellions, and of those of Münster, as well as all the contemporary errors, misdeeds, and abominations . . . and have from the inception of our teaching and doctrine disapproved them. See Verduin, *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 525. See also Menno Simons, *A Very Humble Supplication of the Poor, Despised, Christians*. Elkhart, IN: John F. Funk and Brother, 1871. More than fifteen years earlier, Simons also wrote a tract “The Blasphemy of Jan of Leiden,” in which he sought to demonstrate some of the errors of the Münsterites. See Verduin, *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 31–50.

In *Racine*, De Bres, already in the introductory section of the first chapter, connects Anabaptism's "bad roots" in history with the "awful and pernicious errors" and heresy of the Anabaptism of his own era. One of the historical Anabaptist errors that De Bres vividly emphasizes in the opening pages of *Racine* is the revolutionary threat to the church and to political government:

They [the Anabaptists] brought the churches where the gospel was preached anew into confusion. They filled the simple with doubts and uncertainties. They made the contentious and those with a spirit of strife even worse. They made the preaching of the gospel suspect and odious among the ignorant. They encouraged servants to rise up against their masters. In short, they brought the whole world into confusion. Therefore, everyone has every reason to avoid them, if one wants to protect and maintain the stability and prosperity of the church, and the peace of the civil government.¹⁶⁸

As the "root of Anabaptism" shows, De Bres is suggesting, Anabaptism was historically programmed to threaten good order in church and society as well as all peaceable civil government.

De Bres then spends about one third of his book on the revolutionary "origins of the Anabaptists."¹⁶⁹ Because of their root, De Bres reasons, the sect of Anabaptists "has from its first only produced insurrectionists and deceivers and veritable hypocrites."¹⁷⁰ Their sect is "of the devil and produced by him," as its fruit clearly show: "Therefore, what should one expect from it [Anabaptism] other than total disorder and confusion in

¹⁶⁸ *Racine*, 2–3.

¹⁶⁹ *Racine*, 1–125. The second part of *Racine* is on the incarnation (*Racine*, 127–497), and the third part on baptism (499–903), which includes separate sections on civil government (806–848) and on the swearing of solemn oaths (849–869).

¹⁷⁰ *Racine*, 25.

the world?”¹⁷¹ If the Dutch nobles wanted to identify the source of the growing civil disorder, they did not need not to search any further than the Anabaptists.

Throughout De Bres’s account of the history of the revolutionary excesses of the 1520’s and 1530’s, he emphasizes that the spirit of Münster still animates the later Anabaptists, despite the attempts of the apparently peaceful Anabaptists to disassociate themselves from the excesses of Münster. He specifically targets the Mennonite Anabaptists, and emphasizes that “it is manifest” that “Menno Simons, your great teacher . . . came forth from Münster.”¹⁷² *Racine*’s historical overview of the turbulent period is sprinkled with interjections addressed to “our Anabaptists,” (i.e. the Dutch Anabaptists of the 1560’s), repeatedly calling the revolutionaries their “brothers” or “fathers.”¹⁷³ For example, after relating how the Anabaptists, after they had come to power in Münster, ejected entire families, including women and children, from their homes, delivering them into the hands of the besiegers of the city, De Bres then concludes: “see here the life and the holiness of your ancestors and your brothers, dear sirs Anabaptists!”¹⁷⁴ He immediately adds,

The same spirit which impelled them, lives today, and it has not become any less inhumane than it was then. . . If you now say that you do not consider them your brothers and do not agree in everything with those of Münster, then I answer that you do not differ in any of the essentials of the doctrine. Because you learned it from them . . . without their doctrine you would have been more silent than a carp!¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ *Racine*, 25.

¹⁷² *Racine*, 53–4.

¹⁷³ See e.g. *Racine*, 24, 26.

¹⁷⁴ *Racine*, 24.

¹⁷⁵ *Racine*, 24.

Thus De Bres, in a way similar to Luther, “simply generalized the obviously visible example provided by Müntzer and transferred it to the [Anabaptist] movement in general.”¹⁷⁶ De Bres simply would not allow the Mennonites to disown the revolutionaries:

Learn to acknowledge that you are the brothers and companions of those of Münster, because you have learned the things you say from their school, don't be ashamed now! But it seems to me that you are protesting in your accustomed manner that you are not brothers of those of Münster, and therefore you can speak beautifully and feign the biggest holiness and innocence in the world! . . . Because the Anabaptists of Münster, your brothers, was initially no less merciful, humane, peaceful, and full of self-mortification than you. You know this very well. Therefore, if you want people to view you as innocent and to believe you, leave this sect, which from its first beginning has produced nothing but seditious people and treacherous violators of the faith and veritable hypocrites. . . What else should one expect from [this sect] than all sorts of disorder and confusion in the world? That your brothers of Münster have clearly shown us.¹⁷⁷

The pacifism of the Mennonites and other Anabaptists, De Bres explained, was only a thin veil, and could not hide their true spirit of sedition and revolutionary violence. All who belong to the sect of the Anabaptists can only be, by reason of their origin, “seditious people and treacherous violators of the faith” – and if they deny it, they are “veritable hypocrites.” De Bres often returns to this charge of hypocrisy. The ostensible pacifism of the Anabaptists will soon evaporate once they obtain power: “See well, sirs Anabaptists, how the gentleness and mildness of your brothers [the Anabaptists of Münster] disappeared permanently, and how all sorts of cruelty, murder, and blood took

¹⁷⁶ Hubert Kirchner, *Luther and the Peasants' War* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 30. Kirchner adds, “Luther's generalization made his judgment factually wrong, however much justification he may have had for it on a theological level.” De Bres's generalization may be criticized on the same ground.

¹⁷⁷ *Racine*, 25–6. The word *faulsaire*, here translated “treacherous violators of the faith,” can also mean a counterfeiter or forger of documents or evidence.

its place? Therefore, what man of understanding will not fear those who maintain a similar doctrine?”¹⁷⁸

The point of De Bres’s message to the nobility was clear: doctrine had political consequences, and heresy was dangerous. The political rulers should not be foolish enough to be hoodwinked by the pretended pacifism of the mainstream Anabaptists of the 1560’s. De Bres’s attempts to shift all blame for Dutch social and political instability upon the Anabaptists might have been a calculated political move, because research identifies a significant degree of Reformed involvement in the growing unrest.¹⁷⁹

What also suggests that a political objective was at work here is De Bres’s resoluteness to attribute the revolutionary tenets of the Münster to the docile Anabaptists of the 1560’s; especially in light of the fact that the Anabaptism of Menno Simons had little in common with that of Münster, as many of De Bres’s contemporaries acknowledged. Jean Crespin’s *Histoire de Vray Tesmoins* of 1570, for example, spends several pages recounting the troubles caused by the “pernicious sect of the Anabaptists,” and also related the usual tales of Thomas Müntzer, of Münster, and of the naked antics of the Anabaptists of Amsterdam.¹⁸⁰ Unlike De Bres, however, Crespin more consistently distinguishes at least five main sects of Anabaptists and makes clear that all of these excesses cannot simply be attributed to “Anabaptists” in general, or more

¹⁷⁸ *Racine*, 30.

¹⁷⁹ For instance, the iconoclasms that swept the Netherlands in August 1566 were in several places supported by the Reformed consistories. See e.g. Marnef, “Multiconfessionalism in a Commercial Metropolis,” 76; Jesse Sponholz even describes the Reformed who were involved in the events of 1566 as “enemies of the state, forced to live in secrecy and exile as they plotted ways that they might achieve victory for what they believed was the true church of God.” Spohnholz, *The Convent of Wesel*, 1.

¹⁸⁰ Crespin, *Histoire de vray Tesmoins*, 83 r, 84 r – 85 r.

specifically to “the Mennonites of our times.”¹⁸¹ Likewise, Veluanus more consistently paints a variegated picture of the Anabaptists, distinguishing between the fanatics (whom he calls “enthusiasts”) or Münsterites,¹⁸² and the “simple ones” or “innocent ones,” among whom many “walked irreproachably, with a peaceful spirit . . . namely the best Mennonites.”¹⁸³

Why did De Bres not similarly do so? Interestingly, on other issues De Bres often *does* carefully distinguish between the positions of different factions of Anabaptists. He mentions at least fifteen Anabaptist factions,¹⁸⁴ discussing, for example, the differences between Franckians and Mennonites on the doctrine of baptism or on the legitimacy of civil government.¹⁸⁵ On the issue of a basic underlying identity with the seditious Anabaptists of Münster, though, De Bres, in the words of De Pater, “refuses to admit the distinction which we are accustomed to make between the seditious Anabaptists like Thomas Müntzer and Jan van Leyden and the peaceful Anabaptists like Menno Simons.”¹⁸⁶ The reason, it is submitted, is that De Bres had a social-political connection to make: the Anabaptists of the 1560’s were rebels and heretics, just like the Anabaptists of the 1520’s and 1530’s, and their doctrine was “crafted by seditious people, indeed by monsters worse and more hideous than devils.”¹⁸⁷ Clearly it was the Anabaptists and not

¹⁸¹ Crespin, *Histoire de Vray Tesmoins*, 85 r.

¹⁸² Veluano, *Der Leken Wechwyser*, in Cramer and Pijper, *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, Vol.4, 203, 257, 335.

¹⁸³ Veluano, *Der Leken Wechwyser*, in Cramer and Pijper, *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, Vol.4, 175, 203.

¹⁸⁴ *Racine*, 66.

¹⁸⁵ *Racine*, 804–6.

¹⁸⁶ Jan C. H. de Pater, *De aanbieding van de Nederlandsche geloofsbelijdenis aan den Koning van Spanje in 1561* ('s Gravenhage: Willem de Zwijger-stichting, 1948), 28.

¹⁸⁷ *Racine*, 54.

the Reformed, argued De Bres, who should be considered suspect in the rising civil unrest in the Netherlands. The Reformed, by contrast, would be reliable partners in a confessional alliance to battle such sedition and heresy.

However successful De Bres's apologetic strategy of blaming Anabaptism for sedition and exonerating Calvinism might have been to safeguard the confessional alliance and to check the growth of the Mennonite movement, it also had a wider effect of confirming as principle the authority of the government to decide what is acceptable or orthodox religion for the body politic – to enforce, in other words, orthodox religion as the *vinculum societatis*. By portraying the Anabaptists as not only heretics but also – despite their disavowals and their pacifist exterior – as rebels, De Bres was reaffirming the sixteenth century conventional wisdom that religion was the *vinculum societatis*: here was living proof, once more, that heresy would, like a virus, destroy the health and life of the body politic. In other words, De Bres was reaffirming the inevitable connection between true religion and political unity, and between false religion and social and political disintegration. The implication was that political rulers must protect the *vinculum societatis*, the true religion which alone could chain society together and without which society would fall apart, by using political force to limit false religion.

It suited the Reformed project of confessionalization to impress this implication upon the Dutch nobility. As we have observed in the previous chapter, overcoming the inertia of the nobility to resist royal Catholicism had been a frustrating challenge in the 1550's and early 1560's. The rise of Anabaptism and political unrest, he argued, was proving the connection between heresy and political danger. This supplied an *a fortiori* argument for the restriction of Catholicism, because, as De Bres wrote already in 1561, ultimately

Catholicism by its promotion of idolatry and false worship was promoting the kingdom of the Devil and causing tumult by its promotion of idolatry and false worship:

One must attribute the sedition and the offence to the irreconcilable enemy of God and men, the Devil, who raises tumult and opposition everywhere in order to hinder the progress of the gospel, because he does not want to lose his kingdom, which exists in idolatry, the false worship of God, whoredom, and countless other vices curtailed by the gospel.¹⁸⁸

Now, by 1565, the rise of Anabaptism was perking the nobles' ears, and De Bres used the moment to try and prod the sluggish nobles into action. Unlike the Anabaptists, the Roman Catholics were not only heretics but also idolaters, and politically even more dangerous because they already *had* political power (unlike the Mennonites who secretly wanted to seize power). The Catholics were “the Antichrists seated in the temple of God . . . exalting themselves over everything divine and human, ruling by the commandments and traditions of men.”¹⁸⁹ To meet both dangers, Anabaptism and Catholicism, the political rulers' safest route was to ally with the Reformed churches.

Combating Anabaptism by Restricting Catholicism

De Bres and other Reformed church leaders who worked toward confessionalization also argued that the best bulwark against the growth of Anabaptism was the political protection of Reformed religion and the political eradication of the idolatry of Catholicism. Thus confessionalization, including the political restriction of Catholicism, would enhance social order and political stability.

¹⁸⁸ “Letter to the King,” *Confession* (1561)^C, a x v – a x i r.

¹⁸⁹ *Racine*, 767.

According to De Bres, the heresy of Anabaptism was God's punishment "upon the ingratitude of the world, who disparages the doctrine of salvation."¹⁹⁰ The reason is because the world "as Saint Paul said, refused to love the truth and so be saved, therefore God has sent them a strong delusion, to make them believe a lie."¹⁹¹ The main problem, therefore, was not Anabaptism – that was only the divine curse upon the pre-existing religious wickedness. In De Bres's view, the sin which invited Anabaptism and all its attendant problems was the existence of Catholic ecclesiastics and the political rulers' rejection of the true gospel recovered by the Reformation. This view had long been held by Dutch reformers. The Large Emden Catechism of 1551 had already attributed the "many heresies and errors" in the Netherlands (of importance being Anabaptism, although only described rather than specifically named) to the magistrates and ministers who "having rejected the truth . . . opened the door to all lies and heresies."¹⁹²

This connection between the sin of Catholicism and the divine punishment of Anabaptism suggested an obvious solution to Dutch political rulers who were anxious to remove Anabaptism, which they suspected was responsible for the growing social unrest: protect the true gospel preaching of the Reformed churches and eradicate Catholic idolatry, and the "door to all lies and heresies" will be closed again. Soon, the civil unrest that was so anguishing the Dutch nobles would disappear.

A similar plea had previously met with success in London, where the government had permitted the establishment of fully fledged Reformed churches, largely, Ole Peter Grell

¹⁹⁰ *Racine*, a vii v.

¹⁹¹ *Racine*, a vii v.

¹⁹² James T. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Vol. 1. 1523–1552* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 588. See e.g. the description that they "reject the remaining good, along with the evil, which yet remains in the Roman Catholic church."

remarks, to create “a bulwark against the sects, in particular the Anabaptists.”¹⁹³

Pettegree explains that in the case of London it was “clearly envisaged” that permitting the Reformed churches “would play their part in eliminating sectarian views.”¹⁹⁴ He cites evidence that the leaders of the Reformed churches in London themselves maintained that permitting a number of Reformed “stranger churches” would help regulate the theology of recently arrived immigrants. The Reformed churches’ argument that the establishment of Reformed churches would counteract the appeal of the sects was influential with the English political rulers. As Pettegree observes, “The argument that the new churches would help control heresy among the strangers was undoubtedly of great weight in securing the necessary consensus of support for the granting of the strangers’ charter.”¹⁹⁵ The Reformed ministers in London were “well aware of this” and “strove conscientiously to discharge their obligations” of opposing the sectaries.¹⁹⁶ Evidently, in an alliance of church and government, the church had a big obligation to promote social discipline.

By granting Reformed churches in the Netherlands the right to organize, Dutch reformers like Junius, Marnix and De Bres claimed the government would prevent the spread of sects and heresies, especially Anabaptism, and thus promote social order. Accordingly, Junius “presented Calvinism as a politically and spiritually safe alternative to Catholicism that it would be wise to tolerate in order to prevent atheism, libertinism and Anabaptism from developing further,” writes Kossman.¹⁹⁷ Marnix, too, reasoned

¹⁹³ Grell, “Exile and Tolerance,” 166.

