The Synod of Dordrecht 1618-1619. The Influence of Calvinism on the Development of Freedom in the Netherlands in the Period 1560-1630

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THE SYNOD OF DORDRECHT 1618-1619.

THE INFLUENCE OF CALVINISM ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF FREEDOM IN THE NETHERLANDS IN THE PERIOD 1560-1630

by

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The Synod of Dordrecht was an important event in the history of the Dutch Republic. A serious, combined religious and political conflict between orthodox and liberal Calvinists had brought the Republic to the brink of civil war. The forceful intervention of the stadholder Prince Maurice in 1617 had cleared the political situation and it was the task of the Synod to solve the religious aspect of the conflict. The Synod was a victory for orthodox Calvinism; the Reformed Church, the state and local governments were purged from liberal elements, and new laws, limiting further the freedom for non-Reformed religions were decreed. This thesis sees the Synod of Dordrecht as a remarkable moment in the ongoing process of interaction between the Calvinists and the rest of the Dutch population. This interaction will be analyzed in order to explore the influence of Calvinism upon the development of freedom in the Netherlands.

The Calvinists were fanatical and well motivated, but they were a small minority of the population. To achieve their goal, they needed the support of the powerful group in the middle. In the southern provinces of the Netherlands fundamentally different ideas about freedom prevented a lasting cooperation between the nobility and the Calvinists. In the northern provinces the Calvinists formed a successful coalition with the regents. Two
groups, the Calvinists and the regents, which needed each other, but at the same time tried to achieve different goals, determined the political history of the Dutch Republic. Most of the time there was a balance, but there were times in which the balance was seriously disturbed. The Synod of Dordrecht is a moment in the history of the Republic in which the balance was disturbed in favor of the Calvinists.

The conclusion of the thesis is that Calvinism had a significant influence on the Netherlands, and that without the Calvinists the Dutch Republic, with its unique tolerant society, never would have existed. Ironically, this toleration was the reaction of the group in the middle against the intolerance of the Calvinists.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION.................................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SYNOD OF DORDRECHT..................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUTLINE OF THESIS...........................................................</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. HISTORY OF THE REVOLT..................................................</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRST AND SECOND REVOLT................................................</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WILLIAM OF ORANGE AND THE CALVINISTS............................</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIRST REVOLT 1566-1585..................................................</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CREATION OF THE DUTCH REPUBLIC.......................................</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY...........................................</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO FAITH....................................</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE THEOLOGICAL CONFLICT.............................................</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIBERTINE THINKERS.......................................................</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUDING REMARKS.......................................................</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. POLITICAL THOUGHTS AND PRACTICES...............................</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL THOUGHTS DEVELOPED IN THE REVOLT....................</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUSTIFICATION OF THE REVOLT...........................................</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POLITICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF FREEDOM....................</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE STATE CHURCH RELATIONSHIP.......................................</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. FREEDOM AND TOLERATION...............................................</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDEAS OF FREEDOM AND THE REVOLT........</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCEPTS OF FREEDOM.....................................................</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOW TOLERANT WAS THE REPUBLIC.......................................</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOLERATION EXPLAINED.....................................................</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUDING REMARKS.......................................................</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALISM.........................................</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPITALISM AND FREEDOM................................................</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPITALISM IN THE DUTCH REPUBLIC....................................</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM...............................................</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFLUENCE OF CALVINISM ANALYZED....................................</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. CONCLUSION...............................................................</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY.................................................................</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

THE SYNOD OF DORDRECHT

On November 13, 1618, Dordrecht, a town in Holland, whose prosperity was based on the trade of wine from Germany, was the stage of an impressive spectacle. More than one hundred theologians, representatives of churches and politicians were gathered to attend a series of meetings that would be known as the Synod of Dordrecht. Of the one hundred people, more than thirty came from foreign countries, the interest of these foreign countries emphasized the importance, and even the international character of the Synod. Historically, the Synod was important because it determined the character of the Dutch Reformed Church for the centuries to come. Its political impact, however, was less: the change in government that had made the Synod possible was affirmed, but this had no long lasting effect on the political situation in the Republic.

The States General, the political body in which all provinces of the Dutch Republic were represented, had decided to convene a national synod to solve the religious conflict in the Reformed Church. This conflict was, however, more than just a dispute between two groups in the Reformed Church over the right interpretation of predestination, which was the cornerstone of the Calvinist doctrine. Because political groups had taken sides in what had started as a religious controversy, the conflict had very important political and social aspects. The now politically, socially and religiously

The format for this thesis follows current style requirements as described in Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations. Sixth edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.
intertwined conflict had become so intense that there was a real danger of civil war. The States General had given the Synod the task to decide on matters of true doctrine, but at the same time to keep in mind the peace in the churches. As it was the duty of the state to protect the church, the state, not the church, had the authority to convene a synod, and peace in the church was for the state more important than purity of doctrine.

That a national synod was held was the direct result of change in the government of the Republic. The stadholder Prince Maurice had, with the support of the orthodox Calvinists, carried out a coup, in which he had eliminated his opponent, Johan van Oldenbarnevelt, the advocate of the province Holland, who was until then the most powerful man in the Republic.

What was the religious conflict the Synod had to solve? As mentioned before, the conflict concentrated on the interpretation of predestination. Calvin taught that God has elected certain people for salvation. God gives these elected people faith, and through this faith they will be saved. This doctrine is called predestination, because man’s destination is decided before he comes in this world. A strict interpretation of predestination automatically implies the denial of human free will. It is not surprising that not all Calvinists wanted to go that far. Soon after the reformed Church had established itself in the Dutch Republic, some of its ministers preached a predestination that left, in one way or another, some room for free will. However, it was Jacobus Arminius, head of the theological faculty of the University of Leyden, who opened the debate on predestination.

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2 Partial translation of the Dutch word stadhouder. Originally, the stadholder was the king’s deputy in a province. When the Dutch Republic had cut the ties with the Spanish king, it maintained the function of stadholder. All stadholders were members of the house of Orange. Officially, the stadholder was subordinate to the States General.
on a scholarly theological level. Initially, the debate took place within the walls of the university, but soon it spread into the churches. The essence of Arminius arguments was that indeed human salvation could only be achieved through faith, and God gave faith to the elected people, but man had the option to accept or to reject the faith. Arminius’ opponent, Gomarus, defended the strict interpretation of predestination: for him faith was irresistible, because it was a gift of God, and man could not resist God.

When the discussion on predestination spread out into the churches, it divided the church in two camps: the supporters of Arminius and the supporters of Gomarus. Most of the ministers supported the ideas of Gomarus, whereas most of the regents supported the ideas of Arminius. The regents were the better educated part of the population, and in that era education was still much under the influence of humanism, especially that of Erasmus. These humanistic ideas, which gave little value to doctrine, were almost opposite to those of Gomarus.

Given their minority position in the Reformed Church, the ministers who supported the ideas of Arminius sought protection for their ideas from the state. In 1610, 40 ministers, led by Wtenbogaert, presented the States of Holland with a formal declaration of their ideas, called a remonstrance. From that time, the supporters of the ideas of Arminius were called “Remonstrants”. The States of Holland, under the firm leadership of Oldenbarnevelt, took the Remonstrants into their protection by attempting to silence the disputes within the Church, and by continuing to oppose the calling of a national synod. When, as reaction on the remonstrance, the Gomarists produced a counter-remonstrance, they got the name “counter Remonstrants”.

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The issue was now not only about the true interpretation of predestination, the issue was also about how strict, or how wide the interpretation of a doctrine should be. The Remonstrants argued that in a doctrine we can distinguish between essential and non-essential elements. The Church should allow differences on non-essential elements of doctrine, and the Remonstrants, together with the States of Holland, considered their differences with the counter-Remonstrants as non-essential elements of doctrine. For the counter Remonstrants, a doctrine was true or false; if there were two interpretation of a doctrine, only one could be the true one. Subsequently, the Remonstrants had no problem tolerating the counter Remonstrants in the Church, but for the counter Remonstrants, who considered the ideas of Arminius to be heresy, it was impossible to tolerate the Remonstrants. A national synod, in which the counter Remonstrants would have a majority, would have a predictable, and for the Remonstrants, negative outcome. That was the reason that the Remonstrants, fully supported by Oldenbarnevelt and the States of Holland, for years successfully blocked any proposal to convene a national synod. When in 1617, Prince Maurice had broken the power of the States of Holland and its advocate Oldenbarnevelt, the way was open for a national synod.

The way the Synod was organized emphasized the importance of the meeting. The meetings took place in the Kloveniersdoelen, the largest building in the town of Dordrecht. All participants received a generous per diem, and festivities and social functions made the stay in Dordrecht as pleasant as possible. The assembly consisted of more than one hundred members. Thirty-seven preachers and nineteen elders represented the Netherlands churches. There were thirty foreign divines from England, Geneva,

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4 van 't Spijker, De Synode, 60.
Berne, and other Swiss places, Bremen, Emden, Nassau, Hesse and the Palatinate. Five professors of theology, Polyander from the University of Leyden, Gomarus from Groningen, Lubbertus from Franeker, Thysius from Harderwijk and Walaeus from Middelburg. Eighteen political commissioners represented the States. The sessions of the Synod lasted more than six months, and the cost to the provinces - which bore the expense - were at least three hundred thousand guilders. This included traveling and lodging expenses, secretarial expenses, festivities and presents to the members of the Synod. To solve the language problem for the foreign representatives, Latin was the official language of the Synod. The meetings were public, and were attended by many curious and interested people.

According to the instructions of the States General, decisions of the Synod required a majority of votes, providing that the political commissioners, who were appointed to the Synod to guard the interests of the States, did not object. The decisions of the Synod had to be included in a final report to the States General: the Acta Synodalia, for approval of the States. This illustrates clearly the influence of the States General on the Synod, first, they had their political commissioners for direct influence on the Synod, and second, they had the authority to approve and legalize the decisions of the Synod.

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6 Blok, *People of the Netherlands*, 469; Maurice Hansen, *The Reformed Church in the Netherlands: Traced from A.D. 1340 to A.D. 1840, in Short Historical Sketches* (New York: Board of publication of the Reformed Church in America, 1884), 139 mentions that the original budget for the synod was 100,000 florins.