¹⁹⁴ Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London*, 44.

¹⁹⁵ Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London*, 45.

¹⁹⁶ Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London*, 45.

¹⁹⁷ Kossman, *Texts concerning the Revolt of the Netherlands*, 9.

that allowing Reformed Protestant preaching, far from courting rebellion and the disturbance of the public tranquility, was in fact the only way

to check the development of wicked and profane sects, and to bring the people to peace and tranquility, and a true recognition of their duty to the Magistrate and to the king. But it is so that by these public sermons, as by the true and most important remedy, the occasion for such inconveniences is removed.¹⁹⁸

It is noteworthy how Marnix describes the promising prospect that “peace and tranquility,” in other words social order, would be served by the public recognition of the Reformed faith.

According to Marnix, so numerous had those forsaking the Catholic religion become, that rooms and houses could no longer contain their meetings.¹⁹⁹ He cautions, “However one looks at it, the people were so starving for this doctrine, that there was no way to refuse them, unless one wanted to make them Atheists, Libertines, and sectaries.”²⁰⁰ The alternatives to protecting the Reformed religion and affording it the privileges of public preaching did not bode well for political stability, Marnix argued. Unless the public (Protestant) preaching of the Word was allowed, only two possibilities remained:

Either people would become completely without religion, Atheists, who despise both the law of God and the authority of the magistrate, and reject every yoke of doctrine. Or they would gather for themselves new ministers and a new doctrine, each according to his own phantasy. From this there would follow terrible confusion and disorder, and instead of two or three sects, there would be a countless number.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Van Toorenenbergen, *Marnix Godsdienstige en kerkelijke geschriften*, Vol.1, 88.

¹⁹⁹ Van Toorenenbergen, *Marnix Godsdienstige en kerkelijke geschriften*, Vol.1, 88.

²⁰⁰ Van Toorenenbergen, *Marnix Godsdienstige en kerkelijke geschriften*, Vol.1, 88.

²⁰¹ Van Toorenenbergen, *Marnix Godsdienstige en kerkelijke geschriften*, Vol.1, 89. Some paragraphs earlier, Marnix defined “atheists” as profane people who “want to put their dreams and imaginations in place of the Word of God,” and thus linked them with “libertines and sectaries.” Van Toorenenbergen, *Marnix Godsdienstige en kerkelijke geschriften*, Vol.1, 88.

Like De Bres, Marnix also affirmed the notion of religion as the *vinculum societatis*, in other words the conventional connection between religion and political order, that we saw in *Racine*: False religion and political revolution are inseparably connected.

A similar appeal to the imminence of revolution is made in De Bres's handwritten letter to the Commissioners of the Governness on 1 or 2 November 1561:

For God is our witness, how much we fear the uprisings of the people. For this reason, we admonish them to have patience and to pray God for all the persecutors, while they expect help from on high, which we are promised, and to leave vengeance to him to whom it belongs, that is to God, and He will repay it on the head of all those who persecute us. And we want you to know, Sirs, that had it not been for the diligence that we have practiced to admonish the people to keep them under control, the country would by now have been absolutely devastated.²⁰²

Thus, De Bres artfully shows that it is the Reformed ministers who played an essential role in maintaining social discipline and preventing the country from going up in revolutionary flames.

In the passage from *Racine* quoted some pages earlier, De Bres also made the desire for social discipline an argument for the restriction of religion (specifically Catholicism) by channeling the political rulers' disapproval of Anabaptism. Anabaptism might threaten social and political stability – *Racine* confirms rather than disputes this – but “princes and kings are not adhering to a good course by extirpating this sect.”²⁰³ Rather than by means of this misguided policy of large-scale cruelty and extirpation, Anabaptism will almost naturally disappear (“like mist before a . . . bright sun”) if political rulers follow the religious restriction modelled by Israelite kings in the Old

²⁰² “Epitre aux Commissaires de la Gouvernante.” Reproduced in Braekman, *Guy de Bres: pages choisies*, 16.

²⁰³ *Racine*, a vi r.

Testament. Political rulers should imitate role models like king Hezekiah and king Josiah, “who first cast all idolatries from their territory, and at the same time reformed the true religion.”²⁰⁴ In other words, the political rulers should expel Catholicism from the Netherlands and reform the Christian religion, as well as promote Reformed religion and preaching (“have the true Apostolic doctrine preached publicly”), and grant the Reformed the opportunity to publicly defend their doctrines.²⁰⁵ Thus De Bres’s apology for the innocence of Reformed believers by laying the blame for political unrest upon the Anabaptists also provided an apology for the political expulsion of Catholicism.

Conclusion

This chapter, like the previous one, investigated how De Bres’s vision of a confessional alliance bound political restriction of religion even more inseparably into the very idea of political protection. In the long tradition of medieval and sixteenth century thought, we have seen in chapter four, the political restriction of false religion and the political protection of true religion were already tightly connected. This chapter showed that this long-assumed connection was now tightened by De Bres’s defense of the nascent confessional alliance of the Reformed with the Dutch nobles. Rising social unrest and the growth of Anabaptism, and the association of these trends with the Reformed, threatened to compromise Reformed churches’ desirability as a partner in a confessional alliance with Dutch political power. De Bres responded to safeguard the emerging confessional

²⁰⁴ *Racine*, a vi r.

²⁰⁵ *Racine*, a vi r.

alliance in a way that would affirm the Calvinists' credentials as social conservatives – by reaffirming the centuries-old justification for the political compulsion of religion. De Bres was accordingly reasserting the traditional view that the political ruler must protect true religion as the *vinculum societatis* by using the force of law against false religion, heresy, and idolatry. The true religion to be so protected was, of course, the Reformed religion. Such protection of the Reformed and restriction of Catholicism was essential to avoid social-political disorder in the Netherlands, De Bres argued.

CHAPTER 7

COMPELLINGLY LEGITIMATE: GOD'S GOOD AND HOLY OFFICE

Previous chapters have argued for the likelihood that political and religious realities furthered De Bres's acceptance of the compulsion of religion, and that the potential of these realities to so convince De Bres is brought into focus by the lens of confessionalization. Two of these realities have already been discussed. First, in chapters four and five, it was demonstrated how a confessional alliance involving the *political protection of the Reformed churches* appealed to the persecuted Reformed churches and how it also appealed, in more subtle ways, to the Dutch nobles. Such political protection, it was noted, tended to involve the restriction of non-Reformed religions, most notably Catholicism, because of the religio-political dynamics of confessionalization. Second, in chapter six, we have also seen how an alliance promised to promote *social discipline*, something that appealed both to the Dutch Calvinist vision of order and to the Dutch nobles' need for intellectual influence that would neutralize Anabaptists and radicals at a time of growing political and social unrest. This, too, promoted the restriction of non-Reformed religions, because De Bres and other reformers attempted to safeguard the Reformed church's credentials as a reliable partner. De Bres emphasized the traditional connection between political stability and the need to politically protect true religion as the *vinculum societatis* by politically restricting false religion and idolatry, and by

showing how false religion and idolatry (like Anabaptism and Catholicism) threatened social order in the Netherlands.

The third benefit that political rulers expected from confessionalization has already been briefly mentioned: vouchsafing the *legitimacy* of the political order. In this chapter, we shall investigate how this practical issue of political legitimacy became the focal point of De Bres's political theology. Around the issue of political legitimacy crystalized De Bres's idea of political office and of the political compulsion of religion. Practically, the Dutch nobles needed the assistance of their aspiring alliance partners, the Reformed churches, to theologically shore up their authority and privileges as they faced (at the very time of growing political restlessness and of an absolutizing monarchy) Anabaptist critiques of their political order. De Bres countered Anabaptist political theology by rhetorically portraying the Anabaptists as anarchists, as well as by arguing that the "magisterial office" is an institution that is divinely ordained, holy, and good. His theological justification of such a divinely ordained, holy, and good office of political power, however, also implied that the restriction of false religion was a central task of the political authorities.

Holy, Good, and (Hence) Legitimate

It has already been shown that the Dutch nobles were facing threats to the security of their political office by the early 1560's. These threats, it was pointed out, came both from above (the King, who was bent on undermining the nobility as a countervailing power) and below (an increasingly restless population). As these threats highlighted, questions about the legitimacy of political office were becoming critical for the nobles.

The crisis of political legitimacy was in fact a deeper issue in the sixteenth century. Many theologians were grappling with questions of legitimacy put forth by various competing claims to authority in the early modern state. The nature of the “state,” Van Nierop reminds us, was a problem that by the middle of the sixteenth century gripped “the whole of Europe, and therefore also the Low Countries.”¹ Steve Ozment describes the sixteenth century magistrates’ “well-documented fear of citizen disorder and anarchy,” not only out of reasons of conservatism and self-interest, but also because it concerned their understanding of their official mandate.² The threat of disorder posed an existential threat, Ozment argues, because for the rulers, maintaining law and order and preventing unrest was, “in the divine economy, government’s reason for existing.”³ Applied to the Netherlands, the nobility faced the challenge of justifying their reason for existing when civil peace in the Netherlands was evaporating and the Dutch nobles were falling out of royal favor.

Against the backdrop of such existential insecurities, Anabaptist critiques of political legitimacy came at the worst possible moment. One ominous result of these critiques, already noted in the previous chapter, was that some anxious Dutch nobles were implicating the Reformed in the Anabaptist theological undermining of the foundations of the *corpus christianum*. If unchecked, such association of the Reformed with Anabaptist political ideas would shipwreck the nascent confessional alliance. This would explain the desperate attempt of De Bres to show that the Reformed were separate from

¹ Van Nierop, “Alva’s Throne – making sense of the revolt of the Netherlands,” 33.

² Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities*, 125.

³ Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities*, 125.

and even hostile to the Anabaptists.⁴ Another potential result of the Anabaptist critiques would be equally dismal. A Dutch nobility paralyzed by theological self-doubt was likely to remain passive in the face of Philip's activism – whereas the Reformed needed noble patrons inspired by a sense of divine calling, daring enough to stand up to the politically entrenched Catholic establishment and to protect the Protestant heretics, and sufficiently confident to confront an increasingly absolute monarch who was convinced that he was God's vicar engaged on a mission of messianic imperialism.

It was therefore essential that the Dutch reformers address the threat to the legitimacy of political rulers posed by the Anabaptist undermining of the sacral body politic, and De Bres sought to do so in various places in his writings, most notably in his *Confession* in 1561 and especially in *Racine* in 1565. What De Bres defended was the very idea of political leadership as the exercise of an *office* – what De Bres often termed “the office of the magistrate,” and sometimes identified by various other appellations: “the office of the kings, of the princes, and of the magistrates” or of “governors” or of “judging”; a “charge”; “earthly superiority”; “superiority among people”; “the office of preeminence”; “the authority of the magistrate”; “public government”; and “prime authority and power.” This office, in De Bres's description, was ordained by God “in the beginning,” and thus existed upon God's “ordinance” or “commandment.”⁵ “We are,” De Bres wrote in his *Letter to the King*, “instructed by the Word of God and by the constant exhortation of our preachers that the kings, princes, and magistrates are of God's ordinance.”⁶

⁴ See chapter six.

⁵ See e.g. *Racine*, 806–12, 831 for instances of these expressions.

⁶ “Letter to the King,” *Confession*, a 2 v.

In De Bres's understanding, the office of the magistrate is analogous to the office or vocation of "the fathers of families, of schoolteachers, of ministers and bishops [in the church]." ⁷ The example of schoolteachers obscures De Bres's sense for modern readers who might be inclined to view the teaching profession as a human rather than a divine institution, but as the examples of fathers of families and of ministers and elders in the church show, De Bres was thinking of the magistracy as a divinely required institution for all time; essential for the well-being, and even the very *being*, of society; analogous to how fathers are essential for families and ministers and elders are essential for churches. ⁸ Moreover, as will be elaborated below, De Bres believed the office of the magistrate was given by "our good God," even though it was prompted by the corruption of man. It was a "good" and "holy" institution, "pleasing and agreeable" to God, as De Bres repeatedly emphasized. ⁹

By emphasizing political rule as an "office," De Bres was reasserting an important legacy which Roman and medieval political thought had bequeathed to the early modern period, and which had become increasingly centered in the political sovereignty claimed

⁷ *Racine*, 839.

⁸ This inference is also suggested by De Bres's words in a dispute with a Franciscan monk during his captivity before his execution in Valenciennes. The monk asked why De Bres finds the notion of the supremacy of the pope so strange, since he agrees that "in all well arranged order and political society, it is necessary to have a head and superior over all. You permit to it for all states and agrees that in a country there should be a king, and in your family a head. Why then can you not permit a head in the church of God?" De Bres answered, "I admit that there must be a king in a kingdom to be the head over the people, and a father of a family chief in his family, and likewise in other estates; because the Scripture established the king in this position, and the father of a family likewise in civil and temporal things. But one does not read anywhere in all of Scripture that the Pope has been ordained head in the church, as one reads of the kings ordained over their peoples." Jean Crespin, *Procedures Tenues a l'endroit de Ceux de la Religion du Pais Bas* ([Geneva: Jean Crespin], 1568), 341–2.

⁹ See e.g. *Confession* (1561)^c, 32; *Racine*, 806, 809, 813.

by European monarchs since the middle of the fifteenth century.¹⁰ This was the heritage of political office, animated by theocracy, which had been woven into Christendom's idea of a *corpus christianum*; and magisterial reformers sought to preserve it in early modern forms after the sixteenth century fragmentation of Christendom. But it was precisely this heritage that Anabaptists fundamentally questioned, both implicitly (by their rejection of infant baptism, the vow, and arms-bearing) and explicitly (by raising questions about the goodness and holiness of political power).

To counter the undermining potential of Anabaptist political theology, especially in light of the crisis of legitimacy confronting the Dutch nobles, De Bres used two strategies. The first strategy was rhetorical rather than theological: De Bres characterized the Anabaptist position as an outright rejection of the very idea of political office, though Anabaptist position were in reality more ambivalent. His second strategy was to offer theological arguments to show that political rule was a divine and holy ordinance.¹¹ We

¹⁰ The medievalist Norman Cantor summarizes the importance of this medieval notion: "At the center of Roman political life had been the assumption that state officials wielded not personal power but public authority... The most important contribution of theocratic kingship to the Western heritage was the recovery of the Roman idea of political leadership as the exercise of an office. The king's power was now viewed as an institutional authority ordained by God for the betterment of mankind, for the fulfillment of divine providence in history. The whole subsequent political development of the West evolved out of this sanctification of state power." Norman F. Cantor, *Western Civilization: Its Genesis and Destiny* (Glenview: Scott, Foresman, 1969), 353–4. For broadly supportive accounts of how this unfolded in medieval political thought, see e.g. Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz and Conrad Leyser, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016); and Francis Oakley, *Kingship: The Politics of Enchantment* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 108–131. A more detailed analysis is provided in the trilogy by Francis Oakley: *Empty Bottles of Gentilism: Kingship and the Divine in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (to 1050)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); *The Mortgage of the Past Reshaping the Ancient Political Inheritance (1050–1300)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); *The Watershed of Modern Politics: Law, Virtue, Kingship, and Consent (1300–1650)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016). Carlos Eire contends that in the Christian West, monarchical claims to sovereignty had only met with real success since the 1450's, and it was peaking by the 1550's. See Carlos M. N. Eire, *Reformations: The Early Modern World, 1450–1650* (Cumberland: Yale University Press, 2016), 13–15. For a general discussion of the importance of the notion of sovereignty in this period, see Franklin, *Jean Bodin and the Rise of Absolutist Theory*. That De Bres favored the idea of sovereign kingship is suggested by one of his disputes in captivity before his execution, Crespin, *Procedures Tenues*, 341–2.