Although the Remonstrants were a minority in the Reformed Church, with only three representatives they were grossly underrepresented in the Synod.\(^8\)

In the fourth session, the synod decided to invite Episcopius and twelve Remonstrants to make a statement of their views. This was, in a way, citing them to appear before a tribunal, not giving them an opportunity to present their opinion in an open discussion.\(^9\) On December 6, the 13 Remonstrant ministers, with Episcopius as their informal leader, appeared in the Synod. First the Remonstrants brought into discussion the judicial authority of the Synod, arguing that all the members of the Synod, except the foreign members, were their opponents. This discussion occupied nine sessions, and then the States intervened in favor of the Synod by forcing the Remonstrants to accept the authority of the Synod, as given by the States.\(^10\)

The chairman of the Synod, Bogerman, had made clear that he saw the relation between the Synod and the Remonstrants as that between a judge and a person summoned to answer. The Remonstrants did not want to be treated that way; they wanted an open fundamental discussion on the doctrine of predestination. From Bogerman’s perspective the Remonstrants were uncooperative and obstinate. It was no surprise that the sessions with the Remonstrants did not contribute to a solution of the conflict the Synod had to solve. Eventually, chairman Bogerman decided not to hear the Remonstrants any more. In the session of January 16, 1619, he dismissed the Remonstrants in an emotional and very inelegant way. “Go as you came. You began with

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\(^{9}\) Blok, *People of the Netherlands*, 469.

\(^{10}\) van 't Spijker, *De Synode*, 102-05; Hansen, *The Reformed Church*, 155.
lies and you end with them. You are full of fraud and double-dealing. You are not worthy that the Synod should treat you farther.” And he sent them away with the last words:

“Dimittimini ! Exite ! Mendacio incepistis, mendacio finivistis ! Ite !”

Now that the Remonstrants had left, the Synod could concentrate on the formulation of the doctrine and the church regime. In the 138th session, on April 24, the Synod decreed a formal condemnation of the Remonstrants. The Synod had judged that they had seriously harmed the church by breaking the rules of the church, deviating from the true doctrine, preaching false doctrines and creating a schism in the church. They had sinned against the faith, love, and commonly accepted laws and rules. If they (Remonstrants) would not accept the decisions of the Synod, there would be no place for them in the Reformed Church. In a ceremonial session on May 6, 1619, the canons of faith adopted by the Synod were read, followed by the sentence passed against the Remonstrants.

In resolution 1072 of July 4, 1619, the States General gave their formal approval of the canon of faith of the Synod. Furthermore, this resolution ratified the placard, which forbade everyone to convene a meeting in which the Remonstrants doctrine was preached. For not obeying this law, the minister who held the meeting would be fined 500 guilders; anyone attending the meeting would be fined 25 guilders. By the enforcement of this resolution about two hundred Remonstrant ministers were deposed as minister of the Reformed Church. Of these two hundred Remonstrant ministers, about

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11 Hansen, The Reformed Church, 158-59; Krijger, De Dordtse Synode, 23.
12 van 't Spijker, De Synode, 113; Hansen, The Reformed Church, 160-61.
13 Smit, Resolutien, 317.
14 van 't Spijker, De Synode, 116.
forty accepted the Dordrecht articles, and they were restored as ministers of the Reformed Church. About seventy signed an “act of cessation”, which forced them to abstain from all preaching and to live a quiet unofficial life, in which the States undertook to provide for their support. The remaining eighty ministers who did not want to sign, were forced to go into exile.\textsuperscript{15}

The foreign representatives had left after May 6, and the sessions between this date and the last day of the Synod, May 29, 1619, were dedicated to the revision of the church ordinances. The proceedings of these sessions are the Post-Acta. Before the Synod, each province had its own church ordinance, in which the relationship between the magistrates and the Church was described. It was the intention of the Reformed Church to rewrite the Church ordinances and make them uniformly applicable in all provinces of the Republic. The goal of the delegates of the Church to make the Church more independent in ecclesiastical matters, met fierce opposition from the political commissioners, and the Church representatives had to compromise. Nevertheless the Post-Acta failed to secure the approval of the States-General, and were never legalized.\textsuperscript{16} With regard to the formal relationship between Church and state, the Synod did not change anything.

The Synod was made possible by the change in the political power relations in the Republic. Now that the Synod had condemned the Remonstrants, the provincial states and the town councils were purged from magistrates who had supported, or sympathized with the Remonstrants.

\textsuperscript{15} Blok, People of the Netherlands, 483-84; Hansen, The Reformed Church, 162; van ‘t Spijker, De Synode, 116.

\textsuperscript{16} Kuijper, De post-acta, 54; H.A. Enno van Gelder, Getemperde vrijheid (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1972), 11.
In its era, the Synod of Dordrecht was a very important event with major political, religious and social consequences. We have seen the direct effects of the Synod, but what were the effects in the long term? The strict interpretation of predestination, and the emphasis on doctrine would for a long time characterize the Reformed Church.\(^{17}\) In all other areas the counter Remonstrants got less than what they had expected and hoped for. Most historians agree that the Synod had few long lasting positive effects for the strict Calvinists. The English historian Price said, "Although the Synod of Dordrecht was on the surface a triumph for Reformed orthodoxy, it can perhaps better be seen as the last major and unsuccessful attempt to make the Dutch Republic a truly reformed state."\(^{18}\) Van Lieberg concluded: "In the decades after the Synod of Dordt it would become evident that the triumph of strict Calvinism had been largely a Pyrrhic victory."\(^{19}\) Van Deursen saw one positive point of the Synod: that the Reformed Church got the freedom to decide on matter of their doctrine.\(^{20}\) He is right in his observation that: "The Dutch are used to being ruled by moderates, by groups of the middle. The Synod of Dordrecht is one of the rare moments in Dutch history that radicals have won."\(^{21}\)

OUTLINE OF THESIS

This last remark of van Deursen is a good starting point for the analysis of the influence of Calvinism on the development of freedom in the Netherlands in the period

\(^{17}\) Geyl, *The Netherlands*, 78-79.


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 275.
1560-1630, which is my primary interest in this thesis. First, van Deursen calls the Calvinists radicals. The ideas, the attitude and the behavior of the Calvinists can, for good reasons, be called radical. The Calvinists were convinced that their religious ideas were the true ones, that they were the God’s elected people, and that their faith would bring them salvation. The truth of their faith was so important that they could not allow any flexibility, or compromise in doctrine. Their attitude was therefore intolerant towards any other religion. The freedom to exercise their religion was very important to them and no effort or sacrifice was too much in the struggle for this freedom. Their feeling of self-righteousness, their inflexibility, intolerance and perseverance were characteristics which, depending on the circumstances, worked to the advantage, or to the disadvantage of the Calvinists. Second, van Deursen mentions that the group of the middle normally rules. The influence of the Calvinists on the history of the Netherlands is basically their influence on the ruling group of the middle. In the southern Netherlands the ruling group was dominated by the nobility, in the northern Netherlands the provincial and town magistrates dominated the ruling group.

The group of the middle was exposed to influences from different directions, of which Calvinism was one, and the group of the middle reacted to events that happened. To find the influence of Calvinism we have to analyze the history as driven by events and actions as well as influenced by thoughts and ideas.

In the second chapter I will describe the history of the Netherlands in the period 1560-1630 and I will evaluate how Calvinists and Calvinism directly or indirectly influenced the history.
In chapter three I will concentrate on the philosophical and theological aspects of thoughts on freedom of Calvinism and other Dutch thinkers. The worldview, especially the relationship between God and man was a determinant factor in the ideas about freedom. Much emphasis on the majesty of God often resulted in the concept of man having limited freedom, and giving more value to doctrine than spiritual faith. I will indicate what influence Calvinistic thoughts, and that of the other thinkers, had on the middle group. The practical application of thoughts of freedom we can find in the political ideas on freedom, as they developed during the Revolt and in the Dutch republic.

Chapter four will describe the development of political thoughts, with emphasis on the relationship between political concepts and ideas about freedom. In particular it will describe two aspects of the political ideas: (1) the justification of the revolt and the struggle for independence, and (2) the Church state relationship. For the justification of their revolt and independence the Dutch used the existing legal principles of natural law and positive law. The Church state relationship was the result of the struggle between the secular authorities and the ministers of the Reformed Church, which had different concepts of freedom.

Toleration is freedom in the political and social relationship between different groups in a society. The Dutch Republic was known as the most tolerant country in Europe. The fifth chapter will investigate how a country in which intolerant Calvinism was the state-sanctioned religion, could be so tolerant. Toleration was the pragmatic solution of a pluralistic society for internal stability and peace.

From a historical perspective, the development of capitalism can be seen as a road which lead from a regime, in which economic behavior and actions, like all other
behavior and actions, were subjected to religious rules and ethical norms, to a regime in which economic conduct follows the law of the free market. In the Dutch Republic capitalism was further developed than in other European countries, because strive for profit had become a stronger leading principle for economic conduct than the medieval ethical norms. The sixth chapter will investigate whether Calvinism influenced the development of capitalism; and if so, what was the nature of this influence, and to what extend did it contribute it to the development of capitalism. The idea of Max Weber that Calvinism created a spirit of capitalism in which capitalism could flourish will be discussed.

In the seventh chapter, I will take the partial analysis of the previous chapters together in order to give an overall answer to the thesis question: what was the influence of Calvinism on the development of freedom in the Netherlands in the period 1560-1630.
FIRST AND SECOND REVOLT

We can distinguish in the Dutch Revolt two episodes or phases, partly overlapping in time, but different in geographical location, and most important: in the goal achieved. The first episode or first Revolt took place from 1564 to 1585 and the second Revolt from 1572 to 1585. The center of activities of the first Revolt was located in the southern Netherlands, whereas the northern Netherlands was the stage for the second Revolt. The first Revolt was a failure for the Calvinists. In 1585, with the surrender of Antwerp, Spanish rule was firmly reestablished in the southern Netherlands. The Roman Catholic Church, revitalized by the Counter-Reformation, had regained its position of state church, and there was absolutely no freedom for any religion other than the Catholic one. Most Calvinists emigrated to the northern Netherlands, making a re-ignition of the Revolt in the southern Netherlands practically impossible. The second Revolt, on the other hand, was a success for the Calvinists. Although not yet firmly established, and still challenged by the Spanish troops, the northern Netherlands had in 1585 achieved a position of practical independence from Spanish domination. The Calvinistic Reformed Church was, although not a state church, sanctioned and protected by the state. The exercise of other religions was severely restricted, and that of the Catholic one, was forbidden by law.