¹¹ See e.g. Racine, 806, 813.

shall examine these strategies in turn, investigating his second strategy more elaborately because of its direct place in De Bres's view of religious liberty.

Portraying Anabaptism as Dismissive of Political Office

The first way in which De Bres sought to counter the effect of Anabaptist critiques of the political office was to use a broad brush to portray the Anabaptist position as altogether dismissive of the idea of political rule as a kind of "office, even though the general Anabaptist view was truly more mixed and irresolute.

For De Bres, the Anabaptist challenge to the goodness and holiness of political power amounted to a rejection of civil government as a divine institution, though he acknowledged some diversity of opinion among them.¹² Such a rejection of civil government by Anabaptists was in mind when the 1566 edition of Art.36 of De Bres's *Confession* disapproved of "the Anabaptists and other seditious people . . . all those who reject the higher powers and magistrates."¹³ Similarly, in *Racine* De Bres resented the fact that the Anabaptists, from their earliest beginnings, "do not recognize magistrates as believers"¹⁴ and maintain that "a Christian is not permitted to be a magistrate."¹⁵ The Anabaptists, De Bres declared in the beginning of *Racine*, "reject the magistracy which was ordained by God."¹⁶ One could expect little better from heretics, *Racine* made clear,

¹² *Racine*, 806.

¹³ *Confession* (1566), 20 r. Art.36 of De Bres's *Confession* of 1561 similarly condemned "those who want to reject the Superiors and Magistrates," but did not explicitly mention the Anabaptists. *Confession* (1561)^F, 21; (1561)^C, 33.

¹⁴ *Racine* a vii r.

¹⁵ *Racine*, 23.

¹⁶ *Racine*, 23.

as it traced such political notions to the Dutch Anabaptists' seditious and heretical predecessors, mentioning not only Hubmaier, Rinck, Hut, and Denck, but specifically Thomas Müntzer. These previous generations of Anabaptists not only attacked and slandered the ministers of the true church, but also turned on the magistrates and "forcefully and determinedly attack the civil governments."¹⁷ The false teachers of the Anabaptists were always taking aim at the institutions of the ordained ministry and the civil government, so that they could separate the leaders from the flock and then rob it.¹⁸ This, De Bres argued, "is the true and first origin of the Anabaptists, of whom Müntzer, a seditious man, was the first parent and author."¹⁹ The errors of this rebellious Müntzer were still maintained by "his disciples, the Anabaptists of our time," as if they were the true, biblical doctrine.²⁰ Later in *Racine*, De Bres warned that the Anabaptists, "without order or measure raise themselves up against this holy ordinance [the political government] of God, to abolish it among men."²¹ They "desire to destroy and totally abolish the kings, princes, and magistrates of the earth," they "disesteem the magistrates," and they "call the magistrates, princes, and kings, 'murderers and children of Satan.'²²

In fact, however, most Anabaptists were far less dismissive of political government than De Bres's portrayal gave them credit. Almost no Anabaptists "rejected" civil government, as *Racine* charged; further, almost all Anabaptists in the 1550's and 1560's believed that God, in his providence, raises up political rulers, that government must be

¹⁷ *Racine*, 4.

¹⁸ *Racine*, 4.

¹⁹ *Racine*, 16.

²⁰ *Racine*, 16.

²¹ *Racine*, 832.

²² *Racine*, 847–8.

obeyed, and that taxes and tributes must be paid.²³ A few influential Anabaptists were even quite positive about political government. For example, Menno Simons (who was, as previously noted, the main Anabaptist antagonist against whom *Racine* aimed) accepted the legitimacy of the magistracy,²⁴ taught that God in his providence raised up kings and rulers to political power,²⁵ and permitted Christians to serve in government. Menno Simons acknowledged that the political office was God's institution and sometimes even spoke of the political office as an "ordained office."²⁶ He accordingly stressed the duty of obedience (within certain limits) to governments,²⁷ as well as the paying of taxes, tolls, and tributes.²⁸ In brief, Menno Simons attempted to "maintain a sympathetic understanding of the rulers as potential Christians," as Stayer describes it.²⁹

To be sure, the appreciative view of the magistrates in the moderate political theology of some Anabaptists like Menno Simons, Hans Denck, Pilgram Marpeck, and Melchior Hoffman was exceptional and out of character with the general Anabaptist worldview of ethical dualism.³⁰ Generally speaking, Anabaptists in the 1560's held a negative – or at least ambiguous – view of political government. They understood the Bible as explicitly

²³ See e.g. Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected primary sources* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 1998), 244. Stayer points out that it was only the Hutterites who refused to pay taxes used for war or to pay the executioner.

²⁴ See e.g. Friesen, *Menno Simons*, 323–4; James M. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1979), 313; Visser, "Mennonites and Doopgezinden," 307.

²⁵ See e.g. Verduin, *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 551.

²⁶ See e.g. Menno's "Reply to False Accusations" in Verduin, *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 550; "Reply to Gellius Faber" in Verduin, *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 726–7. See also Friesen, *Menno Simons*, 324.

²⁷ See e.g. Verduin, *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 284–5.

²⁸ See e.g. Verduin, *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 549.

²⁹ Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 335.

³⁰ Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 335. The most atypical Anabaptist with respect to political theology, Stayer argues, was Hubmaier with his almost magisterial Protestant convictions. Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 336–7.

forbidding believers to bear arms and to swear oaths, and they aimed to establish an alternative community parallel to, or outside of, the political religious community of the state – positions which trivialized the political rulers’ claims and, in the eyes of reformers since Luther, Zwingli, and Bullinger, refused “to yield to the indispensable requirements of the . . . nation state.”³¹ More typically, even in the second half of the sixteenth century, Anabaptists retained the suspicion of the early Anabaptist Schleithem Confession, which held that the “sword is ordained of God outside the perfection of Christ,” that “the magistrates’ authority is of the flesh, but Christians’ authority is of the Spirit,” and that as Christ had fled attempts to make him king, so Christians should flee the office of ruler.³² Accordingly, many Dutch Anabaptists insisted that once a person in political power was converted to true Christianity, he would no longer be able to stay in office, and had to leave and follow Christ to the cross.³³ Such skeptical views of political rule were hardening in the Netherlands during the 1560’s and 1570’s.³⁴

³¹ Clarence Bauman, "Theology of 'the two kingdoms': a comparison of Luther and the Anabaptists," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 38, no. 1 (1964): 38. See also Clarence Bauman, *Gewaltlosigkeit im Täuferum. Eine Untersuchung zur theologischen Ethik des Oberdeutschen Täuferums der Reformationszeit* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 13–23. A cursory overview is given by Adriaan D. Pont, *Algemene Kerkgeschiedenis: 'n Inleiding tot die Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis van die Beginjare tot 1795* (Pretoria: Hervormde Teologiese Studies, 1994), 32.

³² See art.6 of the Schleithem Confession. Wenger, John Christian. "The Schleithem confession of faith." *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 19, no. 4 (1945): 250–1. I have changed Wenger’s translation for clarity where he translates the phrase, “The government magistracy is according to the flesh, but the Christians’ is according to the Spirit.” (251). Stayer writes that the Schleithem articles’ statements on political government “arose quite naturally from the early Anabaptists’ modeling themselves on the New Testament.” Stayer, “The Anabaptist Revolt and Political and Religious Power,” 70. See also Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 122–3. The citations from the Swiss Brethren’s 1575 *Simple Confession* in Friesen, *Menno Simons*, 325, give some impression of the continuity between the ideas expressed in the Schleithem confession and continental Anabaptism of the second half of the sixteenth century.

³³ Friesen, *Menno Simons*, 326.

³⁴ See Stayer, “The Anabaptist Revolt and Political and Religious Power,” 69.

Thus, there was a difference between the ambiguous notion of political office held by mainstream Anabaptists, even those who consented with Menno Simons that “the office of a magistrate is ordained of God,” and the lofty notion of office defended by Dutch reformers like De Bres.³⁵ Anabaptists certainly did not ascribe to political office, considered as an abstract notion, a good and holy status.³⁶ When, for example, Pilgram Marpeck wrote, “I admit worldly, carnal, and earthly rulers as servants of God in earthly matters,” he was granting the political rulers a certain usefulness in the divinely ordained scheme of things; however, this idea of “office” was quite removed from De Bres’s idea of a political institution that was divinely desired and holy and good.³⁷ Anabaptists frowned upon the Reformed’s unqualified seal of divine approval, at least in principle, upon the political office. As a result, Menno Simons complained that the Reformed were saying “yea and amen to everything the magistracy commands or does, whether it is agreeable to the Scriptures or not.”³⁸ As De Bres was well aware, Anabaptists accused the Reformed ministers of being “flatterers of kings and princes, attributing to them what by no means properly belongs to them.”³⁹ Hence, the Anabaptists charged the Reformed church leaders with naïve optimism in their assessment of the political office which amounted to encouragement of the rulers in their sinful use of power.⁴⁰ Menno Simons, for instance, protested to the Dutch reformer Micron, “[You] encourage and strengthen

³⁵ Simons, *Complete Writings*, 549. To cite one other, Peter Riedeman called the magistrate an “ordinance and establishment of God.” Peter Riedeman, *Account of Our Religion, Doctrine and Faith* cited in Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Primary Sources*, 258.

³⁶ Art.6 of the Schleithem Confession in Wenger, “The Schleithem confession of faith,” 250.

³⁷ Marpeck, “Confession,” cited in Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Primary Sources*, 251.

³⁸ Simons, *Collected Writings*, 549.

³⁹ *Racine*, 806.

⁴⁰ See the discussion in the previous chapter.

the rulers in their impenitent lives not a little by your writing; rulers who are usually quite obdurate, proud, ambitious, puffed up, self-conceited, pompous, selfish, earthly, carnal, and often bloodthirsty.”⁴¹

The tensions between the Anabaptists’ notion of political “office” and De Bres’s were thus palpable, but the Anabaptist position did not fit the kind of “rejection” of the magistrate that De Bres ascribed to them. Was De Bres’s portrayal of Anabaptist political theology one-sided to the point of being misleading? A few considerations can be suggested in De Bres’s defense. First, De Bres was by no means unique among his colleagues in depicting the Anabaptists as rejecting the political magistracy. For instance, Jean Crespin, who knew De Bres personally, wrote in 1570 that the Anabaptists wanted to abrogate the office of the magistrate by insisting that the political office must be “outside the church.”⁴² Likewise, De Bres’s co-laborer in the quest for a Dutch confessional alliance, Jean Taffin, complained that the Anabaptists were degrading and overthrowing the office of magistrate, albeit indirectly.⁴³

Second, De Bres’s overall aim, as previous chapters argued, was to safeguard the confessional alliance by offering a theological defense of the legitimacy of the political office. He generalized the Anabaptist critiques of the political office because his central concern in discussing the authority of the magistrate was to show, as the subtitle of the

⁴¹ Menno Simons, Leonard Verduin, J. C. Wenger, and Harold Stauffer Bender, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons: C.1496–1561* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1976), 920.

⁴² Crespin, *Histoire de Vray Tesmoins*, 83 r – 83 v. On De Bres’s contact with Crespin see F. Pijper, *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, Vol.8 (’s-Gravenhage: Marinus Nijhoff, 1914), 466. See also Gilmont, “Guy de Bres. Nouveau bilan bibliographique,” 31–2.

⁴³ Jean Taffin, *Instruction contre les erreurs des anabaptistes* (Harlem: Gilles Rooman, 1589), 163. Taffin lists the Anabaptist views of the “duty, authority, and power of the magistrates” as one of their four main errors, the others being their view of Christ’s incarnation, their rejection of infant baptism, and their rejection of vows. Taffin, *Instruction contre les erreurs des anabaptistes*, 1.

chapter stated, “how the magistrates were instituted by God.”⁴⁴ Although De Bres gave the occasional glimpse that the Anabaptist position was more complex than his generalization (he acknowledged, for example, that Menno Simons held to a more moderate position), disagreements and tensions in Anabaptist thought were of secondary interest to him.⁴⁵ For De Bres, the main value of these differences between Anabaptists was to impress upon his readers what he described as the hallmark of heresy: there were more heresies and strange doctrines among the Anabaptists than there were individuals! In fact, De Bres could not even “name all their errors and crude fantasies,” and he sighed that it would be “foolishness to try and make sense of all their errors.”⁴⁶ One can hardly fault De Bres for not attempting what he considered a futile effort.

Third, De Bres was being rhetorically astute. To attempt to address the subtleties of the notion of political “office” of moderate Anabaptists like Menno Simons and its departures from magisterial Reformed understandings would have complicated De Bres’s endeavor of offering a defense for the legitimacy of political magistrates. Although moderate Anabaptist critiques of the *corpus christianum* also undermined political legitimacy, they were at least milder and indirect – and more sophisticated and hence harder to refute. The route which De Bres chose was to target the more radical tendencies in Anabaptist political theology and magnify these as the defining elements in Anabaptist political theology.

⁴⁴ *Racine*, 806.

⁴⁵ Menno, De Bres writes, “does not want to force Christians to abandon his [political] office, but wants to refer him to his own conscience.” Christians may exercise the function of a magistrate “if they take care not to spill any blood, because that is inappropriate for Christians.” *Racine*, 806.

⁴⁶ *Racine*, 1.

The advantage of targeting the more radical Anabaptist positions was that these views, with their broad categorical claims, were easier to explode. De Bres found it easy, for instance, to give biblical examples of political rulers approved by God – Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Daniel, David, Hezekiah, and Josiah, among others, to show that “being a believer and exercising earthly power can agree quite well.”⁴⁷ This refutation demolished the claim that holding political office was irreconcilable with faith in God. On the other hand, this refutation would accomplish little against the claims of moderate Anabaptists like Menno Simons. The moderates could answer that, even if many godly men in the Old Testament were political rulers, there was a sharp distinction between the Old and New Testaments.⁴⁸ Moreover, even if rulers were “chosen and ordained of God . . . called and chosen to . . . office,” the methods of sixteenth century governments revealed that “the scale of justice” was now “badly out of balance,” and the rulers were “an abominable, detestable band of murderers,” who were the “Babylonian whore. . . drunken with the blood of the saints and of the martyrs of Jesus.”⁴⁹

Fourth, Anabaptist political theology was troubled by tensions and contradictions, and even individual theologians like Menno Simons were constantly changing their views about political power.⁵⁰ It seems probable, as some scholars conclude, that moderate Anabaptists like Menno Simons never resolved important contradictions in their

⁴⁷ *Racine*, 807–8.

⁴⁸ See e.g. Bauman, *Gewaltlosigkeit im Täuferum*, 155–170.

⁴⁹ Simons, “Christian Baptism,” in *Collected Writings*, 285, 286; Simons, “Reply to False Accusations” in *Collected Writings*, 552.