What explains the difference in outcome of the first and the second Revolt? The main reason is the difference in the relationship between the group of the middle, which
had political power on one side and the Calvinists on the other side. And of course the circumstances were not identical.

In the first Revolt, the group of the middle took the initiative. This group, consisting of high and low nobility and town magistrates, had developed a strong resistance to the policy of king Philip II. Philip had continued the policy, started by his father Charles V, to change the government of the Netherlands from a regime, in which the political power is concentrated in the local authorities, into an absolute, centrally organized government. The nobility was correct in their fear that an absolute, central regime would diminish their role in government, and consequently their political power. The same was applicable for the town magistrates; their political power was based on privileges, and in an absolute and centrally organized government there was no room for privileges that were different for each province and town. Furthermore, in the whole population grew a strong opposition to the ruthless persecution of people with deviating religious opinions, normally called heretics. End 1550's the persecution of heretics had turned into a political problem.¹ The idea, on which Philip’s policy was based, that heretics were tools of the devil against the God given social order had lost its last support in the Dutch society.²

When in 1566 and 1576, the group of the middle was quite successful in having the policy changed in accordance with their goals, the Calvinists took the opportunity to pursue their agenda, and they seized political power in a couple of towns, disturbed Catholic churches with iconoclasm, and created for Calvinism a practical freedom to

preach and worship. The success of the radical Calvinists, combined with the social
unrest and political instability it had created, made the group of the middle realize how
big the gap was between their goals and those of the Calvinists. The group of the
middle wanted restoration of the old privileges and the end of religious persecution; the
Calvinists wanted Calvinism as the state religion and a state subordinate to the Church,
similar to the theocratic regime of Calvin in Geneva. The Calvinists had polarized the
political situation in such a way so that only two options were left: reconciliation with
Spanish rule, or subjugation to Calvinist rule. When the Spanish offered an almost
complete restoration of the privileges and promised the nobility their old role in
government, it is not surprising that the group of the middle choose reconciliation with
Spanish rule over Calvinist rule.

In the second Dutch Revolt the initiative came from the Calvinists, in particular
from the Sea Beggars. They were a group of Calvinist that had fled the Netherlands to
escape persecution. With their ships, and using English and north German ports as base,
they attacked, as privateers, shipping on the North Sea and occasionally pillaged coastal
villages. When, in 1572, they appeared with their ship at the port of Brill, they created a
new political option for the population of the northern Netherlands. There was already a
strong opposition to the regime of the Spanish governor, the duke of Alva, in the northern
Netherlands, but until now there had not been an opportunity to translate this feeling of
opposition into acts of disobedience, or even revolt. The Sea Beggars, supported by
fanatical, disciplined and well-organized Calvinists, just made the difference. Again, the
Calvinists, who now had the political support of William of Orange, had created a
situation in which the political alternatives had been reduced to only two: a regime under
Alva, or a regime under Orange, with Calvinists in a dominant role. The group of the middle was reluctant to make a choice, neither of the options was attractive to them, but pressured by the middle and lower class of their citizens, town governments eventually choose the least of the two evils, and surrendered their towns to the Calvinists and the Sea Beggars, under the name of William of Orange. In the following years of struggle against the Spanish troops, the Calvinists were the core of the resistance. Because they knew that freedom for their religion only could be realized by a successful defense against the Spanish troops, they were unconditionally devoted to that defense. Their attitude was a source of inspiration for all people in the Netherlands. It is fair to say that without the Calvinists there would not have been a second Revolt and subsequently, no independent Dutch Republic.

WILLIAM OF ORANGE AND THE CALVINISTS

The relationship between the group of the middle and the Calvinists can be illustrated with the behavior of William of Orange, the man who was the inspirational leader of the Dutch Revolt, and of whom can be said, just like the Calvinists, that without him the Dutch Revolt would have failed. William of Orange was a typical representative of the group of the middle; as a member of the high nobility he led the first opposition against the government of the governess Margaret. The agreement with Margaret, known as the ‘Moderation’, in which temporarily religious freedom was legalized and the edicts against heretics were suspended, was the result of the opposition, in which William had been so instrumental. However, when the Calvinists reacted to the ‘Moderation’ with radical behavior and riots, which seriously threatened the political and social stability, he
offered Margaret his help to restore order and peace. In the 1570’s, the political situation had changed completely, and William was the only one of the old group of the middle who still fought the Spanish regime. He was desperate for any help, and the Calvinists, especially the Sea Beggars were the only group that was willing to help him. He solicited, initially reluctantly, their support. As sovereign of the principality Orange in France, he had given commissions to the Sea Beggars. Their ships were now flying his flag, and their actions were in the name of Orange. As an experienced politician William realized that he could not defy his strongest supporters. Although he strove for religious toleration, he recognized the necessity of first establishing his political strength on the Calvinist rock.

In 1566, when the Calvinists staged the iconoclasm they had become an important group. How had Calvinism developed in the Netherlands? Ironically, it was the ruthless repercussion of Charles V’s later years that largely contributed to the creation of Dutch Calvinism. Among those who were forced to flee abroad were a number of educated men who had professed little more than a mild evangelism. If they would not have been persecuted, they would probably have been little or no threat, but once settled abroad, it was no more than natural that they banded together with more determined opponents of the regime. Calvin and his new church in Geneva had tremendous influence on the exile churches, Calvinism with its strong sense of discipline and providential destiny proved an ideal creed for groups in hazardous and difficult conditions.

From 1559 forward, an era of national political instability, French Calvinism

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4 Ibid., 127.
experienced a period of buoyant and apparently uncontrollable growth. In 1562, when the religious war broke out, it is estimated that as many as half of the French nobles had defected to the new faith.\textsuperscript{6} These developments in France inevitably caused reverberations in the provinces in the Netherlands, particularly in the Walloon provinces, which were directly adjacent to France. Most important was the example the French reformed churches gave with their apparently providential success. They gave the Dutch Calvinists courage: courage to show the same defiance against the official persecution that had led to such a success in France. One of the most remarkable features of Calvinism in these years was its irrepressible self-confidence, often in defiance of any realistic expectation of success. The Dutch Calvinists started to imitate the provocative and confrontational behavior that had brought the French Calvinists such success. The situation in France did not only inspire the Calvinists in the Netherlands, it also gave the Dutch nobility an example of how political crisis could be turned to their own advantage.\textsuperscript{7}

The Catholic historian Rogier and the Belgian historian Pirenne saw in the social class structure a cause for the rise of Calvinism. They compared the attraction of socialism for the nineteenth century industrial proletariat with that of Calvinism for the sixteenth century lower class.\textsuperscript{8} This view projects too much a modern concept of social and economic relationships on a society that was fundamentally different.

\textsuperscript{6} Pettegree, \textit{Religion and Revolt}, 73.
\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 72.
\textsuperscript{8} L.J. Rogier, \textit{Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de 16e en 17e eeuw}. vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Urbi et Orbi, 1945), 158.
FIRST REVOLT 1566-1585

In 1559, Philip II, after having received the approval of the Pope, executed a reorganization of the bishoprics in the Netherlands. From a rational viewpoint the plan improved the organization of the Catholic Church, but it nevertheless produced a storm of opposition, because it involved the strengthening of the King’s authority, at a moment when all his plans were viewed with distrust. With regard to the persecution of heretics, Philip continued the policy of his father, but more than before, people became irritated by the cruelty of this policy. There was a rising sympathy and even admiration for people who were burned at the stake because of their faith.

After his accession in 1555, Philip had stayed for four years in the Netherlands, and it was now time for him to go to Spain to be crowned as king. He gave the formal responsibility for the government of the Netherlands to his half sister Margaret of Parma, who received the title of governess.

The nobles formed the core of the growing opposition to Philip’s policies. What frustrated the nobles most was the idea that they were systematically denied any involvement in the creation of political policies. Formally they were responsible for the execution of policies, which were formulated without their consent. Taking the French nobles as their example, they formed a league, the so-called League of Compromise. On April 1566 two hundred nobles presented a petition to the Governess, in which they asked the suspension of the anti-heretic Edicts. Furthermore, they asked that the States General should assemble and discuss the religious questions. Margaret made clear to the nobles that she was not in a position to decide on their requests; only the king could make

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such a decision. However, the Governess agreed to a temporary moderation of the
Edict, till a formal answer from Philip would be received.

The 'Moderation' resulted in an immediate and vast upsurge of Protestant
activity, including the forming of Calvinist consistories. Calvinist preachers, often former
friars, who had been living in exile abroad, streamed back.\textsuperscript{10} Mass Calvinist preaching in
the open air, so-called hedge preaching, started in West-Flanders a month after the
'Moderation', and spread rapidly, giving the impression that the government in Brussels
and the Church were powerless to arrest the advancement of Protestant activity.\textsuperscript{11} In such
a situation it was not surprisingly that frustrations of decades would erupt in a wave of
popular violence against the Church. On August 10, 1566, after having attended a
Protestant service, the people of the village Steenvoorde, a village in Southwest Flanders,
destroyed the sculptures and images in the cloister.\textsuperscript{12} People of nearby towns quickly took
over this destruction of icons in religious buildings, and within two weeks this riot
movement, now known as iconoclasm, had spread over the whole country. Despite the
very bad economic situation in that time, which probably had been a contributing factor
to the eruption of the iconoclasm,\textsuperscript{13} there were no assaults on governmental officials, or
town halls, or plundering of shops or food stores. In form, the iconoclast was purely and
simply an attack on the Church and not anything else.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} Jonathan I. Israel, \textit{The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477-1806} (Oxford: Clarendon
Press, 1995), 146.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 147.
Revised version http://dutchrevolt.leidenuniv.nl/Nederlands/verhaal/verhaal04.htm), ch. 2, p. 10; Geyl, \textit{The
Revolt}, 92-93 gives August 14, in Poperinge as date and place of the beginning of the iconoclasm.
\textsuperscript{13} I. Schöffer, "De opstand in de Nederlanden, 1566-1609," in \textit{De lage landen van 1500 tot 1780}, eds.
\textsuperscript{14} Israel, \textit{The Dutch Republic}, 148.
Margaret was desperate, but the nobles came to her help. They offered their support in restoring the order, if she would agree to permit Protestant worship in those places were it was already practiced.\textsuperscript{15} When the nobles achieved this agreement ("Accord") with the governess on August 23, they decided to dissolve the League of Compromise.\textsuperscript{16}

Although a kind of religious freedom was now realized, the order restored by the nobles had strengthened the position of Margaret; with money sent from Spain she was able to recruit new troops\textsuperscript{17}, and with these troops she started in December to suppress the Protestants in the Walloon provinces. In March 1567, her troops defeated a rebel force near Antwerp, and after the fall of the strong Calvinist bastion Valenciennes, religious freedom was an illusion and the revolt seemed dead.

That Margaret had regained control of the Netherlands was no reason for Philip II to change his decision to send the Duke of Alva with an army to the Netherlands to punish the rebels and firmly reestablish his royal authority.

The resistance to the non-national tendencies of Philip's rule, to the Spanish troops, to the excessive centralization and to the religious persecution, had proceeded from the politically privileged classes. The national movement had found expression in the activities of the knights of the fleece, the lower nobility, the town governments and the States assemblies, in which all these groups could cooperate. Calvinism had added a warlike element to the movement, but it had split the nation, and its iconoclasm had scared large parts of the population, in particular the politically privileged and active

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 152; Schöffer, De opstand, 104.
\textsuperscript{16} Schöffer, De opstand, 108.
\textsuperscript{17} Woltjer, \textit{Tussen vrijheidsstrijd en burgeroorlog}, 36.
ones. Subsequently, the Brussels government of the governess had been able to subdue the country with the help of the native nobility, and with the sympathy of a great part of the citizens, particularly of town governments. 18

The prospects in the summer of 1567 were therefore as favorable as possible for Philip II. He had sent out the duke of Alva, not only “to wipe out the last vestiges of sedition and heresy”, but also “to destroy the ancient privileges of the country, the root of all evil, and to raise the edifice of absolutism, the ideal of the new age.” 19

After Alva arrived in Brussels on August 22, 1567, he set up a reign of terror. He arrested, on September 9, the dukes of Egmont and Horn, both knights of the fleece, and they were eventually executed on June 5, 1568. The reign of terror caused an enormous emigration, Calvinists, and even Catholics who had played a role in the opposition fled to Protestant states in Germany or England. William of Orange, despite an invitation of Alva to return and to accept a position in the government, found it safer to stay at his ancestral castle in Dillenburg, Germany. History proved him right; the regime of Alva confiscated all his properties in the Netherlands, and his eldest son was abducted and transported to Spain. While in Dillenburg, William raised an army, consisting of émigrés and mercenaries, hoping that with some successful military actions he would revive the revolt. In the first military action, the battle of Heiligerlee, his troops defeated the Spanish troops, but the following actions were less successful, and when William had to disband his troops from lack of money, he had achieved nothing.

Although the revolt seemed dead, there was one group that continued a form of revolt: the Sea Beggars. William had realized their importance for the Revolt and he had

18 Geyl, The Revolt, 99.
19 Ibid., 100.
arranged a form of cooperation in which his name and title would legalize the Sea
Beggar’s actions. However, he was not very successful in controlling this unruly bunch
of pirates. Nevertheless, it was the Sea Beggars who initiated the second revolt, which
eventually led to the creation of the Dutch Republic. On April 1, 1572, they captured the
town of Brill, situated at the entrance of the Meuse; a couple of days later the citizens of
Flushing invited the Sea Beggars to take over control of their city. The reason why this
could happen was that Alva, considering the possibility of a French invasion, had
concentrated his troops along the French border, and had left almost no troops in the
garrisons of Holland, Zeeland and the other northern provinces.\textsuperscript{20} The capture of Brill and
the voluntary surrender of Flushing had revealed the weak military position of Alva, and
in one to two months most towns in Holland and Zeeland took the side of the rebels. In
July, Dordrecht, as the oldest town in Holland, took the initiative to convene the States of
Holland. This was in essence a revolutionary act, because only the lord of the province, in
this case Philip II, had the authority to convene its States.\textsuperscript{21} It was remarkable that the
States of Holland recognized William of Orange as their stadholder, basing their decision
on a decree of Philip of 1559, and pretending that in the following years nothing had
happened. Furthermore, they declared that their fight was not against the king, but against
his bad governor (Alva). The States raised money for a military campaign. Orange
brother in law, Count of Bergh conquered large parts of Gelre, and Friesland chose the
side of the prince. William invaded in August the Netherlands, and captured the town of
Roermond and parts of Brabant.\textsuperscript{22} In the meantime, his brother Louis of Nassau had

\textsuperscript{20} Schöffer, De opstand, 114.
\textsuperscript{21} van der Lem, De Opstand, ch. 6, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., ch. 6, p. 6.
surprised Mons in Hinault with a band of Huguenots, thereby opening a suitable gate of entry to the threatening French invasion.\textsuperscript{23}

The strategic situation changed on the night of August 23-24: the St Bartholomew night, in which the French king killed all the Huguenot nobles who had come to Paris to celebrate the wedding of the king’s sister. The threat of a French invasion disappeared, and Alva could dedicate his troops to a campaign against the rebellious provinces.

Initially Don Fadrique, Alva’s son, who commanded the campaign, did not meet serious resistance. Terror was an integral part of the policy for this campaign. To set an example for other towns, Don Fadrique let his soldiers plunder and burn the town of Mechelen. This policy appeared effective as all towns in Brabant opened their gates without any resistance. In Holland, he slaughtered the complete population of the small garrison town Naarden. In the following siege of the town of Haarlem, Don Fadrique was less successful; it took him seven months, from December 1572 to July 1573, before the town surrendered.\textsuperscript{24} The Spaniards had to pay a high price, they had more than 8000 casualties, and the long months of hardship had demoralized the troops.\textsuperscript{25} The next siege of the town of Alkmaar turned into a fiasco. A month and a half after the Spaniards had started their siege, Diedrich Sonoy, the deputy of prince William, inundated the surrounding lands of Alkmaar, and the Spanish army was forced to withdraw. Three days later, the Sea Beggar’s fleet, under command of Cornelis van Monnickendam, defeated Alva’s fleet on the Zuiderzee near Hoorn. This all had a very positive influence on the morale of the rebels.

\textsuperscript{23} Geyl, \textit{The Revolt}, 117.
\textsuperscript{24} van der Lem, \textit{De Opstand}, ch. 7, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., ch. 7, p. 7.
Shortly hereafter, Don Luis de Requesens succeeded Alva. Requesens had a different policy than Alva: he made some serious efforts to bring the combating parties together. To play the public opinion, he dissolved the hated Council of Troubles and he terminated the unpopular “tenth penny” tax. The differences in opinion on religious matters, especially on free worship for Calvinists, were too high obstacles for an agreement between the government in Brussels and the rebellious provinces. On March 5, 1576, Requesens died unexpectedly. Because the King had not assigned a successor, the Council of State automatically took over the responsibilities and authority of the governor. However, the Council did not have the practical power to establish a convincing authority, and the States of Brabant took the initiative to convene the States General.\(^{26}\) One of the decisions the States General made was to start negotiations with the rebellious provinces. Both the loyal and the rebellious provinces recognized Philip II as their legal sovereign; both wanted an end to the plundering and pillaging of the mutinying Spanish troops, and both wanted a government of the Netherlands, for the Netherlanders, and by the Netherlanders. On the religious question the loyal and rebellious provinces had different opinions, but a temporal compromise opened the way to an agreement that was acceptable to all parties: the Pacification of Ghent.

On the religious question the Pacification ordered the States General to find a definitive solution, and in the meantime in Holland and Zeeland, the Protestants could freely worship, while the Catholics were restricted in the exercise of their faith. In all other provinces the religious Edicts were suspended.

November 4, 1576, one day after the successful completion of the negotiations, mutinying Spanish troops ransacked the town of Antwerp. In this, later called “Spanish Fury”, 8000 people were killed. This emphasized the need for cooperation between the provinces, and on November 8, the representatives of the provinces signed the Pacification of Ghent.

Although the southern provinces and the States General now in effect had joined the northern provinces in the revolt against the Spanish Crown, there was still an immense gap between the South and the North. The northern provinces had burned its bridges with Philip, while the southern provinces remained officially Catholic and kept open the door for reconciliation with the king.

Philip had appointed his half brother Don Juan as governor, but when he arrived on November 3, 1576, in Luxembourg, his position was weak; he had no money and subsequently, he had no control of the Spanish troops who were still in mutiny. It was obvious that he had to give in to quite a lot of wishes of the States General before he could make his ‘Joyous Entry’, the ceremonial inauguration, in Brussels. After the States General had given him the money to pay the troops, he agreed to remove the Spanish troops, and he affirmed the Pacification of Ghent.

In the meantime, militant groups in Brussels and some other cities in Brabant and Flanders, had taken control of the town governments and forced the States General to invite William of Orange to Brussels. William received a very warm welcome, and was given the function of stadholder of Brabant. He was now the most influential man in the Netherlands, deriving his political power largely from the support of the middle and lower classes of the population.
The revolt of Brussels and the southern provinces was different from the revolt of 1572, because now all provinces participated, and not just Holland and Zeeland. Still, most southern provinces were not so interested in religious freedom, for them the liberation from the Spanish troops was the major issue. The vast majority of the population of these provinces was Catholic, and although it admired the struggle of the people of Holland and Zeeland, and the Catholics certainly did not want the return of religious persecution, they had little sympathy for Calvinism. When we take into account the differences in interests between the northern and southern provinces in political, social and religious matters at that time, we should not be surprised that the Pacification did not last longer than three years. The Walloon provinces Hinault and Artois were the first to realize the incompatibility of the Pacification of Ghent; they signed in 1579 a pact of cooperation: the Union of Arras. The northern provinces reacted with a pact of mutual defense: the Union of Utrecht.