⁵⁰ Lydia Harder, for example, mentions the “many shifts and changes in Menno’s thinking” about power and authority. Lydia Harder, “Power and Authority in Mennonite Theological Development.” In *Power, Authority, and the Anabaptist Tradition*, edited by Benjamin W. Redekop and Calvin W. Redekop, 73–94 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 75.

positions, most notably that of allowing Christians to be political rulers while disallowing Christian involvement in any form of violence, including state-sponsored violence. To disallow Christians to be rulers offered no better solution, because the contradiction would remain between “the assertion that government was ordained by God and the claim that no Christian could be a magistrate, with its corollary that no magistrate could be a Christian,” as Klaassen puts it.⁵¹ De Bres, for one, mocked Anabaptist attempts to make sense of their contradicting impulses: “Can we not clearly see the absurdities to which these people’s ignorance carry them?”⁵² Of course, Anabaptist ideas did not have to comprise a consistent system to successfully erode political legitimacy. But it would be fastidious, at least by sixteenth century standards, to expect of De Bres to evenly balance and integrate the troublesome tensions, shifts, and discrepancies of Anabaptist political theology in his generalized treatment.

The significance about De Bres’s rhetorical strategy was not, however, that it painted a somewhat one-sided picture of Anabaptist political theology, but that this one-sided picture served to confirm, as we also saw in the previous chapter, the reasonability of political compulsion of religion. In other words, De Bres was retracing – and reinforcing – the rationale for the use of political force against the Anabaptist heresy which the previous chapter outlined: not only were the Anabaptists *heretics*, they were (like all heretics, and certainly also like the Roman Catholics) politically dangerous. This intimated that the Anabaptists (and, even more so, the Roman Catholics) should, for the sake of political stability, be subjected to political restrictions.

⁵¹ Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Primary Sources*, 245. See also Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 318–324.

⁵² *Racine*, 811. See also, for example, *Racine*, 842–3, 847.

Theological Arguments for a *Holy* and *Good* Political Office

On an intellectual level, what Anabaptism's direct and indirect challenge to the legitimacy of political rule prompted De Bres to propound was the connection between the political compulsion of religion and the idea of political office as a "holy ordinance of God."⁵³ His positive assessment of the status of the political order as *good* and *holy* was De Bres's crucial disagreement with the Anabaptists. While Anabaptists shared (to different degrees) many Reformed assumptions about political government and its role in the divine scheme of affairs, they believed that government's "means and methods were sub-Christian," as Stayer puts it.⁵⁴

To prove that the so-called "office of the magistrate" was intrinsically good and holy, De Bres offered several theological arguments, especially in his anti-Anabaptist treatise, *Racine*. Two central arguments will be considered here. As the analysis below will show, the result of De Bres's arguments was not only to demonstrate the holiness and goodness – and hence *legitimacy* – of the political magistracy, but also to imply that the ruler had the task to use political power against false religion and idolatry.

The Divine Origin of Political Office in Old Testament Israel

De Bres's first theological argument for the divine legitimacy of the political office was his appeal to the divine institution of political rulers in the Old Testament theocracy.

⁵³ *Racine*, 806, 813.

⁵⁴ Stayer, *Anabaptism in Outline: Primary Sources*, 245. As Klaassen summarizes the views of Denck and Marpeck, although it is permissible for Christians to be a magistrate, "the conflict between the Spirit of Christ and the methods of the world would not allow a Christian to survive as a magistrate." Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Primary Sources*, 245.

This divine institution of political rule, De Bres contended, remained after the coming of the New Testament and was still in force. This argument also implied a conclusion about the political compulsion of religion: continuity of the Old Testament political office entailed that the specifically religious jurisdiction of the Old Testament political office similarly remained after the coming of the New Testament.

The first paragraph of the *Remonstrance to the Magistrates* gives a crisp statement of De Bres's view of the divine institution, and hence implied legitimacy, of the king and nobility:

Oh, virtuous magistrates and high nobles, we confess with the heart and the mouth that the King has been ordained by God over his people, and we recognize also you as his vicars and deputies over his provinces, and thereby placed in authority in your dominions, charges, and offices, not only by the King, but by the living God. Unto his justice you have been called to be ministers.⁵⁵

To substantiate this statement, De Bres cites several biblical passages, including some about Moses's appointment of rulers and about the establishment of the Israelite monarchy.⁵⁶ Similar references to the political office of Mosaic officers and of the kings of Israel are found in the proof texts cited in the *Letter to the King*, and, more extensively, in the marginal proof texts of the *Confession* and in *Racine*.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ *Confession* (1561)^C, d iii r.

⁵⁶ In the margin next to the first part of the statement are cited 1 Samuel 8:9, 1 Timothy 2:2, and Acts 23:5. Next to the second part of the statement are cited Exodus 22:28, Deuteronomy 16:18, Exodus 23, Romans 13.

⁵⁷ In the *Confession*, see e.g. the references to Exodus 18:20, Jeremiah 22:3, Psalm 82, Deuteronomy 1:16, Deuteronomy 17:16, Deuteronomy 16:19, Psalm 101, Jeremiah 21:12, Judges 21:25, Jeremiah 22:3 in *Confession* (1561)^C, 32–3. In the *Remonstrance to the Magistrates*, the proof texts relating to the institution of political government are 1 Samuel 8:9, 1 Timothy 2:2, Acts 23:5, Exodus 22:28, Deuteronomy 16:18, Exodus 23, and Romans 13 in *Confession* (1561)^C, d iii r. In the *Letter to the King* they are Romans 13:1, Prov. 8:15, and “the book of Samuel.” *Confession*, 1561^C, a iv r.

For example, in *Racine*, De Bres mentions a few cases of individuals exercising political power in pagan theocracies (like Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon) or in pre-monarchy patriarchal settings (such as with Abraham and Isaac), but the bulk of De Bres's Old Testament appeals are to the Israelite theocracy.⁵⁸ De Bres mentions the judges appointed by Moses on advice of his father in law, Jethro, and soon proceeds to the "good judges" of Israel, and especially "the good kings, such as David, Hezekiah, and Josiah."⁵⁹ God's instruction to Moses, to "take Joshua, the son of Nun, the man upon whom is the Spirit, and lay your hands upon him," showed that "it is God who gives political leaders over us" and that "the office of kings, of princes, and of magistrates are . . . ordained of God, being pleasing and agreeable to Him."⁶⁰ Similarly, in his *Confession*, De Bres cites texts about God's ordination of the Israelite monarchy to prove that "God . . . wants the world to be governed by their [the kings, princes, and magistrates] laws and policies."⁶¹ Likewise, in his *Letter to the King*, De Bres cites simply "the book of Samuel" to substantiate his statement that kings and princes "did not come by usurpation or tyranny, but by the proper institution of God."⁶²

It is worth pointing out, however, that De Bres's strategy of appealing to the biblical accounts of the divine origin of the Mosaic commonwealth and the monarchy of Israel does not support the legitimacy of sixteenth century "kings, princes, and magistrates" as effortlessly as De Bres articulated it. There is much that De Bres's exegesis took for

⁵⁸ *Racine*, 807–8.

⁵⁹ *Racine*, 807–8.

⁶⁰ *Racine*, 809.

⁶¹ *Confession*, 1561^C, 32.

⁶² "Letter to the King," *Confession*, 1561^C, a iv r. De Bres also cites in the margin Proverbs 8:15, as will be mentioned below.

granted.⁶³ De Bres assumed an essential parallel between the ancient Israelite political organizations and those of the early modern period, which is disputable.⁶⁴ These kinds of difficulties need not concern us in this dissertation. What *is* relevant for our purposes, due to its consequences for De Bres's view of the political compulsion of religion, is that the kind of continuity between the Old Testament and New Testament political administrations which De Bres insisted on was precisely the point of controversy with his Anabaptist opponents. This controversy directly affected De Bres's attempt to support the

⁶³ For example, a significant proof text cited by De Bres's *Confession* is Judges 21:25 ("In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.") For De Bres, this proof text, among others, apparently confirmed the superiority of kingship over, perhaps, decentralized political government that lacked a clear *locus* of sovereignty, such as the pre-monarchical period of the Judges, see *Confession*, 1561^C, 33. De Bres was unconcerned, of course, given his defense of the political compulsion of religion, about the implication of some of the parallel passages in Scripture (Judges 8:6, for instance) that base the superiority of the monarchy in its restoration of centralized religion and its eradication of false religious practices. But he also did not attempt to interact with countervailing biblical data hostile to the institution of kingship in Israel. One example from Scripture is God's declaration that by desiring a king, Israel "have rejected me from being king over them," 1 Samuel 8:7–8. See also e.g. 1 Samuel 8:4–22, 10:18–19, 12:7–21; Judges 8:22 – 9:57; Hosea 13:10. In 1 Samuel 12:21, the desire for a king is ranked with turning aside after "empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty." Bruce Birch identifies at least two biblical assessments of the Israelite monarchy, a "'sinful-but-still-of-God' view of the kingship" and a more dismissive "Deuteronomistic" view. Bruce Charles Birch, "The Rise of the Israelite Monarchy: The Growth and Development of 1 Samuel 7–15" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1970), 28. For a perspective on how the Old Testament assessments of monarchy troubled even ancient interpreters, see Tessa Rajak, *Jewish Perspectives on Hellenistic Rulers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). See also Christopher R. North, *The Old Testament Interpretation of History* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 55 f.

⁶⁴ See e.g. the sources cited by Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger, "Sociological and Biblical Views of the Early State" in *The Origins of the Ancient Israelite States*, ed. Philip R. Davies and Volkmar Fritz (Sheffield: Sheffield academic Press, 1996), 83. Pre-monarchical Israel, at least, did not exhibit the features of sovereignty that De Bres was apparently willing to concede to monarchs like King Philip II (he calls Philip II "the King, our sovereign prince and lord," for example, see *Confession* (1561)^C, d iii r), and was apparently prepared to regard the sovereign state as divinely approved. The increasing success of Western monarchs in appropriating sovereignty was only a fifteenth and sixteenth century phenomenon, however. See e.g. Eire, *Reformations*, 13–15. There are also additional factors which complicate the parallel between the Israelite polity and the early modern states. One of these is that in Israelite theocracy, both in the Mosaic confederacy and the monarchy, the office of king or ruler was inseparable from the divinely appointed priestly and prophetic offices. For example, the rulers were assisted by direct divine revelation offered via the high priest through the Urim and the Thummim. As Bruce Waltke explains, this mode of revelation was specifically used for "royal and priestly decisions." Thus important military or other decisions by the kings Saul and David and by the post-exilic governors of Israelite nation were assisted by the priest and the Urim and Thummim. Bruce K. Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 54. Additionally, the divinely appointed office of prophet also functioned to communicate divine revelation to the royal court. Waltke, *Will of God*, 51–2.

legitimacy of sixteenth century political rulers by appealing to the divine foundations of Israel's polity.

The proper relation between the Old and New Testaments and related questions, such as the degree of continuity between Old Testament Israel and the Christian church or the early modern European nations, was a major point of disagreement in De Bres's dispute with the Anabaptists. While De Bres assumed a large degree of continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament administrations, Anabaptists saw a much sharper break.⁶⁵ Mainstream Anabaptists, Stayer notes, displayed a "kind of Christocentric piety that eroded the authority of the Old Testament and the Law" more so than other Protestant groups allowed.⁶⁶ Thus the law and institutions of the Old Testament theocracy were marginalized in Anabaptist theology. As Bouman summarizes it, "In the new dispensation, the new law of Christ, that 'of love,' comes in the place of the 'judicial law of Moses.'" ⁶⁷ For the Anabaptists, institutions and practices ordained for Old Testament Israel ceased in the New Testament period because, as George Williams points out, they insisted upon a discontinuity between the church and Israel in the Old Testament.⁶⁸ In Anabaptist thinking, the New Testament's authority was decisive and the example of the early church described in the Acts of the Apostles predominated.⁶⁹

Accordingly, the Anabaptists saw the Old Testament institution of kingship almost exclusively as a shadow or type of Christ rather than as a perpetual prototype for the

⁶⁵ See Bauman, *Gewaltlosigkeit im Täuferum*, 155–170.

⁶⁶ Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 123.

⁶⁷ Bauman, *Gewaltlosigkeit im Täuferum*, 163.

⁶⁸ Williams, George Huntston. *The Radical Reformation*. Kirksville: Truman State University Press, 2000, 1286.

⁶⁹ Stayer, "Anabaptist Revolt and Political and Anabaptist Power," 70.

organization of society. Because the kingly office, like the priestly office, prefigured the person and office of Christ, Anabaptists concluded that, like the priesthood, kingship was abolished in the New Testament.⁷⁰ The coming of the Messiah, prefigured in the Old Testament law and institutions, now demanded the realization of a “free Christian community” rather than the “old theocratic principle.”⁷¹

Similarly, because the Old Testament theocratical institutions were typological, for Anabaptists the most trenchant implication of the discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments was that sixteenth century magisterial attempts to emulate the Old Testament’s political compulsion of religion were misguided.⁷² As Marpeck’s Confession stated,

Where the governmental authority is used, as it was in the Old Testament, to root out the false prophets, Christ's Word and Spirit are weakened, and are turned into a servile spirit designed to uphold insufficient and weak laws. For the Word of God is the sharp, two-edged sword, separating and chastising false and true, good and evil. It is to be feared that the wrath of God comes chiefly because man, with a semblance of faith, attempts to protect the kingdom of Christ.⁷³

⁷⁰ It is instructive to compare the Short Confession of Hans De Ries written some decades later. De Ries stated, “Christ has brought to an end and removed from among his people the unbearable burden of the law of Moses with its shadows and figures, the priestly office of the temple, altar, sacrifice and all else that was a part of the priestly office. Likewise he brought to an end the kingly office and what came with it, the kingdom, sword, the wrath of the law, war, and whatever prefigured his Person and office. These were the image, the shadow of him who was to come.” Cornelius J. Dyck, “A Short Confession of Faith by Hans de Ries.” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 38 (1964): 5–19, 13.

⁷¹ Bauman, *Gewaltlosigkeit im Täuferium*, 163. Bauman is describing the view of Pilgram Marpeck.

⁷² On this matter, once again, the views of some Anabaptists like Balthasar Hubmaier and even to some extent Menno Simons were more in line with the magisterial Reformation, but exceptional among Anabaptists. On the general Anabaptist view, see e.g. Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Primary Sources*, 290–301.

⁷³ William Klassen and Walter Klaassen, eds., *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 1978), 150.

Hence the last thing Anabaptists thought political rulers could appeal to in an attempt to demonstrate their legitimacy were their attempts to “advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ,” as De Bres’s *Confession* described the task of the magistrate.⁷⁴

De Bres rejected such sharp divisions between the Old and New Testaments as unwarranted, and he exhorted Anabaptists to “obey Christ, who commands you to more diligently consult the Scriptures of the Old Testament.”⁷⁵ A more central role for the Old Testament was necessary, especially with respect to the issue of baptism; however, the Anabaptists’s failure to grasp the continuities with Old Testament Israel extended “also in many other matters, to properly constitute our lives,” such as politics.⁷⁶ De Bres further argued from a number of key Old Testament biblical passages that the office of political ruler in the Old Testament Israelite theocracy continued in the New Testament age, and thus was still valid in the sixteenth century. As De Bres put it, “the [Old Testament] magistrate remains in his position of authority” after the coming of the New Testament church.⁷⁷

A pivotal verse used by De Bres to show that the magistrate remained in his original Old Testament authority was the prophecy of Isaiah 49:23:

Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.

⁷⁴ *Confession* (1561)^C, 33.

⁷⁵ *Racine*, 720.

⁷⁶ *Racine*, 720.

⁷⁷ *Racine*, 825.