The Union of Arras made reconciliation with the king possible, and when that reconciliation took place, the old political ideals of the 1560s were almost completely realized: withdrawal of foreign troops, restoration of the ancient privileges, and for the nobility a role in the government. Any freedom for Protestantism however, was not included.

CREATION OF THE DUTCH REPUBLIC

The Union of Utrecht included the provinces Holland, Zeeland, Gelre, Groningen and Friesland, and the majority of the towns in Brabant and Flanders. The Union was

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27 The Union of Utrecht called the union of the signatory provinces the United Provinces of the Netherlands. I will use the term United Provinces.
vague in a number of important political aspects: it did not mention the king at all, and it made no decision on the Catholic religion. Each province could make its own rules with regard to religious matters, only freedom of conscience was guaranteed.

On October 1, 1578, Don Juan died unexpectedly; Alexander Farnese, duke of Parma, and son of governess Margaret, succeeded him. His aim was to bring back to the undisputed sovereignty of his king in all the provinces of the Netherlands, and in order to achieve his aim, he relied heavily on military force. As a good politician however, he realized that brute force and terror could only be counterproductive. His capture of Maastricht in 1579 was the last time that he allowed his soldiers to plunder the town. In his 1584/85 campaign, he put emphasis on the human treatment of the towns he captured; no plundering, a general pardon for all opponents, and Protestants got ample time to sell their properties and belongings before they had to leave the country. Military action was not always necessary to win back provinces for the king. In Groningen, the stadholder George de Lalaing, count of Rennenberg had mixed feelings about the increasing influence of the militant Calvinists. As a Catholic conservative nobleman, he feared the social and religious consequences of the increasing power of the Calvinists. Knowing that he had the support of the Catholic majority of the population, which largely shared with him the same fears, he decided to leave the Union of Utrecht and returned to the side of the king.28

Parma completed his successful military campaign in the southern Netherlands with the capture of Antwerp in 1585; all southern provinces were now brought back under Spanish rule.

William of Orange realized that the revolt needed the support of a foreign country. The Protestant Queen Elisabeth of England initially turned a deaf ear to William’s requests for help. Then William looked at France; he hoped to assure political, and preferable military support of France by offering the sovereignty of the provinces united under the Union of Utrecht to the brother of the French king Henry III, the Duke of Anjou. The Duke of Anjou was Catholic, and to have a Catholic sovereign over a state dominated by Protestants, seems at least odd. For William however, it was not so odd, he hoped, with the introduction of Anjou, to bind the Catholics and to moderate the Calvinists, and in such way to realize a religious tolerant state.

Although the United Provinces acted as if they were independent, officially they still recognized Philip II as their sovereign. Because they had now offered sovereignty to the Duke of Anjou, it was necessary to cut the legal ties with the Spanish crown. On July 22, 1581, the States General signed the Act of Abjuration, in which they declared that Philip was not anymore their sovereign. They justified their act by referring to medieval traditional law, as for example expressed in the ‘Joyous Entry’ of the province of Brabant, which says that that a prince who grossly neglects his duty to take care of his subjects can loose his sovereignty.

Anjou had been formally given sovereignty of the United Provinces, but its scope was limited. Feeling too much restricted by the States General, Anjou tried to take matters in his own hand. He seized Dunkirk and some other rebel towns in Flanders, but when he attacked Antwerp his troops faced fierce resistance from the citizens, and he had to withdraw with heavy losses. Anjou’s position was now untenable and he left the country.
By spring 1583, Orange was in despair. Both his pro-French strategy and his ‘Religious Peace’ policy were in ruins. The fall of Breda, reportedly the work of local Catholics opening the town’s gates to the Spaniards, had so enraged the Protestant population of Antwerp that they drastically curtailed Catholic freedom of worship in both Antwerp and Brussels, despite Orange’s effort to prevent it. Facing the reality of the advancements of Parma’s campaign, Orange moved his headquarters from Antwerp to Delft in Holland.

With Orange’s removal to Delft, his vision of a Netherlands, united in a revolt against Spain under joint Catholic-Protestant leadership was definitively shattered. He was compelled to accept that if the Revolt was to survive at all, the only possible base was Holland under Calvinist leadership.

In July 1584, Balthasar Geerards murdered William of Orange. The Revolt had lost its inspirational leader, and there was nobody with the same charisma to take over his role. Given its precarious situation the United Provinces looked abroad for help. Despite the very disappointing experience with Anjou, the United Provinces tried again to solicit France’s support by offering the sovereignty to king Henry III, but he had too many internal problems, and he declined the offer. With all other options exhausted, the States General at The Hague turned in May 1585 to England. Just as Henry III had done, Queen Elisabeth did not accept the sovereignty offered to her. But she feared that recapturing of the northern provinces would improve Spain’s international position. Therefore she agreed to give military assistance in return for political and military influence in the United Provinces. Elisabeth sent an expeditionary force of 6,350 foot and 1,000 horse,

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29 Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 213.
30 Ibid., 213.
the costs of which had to be shared with the States.\textsuperscript{31} In exchange, she could nominate the political and military head of the United Provinces, and she was given two seats in the Council of State.\textsuperscript{32} Elisabeth appointed the Earl of Leicester to the position of political leader of the United Provinces and commander of the English and State's troops.

The short period (1585-1587) that Leicester was governor general of the United Provinces, was a time of profound crisis in the Dutch body of politics. He played an important role in that crisis and his actions intensified the crisis. The issues in the crisis were: (1) strong federal government versus particularism, (2) hegemony of the province Holland, (3) state-church relationship and (4) religious toleration. Leicester took a stance in favor of a strong central government, a strong Calvinist church, and against the hegemony of Holland. For support of his policy he mobilized the radical Calvinists, mostly found in the middle and lower class of the society and among emigrants from Brabant and Flanders. His opponents were the regents, the ruling oligarchy, and the merchants, especially those of Holland and Zeeland.

Leicester, a convinced and stubborn Calvinist, missed the flexibility and tactical skill required solving a crisis like this. Tired of the opposition he met, he tried to force a solution by military means. He occupied Gouda, Schoonhoven, and some other smaller places, but his attempt to occupy The Hague failed. His coup was a gamble, and he had lost. He had no other option than to return to England.

After these two failed attempts to have foreign states to assist the United Provinces in their revolt, it became clear for the Dutch that they had to rely on their own


\textsuperscript{32} Israel, \textit{The Dutch Republic}, 220.
power and resources to defend their independence. In stead of giving their sovereignty to a foreign prince, they confirmed that sovereignty was vested in the States General.33

For the coming two decades, two men would dominated the political arena of the Dutch Republic: Johan van Oldenbarnevelt and Maurice of Nassau, son of William of Orange. In 1585 Oldenbarnevelt, one of the greatest statesmen in the history of the Netherlands, was appointed to “advocate” of Holland. As the principal figure in the States of Holland, as well as their spokesman in the States General, he had enormous influence on the policy of the Dutch Republic.

Maurice was in the first place a brilliant military commander. He turned the army into a professional, well-trained, well equipped, and well paid war machine. His successful military campaigns provided the Republic with the external security essential for its independence.

Irritated by the support Queen Elisabeth had given to the rebel provinces, Philip made the plan to send out an expedition to punish England and the rebels. He ordered the construction of an enormous fleet; Philip’s vision was that this fleet, in cooperation with Parma’s army, would first conquer England, and then subdue the rebels. This large fleet, known under the name of “Armada” left the Spanish port La Coruna July 22, 1588. It consisted of 150 ships and had 10,000 sailors, 20,000 landing troops and 2400 pieces of artillery on board.34 The operation was a failure; it never came even close to an invasion of England. The Armada was no match for the attacking English and Dutch fleet, the losses were heavy and the original goal of invading England had to be replaced by that of

33 The Union of Utrecht called the federation of provinces the United Provinces of the Netherlands. During the existence of the United Provinces, till 1795, it never called itself a republic. In English literature the United Provinces are called the Dutch Republic. I think that after Leicester had left, the United Provinces were really a republic, and from that time I will use the name Dutch Republic.
pure survival. Only one third of the ships of the Armada would return in Spanish ports. Parma had lost the campaign season of 1588 while he was waiting for the Armada.

In 1589 the international political situation changed in favor of the Dutch Republic. In that year Henry III, the king of France was assassinated, and Philip II sent Parma with his troops to France to prevent that the Protestant Henry of Navarra could effectuate his claim on the French crown. This relieved the military pressure on the Republic, and in 1589 Maurice and his nephew Willem Lodewijk proposed the States General to change the military policy from a defensive one into an offensive one. In the period 1590-1604, Maurice regained, starting with the recapturing of Breda in 1590, large territories in the South, the East and the Northeast.

Spain and the Dutch Republic had to pay a heavy toll for the war. There was the financial toll: in 1596 Spain had to declare itself bankrupt for the third time\textsuperscript{35}, and in the Dutch republic taxes were the highest in the world. The population in areas where military actions took place often saw their possessions damaged or destroyed. They were frequently the victims of misbehavior of soldiers, especially of mutinying soldiers. In the first decade of the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, the war was in a stalemate, and none of the warring parties had a realistic hope for a breakthrough in their favor. It was against this background that in May 1606, the government in Brussels took the first steps towards serious negotiations for peace.\textsuperscript{36} The Republic wanted to be recognized as a free state before it could continue the negotiations. So the governor, archduke Albert of Austria, as head of the Brussels' government, signed a statement in which he expressed his readiness

\textsuperscript{34} Blok, \textit{People of the Netherlands}, 245.
\textsuperscript{35} Anton van der Lem, \textit{De Opstand}, ch. 6, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., ch. 6, p. 5.
to negotiate with the Republic: "in the capacity of, and as taking them for, free lands, provinces, and towns, against they claim nothing". On the basis of this statement an armistice was concluded in April 1607, on conditions favorable to the North. The Republic was divided over a possible peace with Spain. To many zealots, any treaty with Spain appeared to be a betrayal of the cause of the Revolt. Indeed, it cannot be denied that a truce or a peace, in which the Spaniards kept a grip on the southern Netherlands, signified acquiescence in the partial failure of the national program. France and England took up their role as mediators, and proposed to negotiate a truce for a number of years instead of a peace. With clever and tactical statesmanship, Oldenbarnevelt could outmaneuver his opponents of the war party, and finish the negotiations, resulting in the signing of a truce for a period of twelve years. The conditions of the truce were very favorable for the Republic. The independence, although not absolute, was recognized; trade with the Indies was not explicitly prohibited. The Catholics in the Republic obtained no protection, and the Republic kept control over the navigation to and from Antwerp.