It will be useful to briefly consider De Bres's understanding of Isaiah 49, because it demonstrates how his attempt to ground the legitimacy of sixteenth century political institutions in the Old Testament theocracy also mandated the use of political power to compel religion.

According to De Bres, Isaiah 49:23 shows that the office of the Old Testament Israel's political ruler continues after the coming of Christ in the New Testament, and is therefore still good and legitimate:

Who does not plainly see that just as the holy people in the church of Israel defended and maintained their state [*republique*] in peace by a true Christian faith, by repelling with the edge of the sword all their enemies – why would the same thing not be permitted to the Christian kings and to the magistrates to do similar things by the same faith, when it should be necessary? Especially since the prophet Isaiah prophesied that the political power would remain in the Christian church, when he says that the kings and queens would be the nourishers of the church. By this he clearly promises that the kings and the magistrates in the Christian church would have the same power and authority to punish the godless as the good kings earlier. The prophet therefore does not take anything away from their office, but rather establishes them and elevates them in the church, and with honorable titles makes them patrons and protectors of the children of God.⁷⁸

In this explanation of Isaiah's prophecy, De Bres stressed the continuity between the office of the Old Testament kings of Israel and the office of the sixteenth century rulers, the "Christian kings and . . . magistrates" who have "the same power and authority to punish the godless as the good [Old Testament] kings earlier."

The important point to notice is that this argument for the continuity of the divine institution of the political ruler implies that the sixteenth century rulers have "the same power and authority" as the Old Testament kings – hence also a specifically religious

⁷⁸ *Racine*, 824–5. Isaiah 49:23 is cited in the margin on page 824.

function. In fact, Isaiah 49:23 was a *locus classicus* among reformers who stressed the magistrate's task to also enforce the first table of the Decalogue.⁷⁹ De Bres, at least in his later writings from 1559 onward, did not shy away from this implication either. This is evidenced by his use of the same verse, Isaiah 49:23, in Art.36 of his 1561 *Confession* as one of the proofs that the political ruler is “to remove and overthrow all idolatry and false worship of God, to destroy the kingdom of the Antichrist, and advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ.”⁸⁰ To understand Isaiah 49:23 as mandating such a task was also the interpretation of Calvin.⁸¹ Calvin explained that Isaiah 49:23 expects kings to “bestow

⁷⁹ Calvin is a good example. In his October 1555 sermon on Deuteronomy 13, Calvin shortly expounds Isaiah 49:23 and writes that political rulers are to “take God's church into their protection to maintain it in the pure doctrine, and in the same religion that is set down in God's word. Since it is so, it is to be concluded, not only that it is lawful for all kings and magistrates to punish heretics and such as have perverted the pure truth; but also that they be bound to do it, and that they misbehave themselves towards God if they suffer errors to roust without redress, and employ not their whole power to show a greater zeal in that behalf than in all other things. . . Kings . . . should employ their whole power and authority to maintain the good doctrine, and to cause God to be honored and served, and to drive away all idolatry and superstition.” Calvin, *Sermons upon Deuteronomie*, 537. (Spelling modernized.)

⁸⁰ Art.36 of the 1561 *Confession* reads: “Finally, we believe that our good God, because of the corruption of the human race has ordained kings, princes, and magistrates, desiring that the world be governed by their laws and policies. . . For this purpose he put the sword in the hand of the Magistrate to punish the wicked, and to protect the virtuous and good people. And their office is not only, to restrain and watch over the political, but also over the church matters, to remove and overthrow all idolatry and false worship of God, to destroy the kingdom of the Antichrist, and advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, to ensure the preaching of the Word of the Gospel everywhere, so that God be honored and served by everyone as He has required it by his Word. . . And for this reason, we detest all those who want to reject the Superiors and Magistrates. . .” (“Nous croyons finalement que nostre bon Dieu à cause de la depravation du genre humain a ordonné des Rois, Princes et Magistrats, voulant que le monde soit gouverné par leurs loix et polices . . . Pour ceste fin il a mis le glaive en la main du Magistrat pour punir les meschants, et maintenir les bons et gens de bien. Et non seulement leur office est, de reprimer et veiller sur la politique, ains aussi sur les choses ecclesiastiques, pour oster et ruiner toute idolatrie et faux service de Dieu, pour destruire le royaume de l'Antechrist, et avancer le Royaume de Iesus-Christ, faire prescher la Parole de l'Evangile partout, afin que Dieu soit honoré et servi d'un chacun comme il le requiert par sa Parole. . . Et sur cecy, nous detestons tous ceux qui veulent reietter les Superioritez et Magistrats.”) *Confession* (1561)^C, 32–3.

⁸¹ John Calvin, *Joannis Calvinii commentarii in Isaiam prophetam: ad Eduardum VI. Angliae Regem; additus est sententiarum et locorum index* (Geneva: Jean Crespin, 1551). The French translation is *Commentaires sur le prophète Isaïe par M Jean Calvin. Avec la table, tant des passages que des sentences* (Geneva: Adam & Jean Riveriz, 1552). Calvin explains that in Is.49:23 “something remarkable is here demanded from princes,” that is, something “besides an ordinary profession of faith,” because “the Lord has bestowed on them authority and power to defend the Church and to promote the glory of God.” John Calvin and William Pringle (translator), *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, Vol.4* (Edinburgh: Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1850), 40. The word Calvin uses for “defend” in the French

careful attention on these things,” that is, “removing superstitions and putting an end to all wicked idolatry . . . advancing the kingdom of Christ and maintaining purity of doctrine . . . purging scandals and cleansing from the filth that corrupts piety and impairs the luster of the Divine majesty.”⁸² To a remarkable extent, Calvin’s thinking about Isaiah 49:23 is echoed *verbatim* in De Bres’s *Confession*.⁸³

Thus, what follows from De Bres’s stress upon the continued validity of the divinely ordained Old Testament political office is not only that the sixteenth century magistrates occupied a divinely ordained office (like the kings of Israel), but also that this office involved the use of political force in religious matters (again, like the kings of Israel). After all, the political magistrate retains “the same power and authority” in the sixteenth century, hence his proper task includes using political power to maintain true religion and

translation of the Latin original is *maintiennent* (from *maintenir*.) Calvin, *Commentaires sur le prophète Isaïe*, 673. Precisely this notion of “defending” or “protecting” (*maintenir*) the church is also seen in De Bres’s description of the task of the political ruler in Art.36 of his *Confession*. “Pour ceste fin il a mis le glaive en la main du Magistrat pour punir les meschants, et maintenir les bons et gens de bien” *Confession* (1561)^C, 33. The word *maintenir* that is specifically used of the sacred ministry in the 1566 text of Art.36 of the *Confession*: “Et non seulement leur office est de prendre garde et veiller sur la police, ains aussi de maintenir le sacré ministere.” *Confession* (1566), 20. Kings that serve Christ, Calvin explains, will be “nursing-fathers and protectors of believers, and will bravely defend the doctrine of the Word.” Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 41; cf. Calvin, *Commentaires sur le prophète Isaïe*, 674.

⁸² Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 40; cf. Calvin, *Commentaires sur le prophète Isaïe*, 673. Calvin continues that as the church’s nursing fathers, kings should also “at the same time supply the pastors and ministers of the Word with all that is necessary for food and maintenance, provide for the poor and guard the Church against the disgrace of pauperism; erect schools, and appoint salaries for the teachers and board for the students.” Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 41.

⁸³ Compare De Bres, *Confession* (1561)^C, 33 and Calvin, *Commentaires sur le prophète Isaïe*, 673, where Calvin writes, “d’arracher et oster les superstitions, et abolir toutes ceremonies abominables, d’avancer le royaume de Iesus Christ, et conserver la pureté de la doctrine, de chaser et reietter les scandales, et toutes autres choses qui diminuent la maiesté et gloire de Dieu.” Calvin’s phrase for the duty “to advance the kingdom of Jesus Christ” (“*avancer le royaume de Iesus Christ*”), is precisely the phrase De Bres uses in Art. 36. Calvin talks of the king’s duty to “expel and remove the idolatries, and to abolish all offensive ceremonies” (“*d’arracher et oster les superstitions, et abolir toutes ceremonies abominables,*”) an idea echoed in Art. 36’s description of the ruler’s task to “to remove and abolish all idolatry and false worship of God” (“*pour oster et ruiner toute idolatrie et faux service de Dieu.*”).

suppress idolatry and false religion.⁸⁴ Thus, it is precisely the continuing validity of the Old Testament office of political ruler which De Bres saw as undergirding the duty of the magistrate to use political force to destroy idolatry and false worship.

In accordance with this view of the origin of political office, one finds that De Bres's move to a positive, more magisterial appreciation of the office of government was accompanied by his embrace of the political compulsion of religion, as was seen in a previous chapter. *Baston* evidences this more than any of De Bres's other books. *Baston* (1559) based the government's duty to punish heretics primarily on Old Testament passages about the punishment of idolatry and false religion under the Israelite theocracy.⁸⁵ In addition to citing specific Scripture references and quoting key Old Testament passages about the execution of idolaters in full, De Bres wrote that this duty of "the Christian princes . . . to maintain the honor of God" is proved by "the examples of Moses, Asa, Jehu, Josiah, Elijah . . . who killed the priests of Baal, and Jehoiada who was called by God to kill Athaliah."⁸⁶

De Bres remained consistent in this understanding of the political office as holy, good, and rooted in the Old Testament theocracy. Two examples of this consistency will

⁸⁴ *Racine*, 825. Other magisterial reformers drew the same conclusion. Thus John Knox wrote in chapter 24 of the the Scottish Confession of 1560: "Moreover, to kings, princes, rulers, and magistrates, we affirm that *chiefly* and *most principally* the conservation and purgation of the religion appertains; so that not only they are appointed for civil policy, but also for maintenance of the true religion, and for suppressing of idolatry and superstition whatsoever: as in David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, Josiah, and others, highly commended for their zeal in that case, may be espied." "The Scottish Confession (1560)" in Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.2*, 205 (Emphasis added.) Like De Bres, Knox's confession moved from the divinely instituted political office of Old Testament kings like David, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Josiah to the early modern "kings, princes, rulers, and magistrates."

⁸⁵ *Baston* (1559) quotes Exodus 22:5 and several verses from the beginning of Deuteronomy 13 in full, and refers in the margin to Exodus 32, 2 Chronicles 25 (probably intending 15), 2 Kings 10, 2 Kings 23, 1 Kings 18, 2 Kings 11. Further marginal references are to Ezra 6, Daniel 3, Acts 5:4–10 and Acts 13:11. *Baston* (1559), 339–340.

⁸⁶ *Baston* (1559), 340.

suffice to illustrate the point. In Art.36 of the *Confession* of 1561, De Bres refers in the margin to the theocratic example of David and Psalm 101 to prove what the task of the political magistrate involves.⁸⁷ In *Racine*, he again refers to the example of David in Psalm 101 in a description of how “the holy judges, kings and prophets of the church of Israel zealously obeyed” God’s commandment that magistrates should execute the wicked.⁸⁸ “When he [David] talks about the virtues of the king,” writes De Bres, “he includes these, that he would cut off the wicked from the earth and destroy them, so that the unrighteous would be cast out from the city of God.”⁸⁹

Likewise, De Bres refers to that incomparable reformer among the Old Testament kings, Josiah, several times.⁹⁰ We have already mentioned in this chapter *Racine*’s comments about “good king Josiah” who, according to De Bres, consecrated his hands to

⁸⁷ In the 1561 edition it is printed to the right of the lines “For this purpose he put the sword in the hand of the Magistrate to punish the wicked, and to protect the virtuous and good people. And their office is not only, to restrain and watch over the political, but also over the church matters, to remove and overthrow all idolatry and false worship of God, to destroy the kingdom of the Antichrist.” *Confession* (1561)^c, 33. Significantly, De Bres refers to the entire Psalm, not only to select verses. Psalm 101 contains, as Calvin described it, King David’s meditation on “what kind of king he would be whenever he should be put in possession of the sovereign power which had been promised him.” John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Vol.4*, transl. James Anderson (Edinburgh: Printed for the Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 87. In Psalm 101 the Israelite king celebrates how he will use his power to actively and directly oppose all sorts of wickedness. Verse 8, for example, states, “Morning by morning I will destroy all the wicked in the land, cutting off all the evildoers from the city of the LORD.” Calvin’s comment on this verse suggests why a magisterial reformer like De Bres would have the civil ruler’s task of removing defilement from the church in mind when reading this Psalm: “David well knew that he was under obligations of a more sacred kind to do so, since the charge of the Church of God had been committed to him. And certainly if those who hold a situation so honorable do not exert themselves to the utmost of their power to remove all defilements, they are chargeable with polluting as much as in them lies the sanctuary of God; and they not only act unfaithfully towards men by betraying their welfare, but also **commit high treason against God himself.**” Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 95. (Emphasis added.)

⁸⁸ *Racine*, 817.

⁸⁹ *Racine*, 818.

⁹⁰ See e.g. *Baston* (1559), 340; *Racine a vi r*, 807–8, 819, 843.

God by purging religion and executing the idolaters.⁹¹ But Art.36 of the *Confession* also refers to 2 Kings 23 to prove that the task of the king is to eradicate idolatry and false religion. This Bible passage details Josiah's use of political power in his war against idolatry.⁹² Once again, it is what De Bres understands as the theological foundations of early modern magistrates that prompts him to assert a parallel between King Josiah's direct and active extirpation of idolatry and false religion, and the similar duty of the early modern European rulers.

Thus, De Bres rested the holiness and goodness of the divinely ordained magisterial office as well as the magistrate's task to restrict religious liberty upon an assumed continuity between the Old Testament and the sixteenth century. The Dutch nobles had reason to take courage from such apologies for the divine legitimacy of the political office. It must be pointed out, however, that some sixteenth century minds were starting to question De Bres's pivotal assumption.⁹³

⁹¹ *Racine*, 819. The marginal reference is to 2 Kings 23:20, "And he sacrificed all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars, and burned human bones on them. Then he returned to Jerusalem."

⁹² Once again, De Bres gives a reference to the entire chapter. 2 Kings 23 describes the reforms of King Josiah: Josiah purifies the temple service and commands the priests to assist (v.4), burns the objects used in idolatrous worship (v.4), deposes the false priests (v.5), burns and defiles the Asherah (v.6), breaks down the idolatrous shrines, even those used by prominent public officers (v.8), breaks down statues connected with idolatry (v.10), slaughters or sacrifices the idolatrous priests of the high places (v.20), commands the population to observe the religious ceremony of the Passover (v.21), and "puts away" those involved in idolatry and magic and various forms of false religion (v.24).

⁹³ Brad Gregory gives a charming example of this questioning in describing a (sixteenth century?) marginal note in a copy of Calvin's book to justify the execution of Servetus, *Declaration pour maintenir la vraye foy*, in the Houghton Library of Harvard. Where Calvin on page 49 "noted the esteem for Moses despite his having delivered God's command about executing blasphemers, this reader wrote: 'He was [a] Jew, but Calvin [is a] Christian; it's a different thing! [Il etoit Juif mais Calvin Chretien: c'est autre chose].'" Calvin's *Declaration pour maintenir la vraye foy que tiennent tous Chrestiens de la Trinité* (Geneva: Jean Crespin, 1554), 49, shelf mark *FC5.C1394.Eh554d, as cited by Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*, 391.