During the truce a religious controversy within the Reformed Church developed into a conflict that spread out over all aspects of the society, threatening the survival of the Republic. The Synod of Dordrecht played an important role in the process that provided the solution to the conflict.

Geyl, The Revolt, 250.
CHAPTER III
PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO FAITH

The basis for all thinking, whether its on religion, freedom or politics is a worldview. A worldview is how we interpret this world, how we find answers for questions which seem to be unanswerable, and how we see the role and function of man in this world. All the European worldviews in the sixteenth and seventeenth century had in common that they were a Christian worldview. That Christian worldview was based on the idea that God had created the world, and that God is very much involved with his creation, so much, that He had sent his son Jesus Christ to this world for the spiritual salvation of mankind. The differences in the worldviews from that time period are related to the differences in the idea of God, and especially in the idea of the relationship between God and man. The Christian view of God is that He is all-powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient) and all just and loving. Consequently, God, unlike his creation, is perfect. The emphasis Christian religions placed on the perfection of God is the reason why Christians had so many problems defining what God is, and therefore with the interpretation of the bible as God’s word. Perfection does not exist in this finite world, we don’t know what perfection is, and we only can describe it in terms of what it is not: imperfection. And imperfection is characteristic of everything in this world. By making God a perfect being, Christians had banned God from our world; however, in order to bring Him back in the world, they had to give Him characteristics of this world; they had to humanize Him; they had to make Him imperfect.
The notion that God is perfect means that any view or idea of God is imperfect and therefore not true in the sense of eternal, unchangeable truth. This was not recognized by the theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Their image of God, and their idea of the relationship between God and man determined how they read the bible. The bible was God's word, but it cannot just be read, it needs interpretation, and this interpretation is strongly influenced by how the reader sees God.

Almost all thinkers of the end of the sixteenth and the begin of the seventeenth century were religious thinkers; a worldview without God was unthinkable for them. To understand their ideas, it makes good sense to find out which ideas they had of God; from there it is relatively easy to unravel their thoughts. All theologians used a logical thinking and reasoning method that was Aristotelian and Scholastic; secular thinkers had freed themselves partly from the Scholastics. The Reformed theologians were convinced that only the Scripture could be used as source of information (sola scriptura). Logical thinking alone was in most cases not sufficient to prove that the whole edifice of religious ideas, which formed the doctrine of a religion, was true. The part of the doctrine that could not be proven to be true was then claimed to be a religious mystery, in which one had to believe. The belief in what could not be proven to be true was the essence of faith. Given that faith was beyond man's logical thinking, most Christians therefore considered faith a gift of God. For the more orthodox theologians faith and doctrine were one and the same. That brought them to the conclusion that when there was more than one doctrine, only one could be given by God. That was the true doctrine, and all other doctrines were automatically heresies. Liberal thinkers also were convinced that faith was a gift of God, but they refused to connect closely faith with doctrine. In their view doctrine was
subordinate to faith; they emphasized the highly spiritual character of faith, and they accepted doctrine only in so far as it did not interfere with the spiritual bond between God and man.

THE THEOLOGICAL CONFLICT

The doctrine of the counter Remonstrants was a strict interpretation of the theological ideas of Calvin. This theology was based on a God who was primarily seen as an all-powerful and all-knowing being; a magnificent portrait of divine majesty. Indeed, in Calvin’s ideas God has all the characteristics of that of an absolute monarch, He decides, He decrees and His purposes are inevitably fulfilled.1 Compared with such a God, man is of course nothing, but for Calvin this was not sufficient, man was nothing even when not compared with God. After the fall of Adam mankind was damned and man was not capable of doing any good without the help of God. This is a very negative picture of man, and it portrays the nature of God not only as all-powerful and all-knowing, but as wrathful and unloving as well. It is this image of God that Arminius opposed; he replaced God as an absolute sovereign, with a God more the characteristic of a loving father. For him love, sensibility and openness, as well as reliability and authority are essential qualities of God. Man has been created in the image of its Creator, and can therefore have positive characteristics without reducing the power of God. The Libertines2 often went further in their ideas about the relationship between God and man; in the tradition of humanism, they supported an even more positive idea about man’s

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2 On page 84 of this thesis I have defined Libertines as Christians who did want to be subjected to the ecclesiastical discipline of a church.
capabilities. In the nature of God they emphasized more His love. His power and knowledge were considered self-evident, did not need to be emphasized, and did not conflict with a larger role of man in the world.

The cornerstone of Calvin’s doctrine is predestination; it is a logical result of his worldview, his ideas about the nature of God and God’s relationship with man. The combination of the perfect power of God and total depravity of man made any contribution of man to his salvation impossible. This idea can be seen as Calvin’s reaction to the Roman-Catholic doctrine, which said that man can positively influence his salvation by doing good works. Calvin’s opinion, affirmed by the Synod of Dordrecht, was that not only was man incapable to influence his eternal fate, his just ordeal was condemnation. “As all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are deserving of eternal death” and “God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish and delivering them over to condemnation on account of sin.”

Although the counter Remonstrants tended to a strict interpretation of the doctrine on predestination, the Acta of the Synod presented an accurate and concise formulation of Calvin’s theology. I will use texts of the Acta to illustrate the major points of Calvinist doctrine.

Only by faith man can be saved: “But in this the love of God was manifested, that He ‘sent his own and only son into the world, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ (John 4:9, John 3:16).” This faith is a gift of God:

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4 Ibid., First Head: Article 2.
"...faith in Jesus Christ and salvation through him is the free gift of God, as it is written:

‘For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourself, it is the
gift of God.’ (Eph 2:8)"\(^5\)

God will not give faith to all mankind, He decides who will receive faith and be saved. “That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it, proceeds from God’s eternal decree.”\(^6\)

This decision is completely up to God. Given God’s omnipotence and omniscience—man had to accept that His decision was the best decision possible. God has made his decision before he created the world. Arminius had argued that God then had foreseen, and even wanted the fall of Adam, which would make God the author of sin. Jesus Christ had as mediator an essential role in the salvation of the elect. “Election is the unchangeable purpose of God, whereby, before the foundation of the world, He has out of mere grace, according to the sovereign good pleasure of His own will, chosen from the whole human race, which had fallen through their own fault from the primitive state of rectitude, into sin and destruction, a certain number of persons to redemption in Christ, whom He from eternity appointed the Mediator and Head of the elect and the foundation of salvation.”\(^7\)

There is only one decree of election: “There are not various decrees of election, but one and the same decree respecting all those who shall be saved.”\(^8\)

Again there is the confirmation that man has no influence on the decree of election: “This election was not founded upon foreseen faith and obedience of faith,

\(^5\) Ibid., First Head: Article 5.
\(^6\) Ibid., First Head: Article 6.
\(^7\) Ibid., First Head: Article 7.
\(^8\) Ibid., First Head: Article 8.
holiness, or any good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or
ccondition of which it depended: but men are chosen to faith and to the obedience of faith,
holiness, etc."  

And the sovereignty of God is affirmed: "The good pleasure of God is the sole
cause of this gracious election."  

Finally, when man is elected, and has been given faith, he cannot reject this faith.
This faith was the will of God and no man can withstand the will of God. "As God
Himself is mostwise, unchangeable, omniscient, and omnipotent, so the election made by
Him can neither be interrupted nor changed, or annulled; neither can the elect be cast
away, nor their number diminished."  

The doctrine of predestination as formulated by the Synod of Dordrecht is often
summarized in the acronym TULIP, which stands for Total Depravity (Total Inability),
Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement (Particular Redemption), Irresistible Grace
and Perseverance of the Saints.

It will be obvious that the Calvinist’s theology, with such a doctrine on
predestination, has no room for human free will. The philosophical problem of
determinism versus indeterminism is the secular version of predestination versus free
will.  

Arminius objected to the strict interpretation of predestination for the following
reasons:

- He could not reconcile it with his ideas about the nature of God.

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9 Ibid., First Head: Article 9.
10 Ibid., First Head: Article 10.
11 Ibid., First Head: Article 11.
His logical conclusion of the strict interpretation of predestination was that God was the author of sin.

- Man was not a totally deprived being, he had been created after the Divine image, and he had been created with freedom of will. Man had been created with a disposition and aptitude for the enjoyment of eternal life.  

Arminius had always fully supported predestination, and he had always insisted that his version of predestination was based on Scripture, and that his ideas did not depart from historic teaching of the church, the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism.  

He defined his doctrine in four divine decrees; these decrees are not in historical succession, but in logical order.

- The election of Jesus Christ. In order to make the salvation of sinful man possible, God has appointed his son, Jesus Christ, as mediator and savior. Christ is capable of nullifying man’s sin by his death, and offering salvation to man through his obedience. The object of this first decree is not man, but Christ. He is the one who ‘obtains the lost salvation’. God loves man absolutely and wants his salvation, but that love could not exist without Jesus Christ.

- The election of the church. God will give His salvation to those who repent and believe. As Christ is the object of the first decree, in the second decree those who have faith are the subjects. This raises the question whether the

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14 Carl O. Bangs, *Arminius; a Study in the Dutch Reformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971) 349; Jacobus Arminius *Letter to his excellency, the noble lord, Hippolytus a Collibus, ambassador, from the most illustrious Prince, the Elector Palatine, to the Seven United Dutch Provinces*.  
second decree is conditional. Are repentance and faith the condition for salvation? Arminius denied this: repentance is a characteristic of the elect, without being a condition of election; and the same is true of faith.

- *The appointment of means.* In this third decree, God promises to provide man with sufficient means for repentance and faith. The means are "sufficient and powerful". If God is to be both merciful and just, the reprobate must not be denied access to sufficient and powerful means to repentance and faith. The reprobate cannot be damned for disobedience, if obedience was beyond his capabilities.

- *Election of individuals.* This decree says that certain particular persons will be saved, while other will be damned. It rests upon the foreknowledge of God, which gives Him, from eternity, knowledge which persons will believe and persevere, and which persons will not. This decree has been attacked from different sides. The major argument of the opposition has been: if God knows what will happen, is then what will happen not inevitable, and therefore not predetermined? Arminius' defense was that there is no causal relationship between God's foreknowledge and future events. Arminius' ideas on God's foreknowledge is closely related to Molina's middle knowledge theory, which claims that God even has knowledge of man's free decisions in all possible situations, even the situations that never will happen.15

As we have seen, Arminius was convinced that free will was a part of man's nature. When a sinful man has a free will, what liberties does he have? Arminius

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distinguished five kinds of liberty as applied to the will. Two liberties apply only to God, and a third one applies only to man before the fall. For the sinful man is left freedom from necessity and freedom from sin and its dominion. Freedom of necessity is the very essence of the will. Without it, the will would not be the will. This may sound like Pelagianism, which claims that human will gives man the capability to achieve a virtuous life without help of God’s grace, but Arminius argued that a will, which is free from necessity, might not be free from sin. If that is the case, we have to answer the question: Is there within man a freedom from sin and its dominion, and how far does it extend? Is the will of the fallen man capable to perform spiritual good? The answer is no; man needs God’s salvation. The essence of man’s free will is his capacity to decide on accepting or not accepting this salvation. With God’s grace man can freely choose to do spiritual good.

When we apply Arminius’ idea to the absolute predestination as described with TULIP, we can easily see in which points his ideas on predestination deviate:

- Total Depravity. As a consequence of Adam’s sin man is born in a sinful society, but for Arminius, God has given prevenient grace to all mankind, which restores to humanity the freedom of will.

- Unconditional Election. Arminius denied that God has unconditionally and arbitrarily elected only a part of mankind to salvation. In his love, God has offered his salvation through Jesus to all. God wants every man to respond in his free will to his grace, as a condition of fulfilling election.

- Limited Atonement. Arminius refuted that Jesus did not die for all mankind
- **Irresistible Grace.** Arminius argued that grace is not grace, but power, if man cannot resist it. God offers his grace to all. Each man can decide his own fate by resisting or cooperating with it.

- **Perseverance of the Saints.** This is a logical consequence of irresistible grace. Grace, as Arminius argued, can be resisted, and it is therefore the choice of man whether it persists in its faith or not.

**LIBERTINE THINKERS**

What was unique for the Dutch society is that a large part of the population was not a member of a church. Strict Calvinist discipline was not very popular among the Dutch in the late sixteenth century, and because membership of the Reformed Church, and with it, submission to ecclesiastic discipline, was voluntary, only a small number of Netherlanders joined a Calvinist congregation.¹⁶ Those who rejected ecclesiastical discipline are often called ‘Libertines.”¹⁷ It is not correct to see in Dutch Libertinism a widespread non-religiosity; Libertines were generally religious people, often with a piety based on spiritualism, but always with a distinct Protestant brand of anticlericalism. Dutch Libertinism included every form of piety that did not fit the emerging confessional norms of one church or another.¹⁸

The most important libertine thinkers were: Dirck Coornhert, Sebastiaan Castellio, George Cassander, Justus Lipsius and P.C. Hooft. They all strongly believed in

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¹⁷ Ibid., 14.
God, but they did not feel the need to know everything about God, they had no problems in accepting that God is partly a mystery. For example, for Castellio was it sufficient to believe three fundamental principle of God: (1). God exists. (2). He is the ruler of heaven and earth, and (3). He is just. Although Castellio demonstrated the feasibility of these principles, he admitted that these principles couldn’t be proven. He allowed doubt. He saw it as a positive element in religion, with purging capabilities, providing that it was based on a solid faith. We must not confuse this doubt with the metaphysical doubt that was the basis of Descartes’ thinking.

Religion was for the Libertines a personal experience, they reflected on religion rationally, while they put emphasis on spirituality in their faith. They attacked doctrine, especially strict doctrine, like that of absolute predestination, when, in their opinion, it limited people in their spiritual development.

Dirck Volkertsz Coornhert was the most important and most influential Libertine. His influence went well beyond the sixteenth century. His thinking still connects well with 21st century thinking, which is the reason why I will describe his ideas in more detail. Erasmus and Castellio had influenced Coornhert. With Erasmus he shared ideas about human free will, and Erasmus’ motto ‘Vita magis quam disputatio’ (life rather than disputations) could have been Coornhert’s. For him, as for Erasmus, Christianity was primarily a way of life, and he hated theological speculation and discussion for its own sake. About the influence of Castellio he said: “I gladly admit that on one short page in

Castellio’s writing I find more truth, more piety, and more that is elevating, than in all the books of Calvin and Beza.”

Coornhert gave in his writing much attention to theological concerns and religious issues, but his approach of these issues was based on his view on ethics, and of the place and the responsibility of the individual in this world. His idea of ethics is based on the conviction that people are able, in this earthly life, to attain perfect obedience to God’s commandments through His grace in Christ. For this ethics Bonger uses the term ‘perfectism’ whereas Voogt uses the term ‘perfectibilism.’ As Webster defines ‘perfectible’ as ‘Capable of becoming or being made perfect’ the term ‘perfectibilism’ as used by Voogt has my preference. The starting point of perfectibilism is the duty of the believers to honor God and to love their neighbors, and this will automatically lead to the other great commandment, the law of reciprocity as found in Matt 7:12. Coornhert calls this law the ‘law of nature’, the ‘Golden Rule’, or ‘Supreme Reason’. God has infused Supreme Reason into nature, and even pagans can thus be saved, if they follow Supreme Reason, and act in accordance with the spirit of Christ, which is eternal. Reason is a guide that points man towards the good. This guide to moral behavior is different from mere intelligence, which only can tell truth from lies.

Coornhert derives free will from the argument that faith is a gift from God (donum Dei). Human volition plays an essential part in the receiving of the gift. Free will, so fundamental in Coornhert’s ethical system, thus exists because God has chosen to rest

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23 Ibid., 67.
24 Ibid., 67.
25 Bonger, D.V. Coornhert, 187; Voogt, Constraint on Trial, 67.
27 Coornhert, Zedekunst, 15.
in certain areas and allow room for free will to operate.\textsuperscript{28}

Coornhert’s emphasis on free will and his ethical system of perfectibilism made him a direct opponent of predestination. In his book \textit{On Predestination} he attacked predestination as well as Calvinism. His arguments against predestination can be summarized as follows:

- Predestination implicitly denies free will; the moral consequences of predestination are that it takes away man’s responsibility for his actions.

- If God did not only foresee, but also wanted Adam’s fall, God would be a wrathful God. This is a \textit{contradictio in terminus}, for God is the essence of what is good, no evil can come from him, nor is wrath possible for him.\textsuperscript{29}

- God does not ask of us anything that cannot be attained: how can we deny the possibility of full obedience and of free choice without denying God’s omnipotence.\textsuperscript{30}

- If God does not wish the salvation of all, he is not a God of love, but a tyrant.\textsuperscript{31}

The reputation of Justus Lipsius as a Libertine was tarnished in the last years of his life, when he had left the Dutch Republic and had settled in Louvain in the southern Netherlands. In this period of his life, he converted to Catholicism and rewrote his books according to the demands of the Catholic censors, because they had been placed on the Index.\textsuperscript{32} We will limit our attention to the period he was a professor of history at the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[28] Voogt, \textit{Constraint on Trial}, 75-76.
\item[30] Voogt, \textit{Constraint on Trial}, 79.
\item[31] Coornhert, \textit{Zedekunst}, 10, 234; Bonger, \textit{D.V. Coornhert}, 248; Voogt, \textit{Constraint on trial}, 79.
\item[32] Voogt, \textit{Constraint on Trial}, 222.
\end{footnotes}
university of Leyden (1579-1591). Lipsius promoted the revival of the Stoic philosophy. He aimed to harmonize the Stoic outlook on life with Christianity.\textsuperscript{33} One of the attractions of the Neostoicism, as promoted by Lipsius, was that it appeared to be able to transcend the religious divisions, by designing an ethical system with a minimum of theology and an optimum of classical philosophical content.\textsuperscript{34}

In Lipsius’ ethics, the role of human freedom of will is essential: virtue and vice are the results of our free choice. The human soul is responsible for both the creation and the production of evil. Man is not only free to choose, but, and here Lipsius comes very close to Palegianism, man can fully achieve virtuousness.\textsuperscript{35} As a humanist, Lipsius had a high idea of human dignity; he therefore could not accept the idea of original sin, unless when understood that man, according to its nature has a good and an evil daemon within itself.\textsuperscript{36}

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we have seen, Dutch thoughts on freedom covered a wide spectrum from orthodox Calvinists who believed that man had no free will, to Libertines who believed that man had a free will that allowed him to overcome sin and evil inclination. The influence of orthodox Calvinist thought can easily be determined by counting the numbers of the members of the Reformed Church. Evaluation of the influence of the more liberal thinkers is more difficult, and is limited to a qualitative and subjective

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 198.
\textsuperscript{35} van Gelder, The two Reformations, 319.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 319.
approach. The ruling class, with its higher education and its fear of too much influence of the Church, was more open for the ideas of the Libertine thinkers. That the majority of the regents supported the ideas of Arminius proves their affinity to more liberal thoughts on freedom. Although we cannot determine the extent of the influence of Libertine thinkers on the regents, we can say that the toleration in the Dutch Republic was rooted in the class of regents, which, often for pragmatic reasons, considered freedom if not important, then at least useful.
CHAPTER IV

POLITICAL THOUGHTS AND PRACTICES

POLITICAL THOUGHTS DEVELOPED IN THE REVOLT

After a country has liberated itself, and people look back on the revolt or the struggle for independence, they have a tendency to see the revolt as the result of an overarching idea of freedom that lived in the population. During the period in which the Dutch Republic emerged - let us date it from the 1560s to the early 1590s - the course of history was dominated to such an extent by unforeseeable incidents that we have to be very careful in trying to explain the Revolt as the result of 'developments' and tendencies. A series of disturbances stretching over various decades cannot be explained using this kind of approach.\(^1\) Modern historians do not deny that many actions in the Revolt were not inspired by a policy, ideology or an idea about freedom, but they emphasize the arbitrary character of the sequence of incidents, which in hindsight is seen as the Revolt. Jan and Annie Romein argued that the Dutch Republic was born out of a series of mistakes and disillusion.\(^2\) Neither of the parties involved in the Revolt had achieved the goal they had been aiming for, partly because they misunderstood the political and social environment, partly because they underestimated their opponents, and partly because the circumstances turned, often by pure coincidence, against them. Nevertheless, when the Republic eventually was established, the country enjoyed a

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unique form of liberty and freedom. The political ideology, on which this freedom was
based, had developed during the Revolt. It is important to realize that this ideology which
had developed during the Revolt, were often in itself the result of events and other
developments in the Revolt. Therefore, the Revolt created the political ideology; the
Revolt was not the result of this ideology.