God's Identification with Political Rule

The second of De Bres's important theological arguments for a holy, good, and divinely instituted political office was to identify political rule with God himself. To elaborate, we shall note three ways in which De Bres connected the identification of political rule with God so as to imply the goodness and holiness of a divinely ordained political office. First, the political function personifies God. Second, God's providential use of political rulers in his governing of human affairs indicates that political office is what God requires from human society. Third, God desires order and the good, and desires the political office because it promotes these ends.

The Ruler Personifies God

One way in which De Bres argued for the goodness and holiness of political rule was by showing how the ruler is closely associated with God and personifies God. In *Racine's* chapter on the authority of the magistrate, for example, De Bres frequently quotes or alludes to Romans 13, stating that "the prince is a servant of God," or "the magistrate is a minister of God."⁹⁴ And since "one cannot resist the government without resisting God Himself and without incurring a judgment upon oneself, as Paul teaches," it follows from this close association, De Bres contends, that government is an ordinance ordained of God.⁹⁵ Similarly, De Bres concludes from Deuteronomy 1:17 and 2 Chronicles 19:6–7 that God identifies himself with political functions like judging.⁹⁶ Additionally, it was

⁹⁴ *Racine*, 810, 811.

⁹⁵ *Racine*, 811.

⁹⁶ *Racine*, 808–9. Deuteronomy 1:17: "You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike. You shall not be intimidated by anyone, for the judgment is God's. And the case that is

Joshua, “a man in whom is the Spirit” upon whom Moses had to lay his hands and appoint him as the next leader of Israel.⁹⁷

God also “recommends the dignity” of the political office by “adorning magistrates with honorable titles,” such as describing them as the image of God and giving them “even the name ‘God.’”⁹⁸ De Bres’s primary scriptural reference for this argument is Psalm 82: 1, 6 which attribute the name “gods” (or, as De Bres writes it, “Gods”) to rulers.⁹⁹ Psalm 82:1 and 6 read, “God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment . . . I said, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High, all of you.’”¹⁰⁰ This identification of rulers as “gods” provided the basis for De Bres’s argument: “The Holy Spirit even ascribes to the political rulers the name of God, because they are like the image of God in their government; so that all would understand that they are ordained by God, and authorized by his command.”¹⁰¹ In other words, God identifies with political rulers and gives them his own name, “God,” because when governing they personify God. From this identification of God with the political rulers, De Bres is

too hard for you, you shall bring to me, and I will hear it.” 2 Chronicles 19:6–7: “Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the LORD. He is with you in giving judgment. Now then, let the fear of the LORD be upon you. Be careful what you do, for there is no injustice with the LORD our God, or partiality or taking bribes.”

⁹⁷ *Racine*, 809. See Numbers 27:18.

⁹⁸ *Racine*, 809–810.

⁹⁹ De Bres also refers in the margin to Exodus 22:8: “If the thief is not found, the owner of the house shall come near to God to show whether or not he has put his hand to his neighbor’s property.” It seems that De Bres considered the reference of “coming near to God” an identification of God with the judicial process. However, this verse refers to a case where a judicial determination cannot be made for lack of evidence, and hence the plaintiff has to be satisfied with an oath and leave the matter with God (see Exodus 22:8–11).

¹⁰⁰ *Racine*, 809–810. See also Calvin, *Institution* (1541), 756.

¹⁰¹ *Racine*, 810.

saying, all should know that political rulers are divinely ordained and legitimate in their exercise of authority.

De Bres corroborated his exegesis by referring to the New Testament passage where Jesus refers to this Psalm (John 10:34–36), observing, “Christ himself explains the saying of the psalmist when He says, ‘If the Scripture called them Gods, to whom the word of God came.’ ” De Bres then asked, “what else does it say than that they are commissioned and ordained by the LORD?”¹⁰² In De Bres’s earlier *Confession*, Psalm 82 was similarly listed to prove the divine ordination of political rulers like “kings, princes, and magistrates.”¹⁰³

Admittedly, the extent to which De Bres pushes this argument for the goodness of the political function has exegetical weaknesses. For example, many, perhaps most, Old Testament passages associate political rulers with gods (*elohim*) in a negative sense: they are “idols,” rival gods or false gods, rather than the true deity (*elohim*, which is the same Hebrew word).¹⁰⁴ Thus, a passage like 1 Samuel 8:8 explicitly describes Israel’s desire for a king as idolatry, “forsaking me [God] and serving other gods [*elohim*].” While these

¹⁰² John 10:34–36 reads, “Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your Law, I said, you are gods? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came – and Scripture cannot be broken – do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’”

¹⁰³ *Confession* (1561)^C, 32.

¹⁰⁴ De Bres’s facile assumption, following Calvin, that the Old Testament uses the word “gods” or *elohim* in essentially a positive sense is questionable. Also in Psalm 82, a poetic description of God’s judgment over the rulers, the term “gods” is negative, and De Bres does not inform his readers how to reconcile his own argument with the predominantly negative use of the term in the Old Testament (especially when used in a political context) or even the New Testament. See e.g. Gen.3:5 “in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil “(KJV); Exodus 12:12 “on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments”; Exodus 20:3 ““You shall have no other gods before me.” The poetic phrase “sons of God” referred to in Psalm 82 is likewise ambiguous in Scripture, because even the devil can be included in their number, as Job 1:6 makes clear. A similar problem affects the New Testament use of the term “god” or “gods,” see e.g. Acts 12:22 and esp. 1 Corinthians 8:5–6.

exegetical complications are not important, De Bres's close identification of political rulers with God has consequences.¹⁰⁵

One consequence is that De Bres's exegesis would demonstrate the legitimacy of political government as a divine office. This was always De Bres's aim. Another consequence is that religion becomes the legitimate concern – indeed the *prime concern* – of the political ruler. If the ruler personifies God, it follows that he is to exercise God's wrath against specifically religious offenses, like heresy, blasphemy, idolatry, false religion, and other sins against God.¹⁰⁶ After all, what justification can there be to punish insults or rebellion against the earthly ruler while ignoring similar crimes against the divine King of whom every earthly king is only the image-and-name-bearer? Hence, if De Bres's argument is pushed to its logical conclusion, the long-established practice in Western Christendom of punishing religious crimes like heresy and blasphemy as forms of *laesa maiestatis* (“treason against the majesty of the king”) seems entirely justified.¹⁰⁷

The inevitability of these conclusions is shown by how De Bres develops the consequences of the identification of God with the political magistrates or “Gods.” De

¹⁰⁵ To mention one additional complication, Bres's interpretation of John 10:34–36 appears problematic. If De Bres is correct, it removes the claim to be divine from Jesus' response. Then Jesus' argument would amount to something like: “My claim to be the son of God is not so outrageous, since political rulers are gods, and are the sons of God, and holy and good.” Consequently, De Bres's inference that God desires political rulers similar to those of the Old Testament does not follow from the Old Testament use of the word *elohim* for political rulers, nor is it saved by Christ's use of Psalm 82 to refute his opponents.

¹⁰⁶ Calvin, too, asked if it was reasonable for political authorities to punish lesser crimes but to “let a traitor to God go unpunished?” John Calvin, *The Sermons of Monsieur John Calvin upon the Fifth Booke of Moses called Deuteronomie*, transl. Arthur Golding (London: Henry Middleton, 1583), 537.

¹⁰⁷ Alexandra Walsham traces the assimilation of heresy and the Roman law crime of *lèse-majesté* back to Innocent III's bull *Vergentis in senium*, endorsed by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. In 1298 Boniface advised that this model should be followed in all states. Walsham, *Charitable Hatred*, 49–50. See also Leonard W. Levy, *Treason against God: A History of the Offense of Blasphemy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 103–157.

Bres explains that although no individual is permitted to use the power of the sword to kill others,

It is entirely different in case of the Magistrate. Because there we see God himself who in his word speaks to them by his word, saying: ‘Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, will be killed.’ Likewise, ‘You shall not permit a sorceress to live.’ . . . They, then, who are executed according to the commandment of God contained in his Word, by the Magistrate, are put to death by the judgement of God, Who condemns them to die. And this is the reason why Scripture especially says that the idolaters who worshiped the golden calf and were killed by Moses and his companions, were killed and put to death by God, because they were executed by his express commandment. For this reason Jehoshaphat said to the judges, ‘Consider what you do, for you judge not for man but for the LORD. He is with you in giving judgment.’¹⁰⁸

According to De Bres, then, it is God’s identification with the political ruler which legitimizes the punishment: “One should therefore not regard the action of the Magistrate in the punishing of the godless as the deed of a private and particular person, but as a work of God himself. And here you have the reason why the Magistrates are called in Scripture by the name of God.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, everything pivots on God’s identification with his image, the magisterial office.

If, however, it is God’s identification with his image, the political magistrate, that settles which punishments (like the death penalty) are appropriate for certain crimes; this identification also settles, by the same logic, which deeds (not only murder, but also idolatry, heresy, false religion, or blasphemy) are liable to be punished by the same magistrate. Punishing religious offenses, therefore, is the magistrate’s act of affirming the identification between God and the political office, of “consecrating” himself to God. De

¹⁰⁸ *Racine*, 836–7. Citations are from Exodus 22:20, Exodus 22:18, 2 Chronicles 19:6.

¹⁰⁹ *Racine*, 837.

Bres gives examples of how this worked among “the holy judges, kings, and prophets of the church of Israel”:

We read of Moses and of Joshua and of the Levites, of whom Moses said, ‘Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me.’ Then he said to them, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side each of you, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.’ And they killed on that day three thousand men because of their idolatry with the golden calf. Such a justice was called by Moses ‘to consecrate one’s hands to God in order to receive a blessing.’ The children of Israel also stoned the blasphemer, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses.¹¹⁰

What is remarkable about De Bres’s recounting of these incidents of the magistrate’s role in inflicting God’s punishment also for religious offenses is his emphasis upon how this is an act of consecration.¹¹¹ The magistrate truly becomes the image of God that his office intends by executing the *punishments* Scripture describes upon the *sins* that Scripture describes – not only sins against other persons, like murder, but also sins against God, sins against the first table of the law, like idolatry and false religion. De Bres gives further examples: the “good king Josiah” consecrated his hands to spill the blood of the wicked “when he purged the religion, and he slaughtered and put to death those who sacrifice to idols.”¹¹² Also consecrating his hands was “the great prophet Elijah” of whom we read that he pleased God; yet “after he had convinced the false

¹¹⁰ *Racine*, 817. As the marginal references also indicate, Moses is quoting parts of Exodus 32:26–29, and then Leviticus 24:23.

¹¹¹ In another reference to the incident, De Bres writes that Moses, “a man of God, most gentle and peaceable, exhorted everyone to consecrate his hands to the Lord and the spill the blood of those who had so grievously offended the Lord by idolatry, and did not cease until he had defeated three thousand.” *Racine*, 818. The marginal reference is to Exodus 32:27, “And he said to them, ‘Thus says the LORD God of Israel, Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.’”

¹¹² *Racine*, 819. The marginal reference is to 2 Kings 23:20, “And he sacrificed all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars, and burned human bones on them. Then he returned to Jerusalem.”

prophets of their falsity, he said in the presence of the king, ‘Seize the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape.’ And they seized them. And Elijah brought them down to the brook Kishon and slaughtered them there.’”¹¹³

Divine Providence shows Political Office is Required

Another way by which De Bres inferred God’s identification with political rule was by abstracting it from Scripture passages about God’s providential raising up of kings, princes, and magistrates. For example, De Bres writes,

The prophet Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, ‘You, O king, are the king of kings, the God of heaven has given to you the kingdom, the power, the might, and the glory.’ It is as if he said, ‘The kings do not rule by themselves, nor by humans, but they are called and ordained of God by his providence, because it pleases God to govern the affairs of men in this way.’¹¹⁴

Thus, De Bres abstracts God’s identification with such political means of governing human affairs from Daniel 5:8’s emphasis that all kingdom, power, might, and glory are raised up by God’s providence. By this abstraction, De Bres moves from God’s providential will or decree to God’s prescriptive will or command: since it is God who calls kings by his providence, “it pleases God to govern the affairs of men in this way.” In other words, the governing of human society by God’s ordinance, “the kings” or other political officials, is what God requires.

Another example is from the *Confession*, wherein a similar appeal is made to God’s providence: “God . . . has ordained kings, princes, and magistrates, desiring that the

¹¹³ *Racine*, 819.

¹¹⁴ *Racine*, 808. The quotation is from Daniel 5:8.

world be governed by their laws and policies . . . For this purpose He put the sword in the hand of the Magistrate to punish the wicked, and to protect the virtuous and good people.”¹¹⁵ The somewhat ambiguous word “ordained” in this sentence might refer either to God instituting political office in the abstract and in principle, or to God instituting actual rulers and kings in history.¹¹⁶ The marginal text references which De Bres cites refer primarily to God’s providence, either in specific historical cases (Moses, King Nebuchadnezzar) or in general.¹¹⁷ In De Bres’s account, however, these texts are interwoven in a way that de-emphasizes their original providential (and more contingent) context. As a result, the fact that God raises up rulers and kings becomes for De Bres a proof that God requires a kind of political office and hence “ordains” or “institutes” it.

This abstraction of a general notion of political office is also seen at work in De Bres’s use of Romans 13:1–4, his most frequently cited passage in *Racine* to justify the idea of the political magistracy as a legitimate, good, and holy office.¹¹⁸ De Bres routinely abstracts the notion of a divinely required office, so to speak, out of the intricate

¹¹⁵ *Confession* (1561)^C, 32. It is very possible that this statement was influenced by a similar theological formulation in the French Confession (which became the Confession of La Rochelle): We believe therefore that God has instituted kingdoms, republics, and all sorts of principalities, hereditary or not, and all that belongs to a just state, and who wishes to be acknowledged their author. From this intent, God has put the sword into the hands of the magistrates to suppress the sins committed not only against the second table of the commandments of God, but also against the first. Dennison, *Reformed Confessions, Vol.3*, 322. Also in this confession, the authorial intent of God to set up kingdoms, republics and “just states” provides the premise for the inference that God wants magistrates to compel religion in accordance with the first table of the Ten Commandments.

¹¹⁶ Compare this sense of the word “institute” in Romans 13:1.

¹¹⁷ The marginal references for the first two sentences of the *Confession* is Exodus 18:20; Romans 13:1; Proverbs 8:15; Jeremiah 22:3; Psalm 82; Deuteronomy 1:16; Deuteronomy 17:16; Deuteronomy 16:19; 2 Corinthians 10:6 [De Bres mistakenly has 2 Corinthians 19:6]; Psalm 101; Jeremiah 21:12; Judges 21:25; Jeremiah 22:3; Daniel 2:21,27; Daniel 5:8. *Confession* (1561)^C, 32–3.

¹¹⁸ See his references to Romans 13:1–4 in *Racine* 810, 811, 813, 815–6, 827, 830, 831, 832, 834, 837, 838, 840, 843, 844, 846, 847.

context of divine providence in which Romans 13:1–4 is textually embedded.¹¹⁹ By minimizing the notion of providence, De Bres infers an absolute duty from the power given to political rulers. Thus viewed, Romans 13:1 and 4, for example, prompt him to insist that the Anabaptists’ conviction that the magistrate is not to execute evil-doers is “totally false and repugnant to the ordinance of God, who gave the sword in their hand to exercise justice and revenge upon the evildoer, as Saint Paul says.”¹²⁰ Rather, De Bres derives an absolute duty from the (originally more providentially shaded) Romans 13:4, a verse to which he repeatedly refers: the political ruler “does not bear the sword in vain.”¹²¹ For De Bres, since the political ruler *has* the power of the sword, and since “he does not bear the sword in vain,” he is to *use* the full extent of that power, including “spilling the blood of the wicked/godless.”¹²²

¹¹⁹ Romans 13:1–4 reads, “1. Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. 2. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. 3 For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval. 4 for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer.”

¹²⁰ *Racine*, 815–6.

¹²¹ *Racine*, 810, 829–830, 831, 837, 838, 840, 842–3, 844,

¹²² *Racine*, 815. De Bres cites Romans 13:4. This is a more one-dimensional use of texts about God’s providence than appears in some theologians. In the seventeenth century, for example, John Owen taught in his “Greater Catechism” that one of the three things in which “the outward providence of God toward his church” consists, was “in ruling and disposing of kingdoms, nations, and persons, for their benefit.” William H. Goold, ed., *The Works of John Owen. Volume I* (Edinburgh: T. T. Clark, 1862), 475. However, De Bres was by far not the most important expositor to infer God’s desire for political government from God’s providential establishment of kingdoms, principalities, and other political organizations. An example of a jump from providence to requirement similar to De Bres’s is Calvin’s *Geneva Students’ Confession of 1559*: “I confess that God wills that the world be ruled by laws and governments so that the reins are not absent by which the actions of unruly men are restrained. And for this reason, He has established kingdoms, principalities, dominions, and whatever else pertains to civil jurisdiction. Of these things He wants to be regarded as author, so that because of Him not only is their rule obeyed, but we even revere and honor them as vicars of God and ministers established by Him, so that they may exercise a legitimate and holy office.” Dennison, *Reformed Confessions*, vol.2, 131.

De Bres's identification of God's will with political rule by means of de-emphasizing the providential aspects of passages like Romans 13 has implications for the magistrate's use of political force with respect to religious matters. By De Bres's reasoning, the magistrate's duty with respect to religious sins (idolatry, heresy, false religion, and blasphemy) is clear: since the magistrate "does not bear the sword in vain," he is to use it to punish all sin, including religious sin. Thus

the wise man [Solomon] says that the spirit of wisdom is faithful, and does not absolve the one that blasphemed God with his lips. All his proverbs relate to this: The king who sits on the throne of judgment scatters all evil by his look. A wise king scatters the wicked and drives the wheel over them.¹²³

The same point – that the political ruler should punish all sorts of sin, including religious sins – is made by De Bres's use of another frequently cited passage. De Bres cites Proverbs 8:15 ("by me kings reign, and rulers decree what is just") and uses it to support the idea of God's identification with the notion of political office.¹²⁴ Instead of interpreting the verse to mean that kings and rulers need God's wisdom to decree what is just, De Bres understands it as declaring that Christ (personified as Wisdom in Proverbs 8) requires that there should be kings and rulers to reign and decree.¹²⁵ An example of De Bres's use of Proverbs 8:15, coupled with a passage from 1 Samuel, is found in his *Letter to the King*, where De Bres swiftly concludes from the passages: "In summary they

¹²³ *Racine*, 819–820.

¹²⁴ "Letter to the King," *Confession*, 1561^C, a iv r.; *Racine*, 808. See also Art.36 of the *Confession*, *Confession*, 1561^C, 32 and *Confession*, 1566, 20.

¹²⁵ A fuller meaning of Prov.8:15 is suggested by considering it together with the next verse, "by me princes rule, and nobles, all who govern justly," with other verses (e.g. "riches and honor are with me, enduring wealth and righteousness," v.18), and in light of the chapter in its entirety.

[the kings and princes] did not come by usurpation or tyranny, but by the proper institution of God.”¹²⁶

If the conclusion De Bres was drawing in his *Letter to the King* from his interpretation of Proverbs 8:15 was that no prince in sixteenth century Europe had ever come into his position by usurpation or tyranny, De Bres would demonstrate a surprising degree of historical naivety.¹²⁷ Surely, therefore, De Bres’s point must have been a different one: no prince was ever a usurper or tyrant merely because of his exercise of political power. The power itself (irrespective of the actual incumbent) belongs to the political office that Christ, the divine Wisdom, established.

The implication of such a generous view of magisterial power, however, was to concede the legitimacy of political force even when it extended to religious matters. In contrast with the Anabaptists’ ambivalent view of the political office, which generally denied the magistrate authority in all religious matters, De Bres did not even hint that the sixteenth century rulers’ extension of their use of political force to religious matters constituted “usurpation or tyranny.”¹²⁸ On De Bres’s terms, any monarch could claim that his power to reign and to decree what is legal and illegal, even with respect to religious matters, was appointed by the Wisdom of God (Proverbs 8:15).¹²⁹

¹²⁶ “Letter to the King,” *Confession*, 1561^C, a iv r. As additional reference, De Bres adds in the margin, “Book of Samuel.”

¹²⁷ To name one example, consider the picture of Philip II as usurper and tyrant in William of Orange’s *Apology*. Huijsen, *De Geboortepapieren van Nederland*, 78.

¹²⁸ On the Anabaptist sense that the political office is limited with respect to religion, see e.g. Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Primary Sources*, 290–301.

¹²⁹ In fact, as we have already pointed out, this power in religious matters was in the Old Testament a feature that recommended the superiority of a centralized monarchy. See the remarks above on Judges 17:6 in connection with De Bres’s use of Judges 21:25 (“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes”) in *Confession*, 1561^C, 33.

God's Desire for Order and Goodness

A final way in which De Bres identifies God with political government is by appealing to God's desire for order and the good. A significant example is the statement in Art.36 of the *Confession*,

We believe that our good God, because of the corruption of the human race has ordained kings, princes, and magistrates, desiring that the world be governed by their laws and policies, so that the human lawlessness might be restrained and all things might be conducted in good order among people.¹³⁰

In addition to this implicit appeal to God's providence (the ambiguity of "God has ordained" that has just been discussed), what is noteworthy about this statement is how God's goodness and orderliness, and his desire for what is good and orderly, provide the basis for De Bres's idea of a divinely instituted political office that is holy and good. Although political government was a response to "the corruption of the human race" in De Bres's view, it was nevertheless identified with "our good God," it was the initiative of God of whom *goodness* is an attribute. This goodness of God was emphasized in Art.1 of De Bres's 1561 *Confession*: "We all believe with the heart, and confess with the mouth, that there is one only simple and spiritual Being, which we call God . . . who is totally wise, just, and good." The 1566 edition of the *Confession* further emphasized the goodness of God by adding to this sentence, "and [the] overflowing fountain of all good things."¹³¹ According to De Bres, this good God is identified with the laws and policies of "kings, princes, and magistrates," because of his attributes, like goodness and

¹³⁰ *Confession* (1561)^C, 32.

¹³¹ *Confession* (1561)^C, 1; *Confession* (1566), A.ii.v.

orderliness, and due to what He prefers: God desires human lawlessness to be restrained and all things among humans to be conducted in good order.

The rule of “kings, princes, and magistrates” was, therefore, desirable and good because of who God is and what God desires. Its desirability and goodness are further confirmed by De Bres’s argument in *Racine* that political rulers are God’s good gift to the church. Citing in the margin Romans 12:8 as a proof-text, De Bres writes, “Paul clearly proves this to us when he numbers the office of ruling among the gifts of God.”¹³² De Bres next appeals to 1 Corinthians 12:28, “in which he [Paul] names governors” – in other words, in which administration is called God’s gift to the church. Although De Bres grants that “the apostle there speaks of the elders, who presided over the public discipline of the church,” he insists that “nevertheless we see that the purpose of civil government amounts to the same thing, hence one cannot doubt that he is recommending to us every kind of just preeminence.”¹³³

This attempt to legitimize every kind of political preeminence does not yet logically demonstrate De Bres’s suggestion that a system of “kings, princes, and magistrates” would be a divine blessing to the church. Similarly, De Bres quickly passes over biblical

¹³² *Racine*, 808. Romans 12:4–8 reads, “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; **the one who leads**, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Emphasis added to the reference to leading.) De Bres’s reading of the verse is interpretative, as the Greek verb can refer to many kinds of non-political leadership.

¹³³ *Racine*, 808. 1 Corinthians 12:28: “And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues.”

passages that seem to contradict his point.¹³⁴ But De Bres's attempt to support his conclusion makes clear what his argument would imply: political government, like church government, aims at the public discipline of the church. Not only does this confirm that, by 1565, De Bres still held the view that political magistrates should regulate "also church matters," as the 1561 *Confession* states,¹³⁵ but it also shows that this view was embedded in De Bres's understanding of the political office as God's legitimate and good gift. And why not? If political rulers truly are God's good gift to the church, designed to promote what is orderly and good in the church and for the church, what else does the goodness of the gift imply but that "kings, princes, and magistrates" should use their power to "restrain and watch . . . also over the church matters, to remove and overthrow all idolatry and false worship of God, to destroy the kingdom of the Antichrist, and to advance the Kingdom of Jesus Christ"?¹³⁶

The way in which De Bres so identifies God with political government by appealing to God's goodness and his desire for order and for the good confirms what has been remarked in an earlier chapter about the early modern philosophical preference (also among the Reformed) for social discipline and order. This philosophical preference was reflected, it has been noted, in the popularity of versions of Stoicism, which were also common among Reformed thinkers. A similar preference for order visibly underlies De Bres argument for the legitimacy, holiness, and goodness of a political government of "kings, princes, and magistrates." In *Racine*, for example, De Bres contrasts order and

¹³⁴ For example, De Bres discusses 1 Corinthians 6 only superficially, arguing that there will always be disputes in the Christian community. The difficulties that verses 1 to 8 present to viewing political rulers simply as a good gift to the church are entirely ignored.

¹³⁵ *Confession*, 1561^C, 33.

¹³⁶ *Confession*, 1561^C, 33.

design (which is divine) with disorder and chaos, which is Satanic. Because political rule is about order, it is “disastrous” and “malicious” to deny the involvement of Christians in the political government. “As often as I note the purpose that the Anabaptists have with this thoroughly disastrous doctrine of the denial of the believing magistrate,” writes De Bres, “I marvel without end at their malice. See how they cry out that a believer cannot exercise the office of preeminence and at the same time belong to the Christian church.”¹³⁷ De Bres then challenges the Anabaptists to answer, “is the estate of the magistrate not good, and is it not from God, as we have shown above from the Divine Scriptures?”¹³⁸

Clearly, De Bres was expecting simple answers to such questions. Could his Anabaptist opponents have attempted to answer that political power, like that of great wealth, might conceivably be good, but was usually bad? Further, could they have argued that what De Bres calls “the estate of the magistrate” was truly from God, as being part of his mysterious providence to purify the church, sanctify believers and often restrain evil, but that it was not from God as an essentially good and holy calling? De Bres would not have been satisfied with any such responses. De Bres demanded a categorical acknowledgement of the political system as a holy and good institution for the sake of order and the good. Anything less, he thought, promoted chaos, revolution, and the designs of the devil:

Truly, everyone should deeply fear the horrible plots of Satan, who is an enemy of all order and good politics. Because he is without doubt engineering a big thing under the appearance of humility, namely a horrible dissipation, and a total overthrow of the states [or

¹³⁷ *Racine*, 811.

¹³⁸ *Racine*, 811.

“commonwealths,” in French: *republiques*] and of all well instituted political order.¹³⁹

The Anabaptists, because they denied the sacredness and goodness of the political order, were clearly aiding these satanic designs, because

it is clear that the devil is trying to overthrow the order which God has instituted among people. Who is the believing and intelligent person who can bear this disastrous doctrine [of the Anabaptists], which so militates against the holy ordinance of God and against all human [public] order?¹⁴⁰

The net result of De Bres’s argument for the goodness and holiness of a divinely instituted political office on the basis of God’s identification with the political office, and in this case on the basis of God’s own goodness and orderliness, is that the premises are supplied from which the conclusion of the political compulsion of religion follows reasonably and necessarily. If the laws and policies of “kings, princes, and magistrates” are necessary because God desires the good, and if God wants to use rulers to enforce the good, what is more logical than that they should also enforce right religion and right worship? What greater good can there be, for individuals and for society, than God himself? What “good” should political rulers pursue more keenly for their subjects than to know this God truly and to serve him rightly? What greater evil can there be for individuals and society than the opposite of God and of true religion: idolatry, heresy, and false religion? And if the “good” includes the welfare of society, what greater harm can befall a body politic than the punishment of God? Thus, once De Bres’s connection between God’s desire for order and for the good and the task of the political magistrate is

¹³⁹ *Racine*, 811–2.

¹⁴⁰ *Racine*, 812–3.

accepted, who can deny what most reformers insisted upon: the task of the magistrate is to enforce also the first table of the Decalogue? Who, then, can escape the force of Peter Martyr's question of 1554, "wherefore for as much as idolatry is the cause of captivity, pestilence and famine, and overthrowing of publique wealthes, shall it not pertaine unto the Magistrate to repress it, and to keep the true sound religion?"¹⁴¹

To continue the implications of De Bres's premises, if God is orderly, and has ordained "kings, princes, and magistrates" to ensure that "all things might be conducted in good order among people," what is more important to God than rightly ordered worship? What is more disorderly and confused than idolatrous worship, or heresy and false religion? What disorder is more dangerous, not only for the body but for the soul, not only for time but for eternity, than *religious* disorder? In other words, in what area of life can there be a greater need to restrain human lawlessness than in religion? What more crucial task can the political ruler have than to ensure that "God be honored and served by everyone as He has required it by his Word" – and hence to prevent the false service of idolaters and heretics like Roman Catholics?

God's Identification and Legitimacy

De Bres's theological argument to establish the goodness and holiness of the political office by, in various ways, showing God's identification with political rule proved not only the holiness and goodness (and thus the *legitimacy*) of kings, princes, and magistrates, but also entailed, similarly, that the political ruler had the task to use political

¹⁴¹ Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Commentary on Judges*, 1564, 266 v. – 267 r. Cited in Carlos M. N. Eire, *War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 300.

power against false religion and idolatry. This entailment would scarcely have raised eyebrows in an age that believed, as James Estes points out, that “the divinely assigned purpose of secular government in its realm is to serve the spiritual realm by establishing and maintaining true teaching and worship while abolishing false teaching and worship.”¹⁴²

In practical terms, for the mid-sixteenth century Netherlands this entailment provided an incentive for the Dutch nobility to commit themselves to a confessional alliance with the Reformed. By using their political power to protect the Reformed and purge the land of Catholic idolatry and false religion, the Dutch nobles would show that they were answering to the divinely assigned purpose of their office. This, in the final analysis, would be a powerful proof of their own *legitimacy*. Hence, the need for political legitimacy would have furthered the kind of political compulsion of religion that De Bres desired, similar to what had occurred in other historical contexts like early modern England – a situation where, as Michael Braddick contends, “political legitimacy was claimed to rest in part upon the defense of the true religion, defined in doctrinal and liturgical terms.”¹⁴³

¹⁴² James Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melancthon 1518–1559* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 109. This once again evidences De Bres’s thought as consonant with magisterial Reformed thinking about the need to restrict religious liberty. Compare, for example, Melancthon who, according to Dixon “projected the entire state as a Christian entity with a Christian purpose. In such a scheme, the monarch assumed heightened powers, for he was not just lord of the state but lord of the church as well.” Dixon, *Contesting the Reformation*, 113. De Bres nowhere describes civil rulers as the lords of the church, but his idea of a political office embodying divine purpose implied similar outcomes, as is seen in his contention that the political magistrates’ jurisdiction extended also to “church matters.” *Confession*, 1561^c, 33.

¹⁴³ It was because political legitimacy rested upon the divine requirement that government defend true religion (expressed, according to Braddick, doctrinally and liturgically) that confessional alliances between churches and political magistrates were needed, as “there was a consequent pressure to define these [doctrinal and liturgical] terms and to enforce conformity to them.” Michael J. Braddick, *State Formation in Early Modern England, C. 1550–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 287.

De Bres's View of Political Office and of Religious Liberty

It is important to note that although De Bres's theology of the political office *entailed* the political compulsion of religion, this logical or theological entailment does not reveal anything about the historical order in which the ideas shaped De Bres's understanding. It does not indicate, in other words, that De Bres first arrived at his general political theology (including his theology of the political office or of the state), and then only afterward accepted the political compulsion of religion – although in some sense it is true that De Bres's vision of an alliance was closely related to how he conceived of the nature and duties of political office. Neither does it mean that De Bres was more invested (intellectually, theologically, or existentially) in his specific view of political office than in his view that the law should restrict religious liberty. On the contrary, two considerations suggest that De Bres was developing both his view of political office and his view of the political restriction of religion somewhat conjointly, even haltingly and hesitatingly, perhaps, and that they were taking shape as his vision of a political alliance to protect the Reformed churches came into focus intellectually.

First, a more or less conjoint development was what we noticed in chapter two where De Bres's Constantinian shift was traced. From 1558 to 1565, De Bres shifted toward both a more optimistic view of political government (which is connected to the idea of political office) and the political restriction of religious liberty. Thus, from the beginning De Bres's thinking on the nature of political government (including political office) and on the restriction of religious liberty were developing more or less in tandem, it appears, even as he was thinking through the implications of a church-political alliance,

whereby the power of the nobles would shield the Reformed believers against a tyrannical Catholic king.

The second consideration is existential in nature. The immediate context of the Reformed churches in the southern Netherlands was one of immense pressure and daily threat to life. De Bres's pressing existential and pastoral need was for an alliance of political power that could protect the Reformed against the fury of King Philip II. Wider aspects of political theology, such as the ramifications of his theology of political office, were not irrelevant to him, but they were certainly secondary, and their details could be worked out later. De Bres's existential need, in other words, was for a power to smash the grip of Catholicism, and it became increasingly apparent to him that the political power of the nobles was the most appropriate power to do so. The broader political and theological details of this solution required time to sort out, however, not least because the theological picture was complicated by Philip II's centralization of the state in his monarchy and his amalgamation of the Catholic religion into an establishment of *royal* catholicism. As a result, we find only in De Bres's final treatise, *Racine* (1565), a somewhat systematic and sophisticated political theology, including a fairly nuanced doctrine of the political office.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that De Bres responded both rhetorically and theologically to Anabaptist political theology's threat to the legitimacy of political rule and, hence, the establishment of a Reformed confessional alliance with the Dutch nobles. De Bres's rhetorical strategy of portraying the Anabaptists as rebels against any political office

furthered the political compulsion of religion, because it stressed the danger of heresy to the Dutch body politic, which was, in the sixteenth century, a danger well-worn since the Middle Ages, as chapter five pointed out.

More significantly and directly, political compulsion of religion was also furthered by De Bres's theological understanding of the magisterial office. De Bres offered two crucial theological arguments against Anabaptist critiques of the goodness and holiness of political rule. However, these arguments for a divinely instituted political office that was good and holy (and hence undeniably legitimate) also entailed the divine mandate of the political office to use political force against idolatry and false religion. Despite this logical and theological relation between De Bres's view of the political office and his view of religious liberty, however, it seems likely that De Bres developed both his view of political office and his view of the political restriction of religion somewhat conjointly as his vision for an alliance with the Dutch nobles to protect the Reformed churches was coming into focus.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

At the conclusion of this investigation into the reasons for De Bres's belief that the law should limit religious liberty, it would be useful to compare the older picture of De Bres's reasons that scholarship presented with the newer picture that has emerged from this dissertation.

The older picture, it will be recalled from the remarks made in chapter one, was elementary and incomplete. Scholars have previously devoted only little attention to exploring the reasons for De Bres's view of religious liberty, despite the importance of the question. Nevertheless, the older picture becomes visible by overlaying the sketchy outlines offered by De Bres scholarship's incidental findings related to religious liberty. This older, incomplete pencil sketch had three features that will a little later be contrasted with the new picture portrayed by this dissertation.

First, the older picture that De Bres scholarship presented was methodologically limited. Almost all the scholarly investigations of issues related to religious liberty were restricted to a single one of De Bres's writings, the *Belgic Confession*. By ignoring De Bres's other writings, investigation into religious liberty in Art.36 approached the *Belgic Confession* as a self-sufficient object of inquiry and as a kind of pristine and timeless encapsulation of ideas – of De Bres's ideas, of Reformation ideas, and even of biblical truth. In such an approach, not only De Bres's other writings but also his political and historical context had little substantive to contribute to the interpretation of De Bres's view of religious liberty, except as an occasional aid to assist making sense of Art.36 and

the *Belgic Confession* on their own terms. By thus approaching Art.36 of the *Belgic Confession* as a kind of autonomous and self-sufficient text, interpreters then extrapolated their picture of De Bres's views of religious liberty.

Second, the standard answer that the older picture identified as the reason for De Bres's view was "continuity." Continuity between De Bres and broader thought, this old picture suggested, explains De Bres's restrictive view of religious liberty, whether this continuity is conceived of as a "rich continuity," extensively embracing the reformers, sixteenth century thought, and medieval thought, or a "thin continuity," more limited to reformers like Calvin.

A feature of this answer of continuity was that it was marked by tensions. There were tensions between "rich continuity" versions of the answer, which usually explained a less-than-tolerant De Bres in terms of wider thought, and "thin continuity" versions, which usually explained an essentially tolerant De Bres in terms of the thought of Calvin and other reformers (portrayed similarly tolerant.). These tensions were sometimes visible even in the continuity explanation proposed by a single scholar. We have noted, for example, how Braekman argued that De Bres's political theology was extensively influenced by Calvin, yet, he also argued, De Bres was an oasis of good sense, balance, and toleration in the sixteenth century, and did not follow Calvin and De Bres in their "intolerance."¹

Third, this older picture of De Bres was an excessively intellectualist interpretation of De Bres's position. It portrayed De Bres's understanding of religious liberty as a harmonious aspect of his apparently majestic and timeless architectonic vision of political

¹ See chapters one and six.

government. This overly intellectualist interpretation was furthered by the older picture's methodological limitation, the first feature discussed above, because the picture's exclusive focus upon that purportedly self-sufficient text, the *Belgic Confession*, seduces the interpreter to regard the *Confession's* Art.36 as a grand interpretive vista from which to survey De Bres's view of religious liberty. As a result, in this picture, De Bres's position was the pure distillation of timeless theological understanding and piety, effectively isolated from the messiness of political context.

Compared with this older picture, the new picture of the reasons for De Bres's view of religious liberty as it emerged in this dissertation looks very different. In addition to the fact that the new picture is more full-bodied, as one would expect, since for the first time much attention has here been devoted to exploring the reasons for De Bres's view of religious liberty, the new picture differs from the three features of the older picture described above.

First, the new picture is methodologically constructed differently. Rather than focusing only upon Art.36 of the *Belgic Confession*, this picture integrates all of De Bres's relevant writings. Rather than treating Art.36 of the *Belgic Confession* as a kind of self-sufficient text from which De Bres's views on religious liberty can be extrapolated, it was combined with several other texts to offer a diachronous image of De Bres's thought over time. Rather than occasionally dipping into De Bres's historical and political context to supplement, *ad hoc*, an essentially self-sufficient interpretation of that ostensibly autonomous text, Art.36 of the *Belgic Confession*, in the new picture, context actively shaped the interpretation of De Bres's various writings of which Art.36 constitutes only a part.

Second, the new picture includes more than continuity in the reasons it offers to explain De Bres's view of religious liberty. To be sure, continuity remains an essential part of the new picture. Thus, this dissertation confirmed that De Bres's restrictive view of religious liberty and of the positive nature of political government in most of his writings closely resembled the theology of mainstream reformers like Calvin. In fact, continuity in the new picture is wider and richer than in the older picture. It is also more consistent, because it is unfragmented by the tensions of the older picture: De Bres, like most leading reformers, and like sixteenth century and medieval theologians more broadly, was convinced, or, more exactly, *became* convinced, that the law should restrict religious liberty.

But the new picture also goes beyond the continuity explanation of the older picture by spelling out *why* De Bres moved to such a position of continuity with wider thought. It does so by incorporating an additional, diachronous feature of De Bres's thought, for which important evidence was uncovered by this dissertation's examination of all of De Bres's relevant writings: There was a Constantinian shift in De Bres's view of government and religious liberty between 1555 and 1565. During this period, De Bres swiftly embraced the mainstream Reformed positive view of government and the mainstream Reformed view of the political restriction of religious liberty. Explaining this pivotal shift and integrating it in our picture of De Bres's thought is key to understanding the reasons for De Bres's view of religious liberty.

The new picture recognizes that while continuity cannot sufficiently explain De Bres's Constantinian shift, historical context is more helpful. The historical and political context was the catalyst that shaped De Bres's political theology. De Bres's historical

context shows that the persecuted Reformed churches in the Netherlands desperately needed to be shielded against the King's ruthless political power if they were to survive. De Bres, desiring protection for the persecuted Reformed churches, envisioned an alliance with the Dutch nobles. As his vision of such a church-political alliance offering protection to the Reformed deepened, De Bres shifted toward the mainstream Reformed view of government and religious liberty. Additionally, the theological and practical dimensions of De Bres's vision of an alliance explain why he coordinated the political protection of (true) religion and the political restriction of (false) religion, in other words, why for De Bres the political protection of true religion and the political restriction of idolatry and false religion remained two sides of a single coin.

This, then, is how De Bres related his belief that law should restrict religion with his quest for a church-political alliance and his general theology of political office. Admittedly, some of the evidence we have adduced suggesting the causal connection between De Bres's political context and his vision of an alliance between law and religion is circumstantial. But ultimately, the kind of proof that an historical approach to theology can offer can never be definitive. Historical investigation is a form of inductive reasoning, and inductive inferences follow as a matter of probability rather than necessity. Historical proof inevitably involves extrapolation, an attempt at connecting the dots – and in the case of De Bres, the dots are often scattered and faint. Our historical task is therefore to try to connect the dots in the most probable way, considering the texts and other evidence at our disposal. It is this kind of conclusion that R. G. Collingwood describes as the proof involved in the historical method: “What they [historians] provide, when they are said to 'prove' a certain conclusion, is not compulsion to embrace it, but

only permission; a perfectly legitimate sense of the word 'prove' (*approuver, probare*).”² It is in this sense that I aimed to prove the reasons for De Bres’s view of law and religious liberty. I sought to establish not so much a compulsive demonstration of the reasons for De Bres’s view, as *permission* for the answer here argued, based on what seems to me the most probable reading of De Bres’s writings and other sources.

Whatever the mechanics of the connection between the social, political, and religious realities that formed his context and De Bres’s political theological ideas, the evidence here surveyed leaves little doubt that they were related. De Bres tied the very notion of a divinely ordained or holy political office to the political restriction of false and idolatrous religion. One might say that for De Bres the very notion of a (divinely willed) “state” implies the political compulsion of religion. And this idea of political power as divinely ordained for the purpose of protecting true religion by eradicating idolatry was – whatever the exact causal mechanisms – informed by De Bres’s historical context, the plight of the persecuted Protestants in the Netherlands.

Third, unlike the older picture’s predominantly intellectualist explanation of De Bres’s view of religious liberty as a timeless feature of his overarching vision of political government, the new picture is more down-to-earth. The new picture shows that it was the need for a practical result – survival and protection – that inspired De Bres’s vision of an alliance between the Dutch Reformed churches and the Dutch nobles. In the new picture, the heart beating at the center of De Bres’s thinking on religious liberty was this need for a practical result. This need was the soul, so to speak, of De Bres’s view of

² Collingwood, *Idea of History*, 255.

religious liberty – not, as the older picture suggested, a prior systematic theoretical commitment to an idea of the state (or, what functions equivalently in his political theology, his theology of the political office).

Significantly, the new picture still recognizes that the reasons for De Bres's view of religious liberty were at their core intellectual and theological. After all, De Bres's very vision of a church-political alliance was an intellectual and theological response to the existential crisis of the Reformed churches. Also, the theological underpinnings of De Bres's vision of a church-political alliance involved, to some extent, political theological insights, such as the nature of the political office, so that there was always a logical and theological relation between De Bres's theology and his view of religious liberty.

Yet the new picture's intellectual and theological character appears sober and even pedestrian when compared with the almost visionary and Olympian intellectualism of the old sketch. The commitment driving the reasons for De Bres's view of religious liberty was not some prior overarching political theological system, some grand idea of the state, for example, but his desire for a church-political alliance to protect the distressed Reformed Church in their prolonged crisis. Far from being the prior overarching principle shaping De Bres's view of religious liberty, De Bres's idea of the state or political office was likely developed somewhat conjointly – even haltingly and hesitatingly, perhaps – with his view of the political restriction of religion while his vision of an alliance deepened and as he shifted toward the mainstream Reformed view. Existentially and spiritually, the driving commitment that shaped De Bres's view of religious liberty concerned the need for the survival of those who wanted to remain obedient to God in

desperate circumstances – in other words, the need for a practical result. For Guido de Bres, this was what an alliance of law and religion was all about.

APPENDIX

THESES FOR DISPUTATION

Theses related to the Dissertation

1. In all his major writings, Guido De Bres advocated that political rulers must limit religious liberty, except in his earliest, *Baston* of 1555.
2. A key to understanding De Bres's view of religious liberty is to explain what can be described as a Constantinian shift in his view from 1555 to 1565, that is, the shift in his view of government and religious liberty that appears when his writings from 1558 until 1565 are compared with *Baston* (1555).
3. De Bres's support for the political or legal restriction of religious liberty was largely the result of his vision of a church-political alliance between the Reformed churches and the Dutch nobles.
4. The theological and practical dimensions of this vision coordinated the protection of (true) religion with the political restriction of (false) religion.
5. Most of the major sixteenth century reformers, including De Bres, believed that the political magistrate is *custos utriusque tabulae legis*, "guardian of both tables of the law," and has the duty, among other things, to extirpate idolatry, false religion, heresy, and blasphemy through the force of the law.
6. De Bres's theological understanding of the magisterial office entailed the idea of the political compulsion of religion. One might say that religious compulsion was implied by De Bres's idea of the state.

Theses related to Graduate Work in Theology

1. *Hominem occidere non est doctrinam tueri sed hominem occidere*. [To kill a man does not mean to defend a doctrine; it means to kill a man.]
2. Robert Boyle was committed to undermining deism.
3. The popularity of Peter Ramus after his death was due less to his philosophical merits (his methods were inferior to Aristotle's), than to his status as a Huguenot martyr promoted by Christopher Marlowe's 1592 play *The Massacre at Paris*.
4. Reformers typically recognized a correspondence between the Decalogue and natural law. A typical Reformed explanation for the writing of the Decalogue was that a written republication was necessary because of the sinfulness of humanity.
5. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Decalogue.
6. Francis Wayland (1796 – 1865), theologian and former president of Brown University, offers important biblical insights in economics.

Other Theses

1. The sin of Onan described in Genesis 38 was likely involvement in abortion.
2. Bitcoin is not a Ponzi scheme.

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