The political ideology that had developed during the Revolt, and which would
determine the political order of the Republic, parallels that of Renaissance republicanism,
because it saw liberty as one of the key political values, and because it conceived liberty
in terms of self-governance. The political order was based on the triad of (1)
constitutional charters, or traditional privileges, (2) local political institutions, the
provincial States and the town governments and (3) the States General seen as
representative of the people. The political order paid much attention to personal freedom.
Personal freedom was understood as the ‘free enjoyment of body and goods’, but
moreover, the freedom of conscience formed the essence of personal liberty. Religious
pluralism, faction based on religious diversity, was relatively new, and posed a challenge
for which the Dutch, in political theory, and even more importantly, in political practice
had to find a solution. They found the solution in religious toleration, more formed by
pragmatism and political practice than by political theory.

Independence was one of the ‘mistakes’ of the Revolt. None of the groups of the
Revolt, the higher nobility, the lower nobility, the local magistrates, the Calvinists, and
even the Sea-Beggars started their actions with the purpose of separating themselves from

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4 Ibid., 281-82.
5 Ibid., 282.
what they considered the legal sovereign. They would have objected strongly to the name “revolt” which we have given to their series of actions. Obedience to the sovereign was a religious duty. All power came from God, and God in his wisdom had given to the sovereign the power to reign. Of course, the sovereign had the duty to reign well and in accordance to God’s laws, but for that he was only responsible to God, not to his subjects. The nobles, especially the higher nobles, or grandees, had as vassals of the king a delegated responsibility for the government. They saw themselves as advisors of the king; they expected that their expertise in, and knowledge of the local political situation would be gratefully accepted by a king, who had a whole empire that required his attention. I think that we have to see in this light the opposition of the nobility in the 1560s. They were genuinely concerned that Philip’s policy of religious persecution and centralization of the government was not in the interest of the country, moreover, that it would lead to serious disruption of peace and order in the country. Of course their view was not free of self-interest, because the same policy of the king hurt their position as well. But the grandees were quite right when they claimed that the heresy policy could not be sustained; in 1564 they dispatched their most eminent member, Count Egmont, to Spain to make this point to Philip II in person. He was received well, and Egmont came back with an encouraging account of his negotiations. When in November 1565, Philips made clear that his views had not changed, and ordered that heresy laws should continue to be enforced, the leading nobles felt betrayed. They reacted by ostentatiously withdrawing their support from the regime of the governess Margaret of Parma, and in January 1566, they resigned from the Council of State. The petition of the lower nobles, presented to the governess in 1566, had some striking aspects. First they wanted to make
clear that the motive for their petition was to prevent a rebellion, which they expected to break out if the religious policy did not change. The words of the petition are: "There are clear indications everywhere that the people are so exasperated that the final result, we fear, will be an open revolt and a universal rebellion bringing ruin to all the provinces and plunging them into utter misery."\textsuperscript{6}

Then, carefully expressed, the nobles gave the King advice how he could thwart this threat of revolt and rebellion: "And so that he (the King) may have no reason to think that we, who only seek to obey him in all humility, would try to restrain him or to impose our will on him ..., we implore His Majesty very humble that it may please him to seek the advice and consent of the assembled States General for new ordinances and other more suitable and appropriate ways to put matters right without causing such apparent dangers."\textsuperscript{7}

This was the first time that a large group of distinguished personalities quite openly stated that the royal policy was catastrophic, and should be revised with the help of a local representative assembly, which was better equipped to judge what was beneficial for the provinces in the given circumstances. And the noblemen found it self-evident that, in the case the king would follow their advice, the States General would be the political body to decide on behalf of toleration.\textsuperscript{8}

With the 'Moderation' the governess Margaret had made substantial changes in her policy to satisfy the demands of the nobles. The iconoclasm and social unrest that followed soon there after, took both the governess and her noble opponents by surprise;

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 64.
\textsuperscript{8} Kossmann, "Freedom", 285.
the rebellion the nobles had warned of was now taking place. The nobles' first priority was to restore peace and order. To support fully the legal government of Margaret seemed to be the only option. The iconoclasm had dealt a fatal blow to the loose coalition between the Calvinists and their allies in the nobility. ⁹

The collapse of the revolt in 1567, was the direct result of differences in ideas about freedom, liberty and political order between the nobility and the Calvinists. For the nobility, freedom was peace and order within a society based on the traditional privileges. They supported religious freedom primarily because they feared that religious persecution would undermine the stability of the state. For the Calvinists freedom was freedom to exercise their religion, to organize in congregation, and to have churches to worship in. Their ideal of political order was basically a theocratic state. Their example was Calvin's Geneva, in which the secular government was subordinate to the church.

During the terror regime of the Duke of Alva, the Calvinists in exile formed the strongest and best-organized opposition. William of Orange, in exile in Germany and having almost no allies in the nobility, tried to ignite a new revolt by military invasions in the Netherlands, but they were a debacle. The calamitous failure of his expeditions taught William that, unless he sank his own cause into that of the religious struggle of the Calvinists, his prospects were hopeless. ¹⁰ The new alliance between the Calvinists and William had a different character than the alliance between the nobles and the Calvinists before 1566. In this association the Calvinists were an equal, if not a senior partner.

Why did William of Orange still oppose the government of Brussels, whereas most of the nobles were passive? Was he driven by ideology or by personal interest? His

⁹ Pettegree, “Religion and the Revolt”, 75.
¹⁰ Ibid., 77.
eldest son had been abducted by Alva and was now in Spain, and all his possessions in
the Netherlands had been confiscated. He was injured by the injustice done to him and
the people of the Netherlands, and he had an idea how the political order should be. In
many aspects his political ideas were identical to those of the nobles in the beginning of
the 1560s, but in one aspect they were unique. He had realized that religious pluralism
does not have to disrupt the state, if the different religions are tolerated. His goal was an
inclusive, tolerant autonomous state free of Spanish troops. This was his pragmatic
reason for advocating toleration, but the consistent way he pressed for toleration indicates
that his ideology of toleration was more than just pragmatic.

When in 1572, the Sea-Beggars successfully started the second revolt, and most
of the northern Netherlands went over to the side of the Prince of Orange, the States of
Holland convened in Dordrecht and decreed that "There will be freedom of religion, for
the Reformed as well as for the Roman Catholic religion." \(^11\)

In 1573 the Calvinists had enough political power to pursue the States of Holland
and Zeeland to forbid Catholic worship. From that time on we see in the northern
Netherlands two groups with different ideas about freedom and political order. First, the
Calvinists who wanted the return to the political situation prior to 1573, but with the
Reformed Church instead of the Catholic Church in power. Second, the magistrates, or
regents who accepted the new situation and wanted a political order adapted to the new
situation.

In the chaotic years of the second part of the 1570's it seemed that William of
Orange could realize his ideals: the Pacification of Ghent united the northern and the

\(^{11}\) van Gelder, *Getemperde vrijheid*, 4.
southern Netherlands, and until the States General made a permanent ruling no one would be persecuted for his religion. The text of the Pacification reads: "All edicts about heresy formerly made and promulgated, as well as the criminal ordinances made by the duke of Alva shall be suspended and shall not be put into operation, until the States General shall ordain otherwise."12

But the Calvinists were restricted in what they could do outside Holland and Zeeland: "...those of Holland, Zeeland or others or whatsoever province..., shall not be allowed to disturb the common peace and quiet outside the provinces of Holland, Zeeland and associated places, or in particular to attack the Roman Catholic religion and practice, nor to slander any one or cause scandal by word or deed because of his Catholic faith."13

The basis of the Pacification was narrow: the eagerness to drive out the Spanish soldiers. When the Calvinists, against the terms of the Pacification, pressed strongly for the renewal of public worship in their former strongholds Ghent and Antwerp, and even staged a civic coup, which overthrew the town government in both cities,14 it was obvious that the Pacification would not last long. From a political point of view the Pacification of Ghent was a curious phenomenon. The States General had taken the initiative for the negotiations, without seeking approval, or even informing the king or his governor. A year later the States General took advantage of the weakness of the governor Don Juan by having him sign the First Union of Brussels, in which he declared to accept the Pacification.

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12 Kossmann and Mellink, Texts, 128.
13 Ibid., 128.
14 Pettegree, "Religion and the Revolt", 80.
JUSTIFICATION OF THE REVOLT

With the signing of the Union of Arras and the Union of Utrecht, in 1579, William’s dream of a unified, religiously tolerant Netherlands was over. Although the Union of Utrecht was used for over two hundred years as the constituting document of the Dutch Republic; it was drafted as a pact of mutual defense between the northern provinces. It provided religious freedom, but in a limited form in which only freedom of conscience was guaranteed. Independence was not mentioned. In the text we find references to His Majesty the king and the archduke Matthias, which indicates that the ties with the sovereign were not severed yet. That these ties eventually would be cut was inevitable, and one can wonder why it took so long. In 1581, with the Act of Abjuration, the northern provinces officially declared not to recognize Philip II any more as their sovereign. This Act of Abjuration is from a perspective of political theory very interesting because it gives in detail the justification of the resistance of the Dutch against their sovereign, King Philip II, and why the king had forfeited the sovereignty.

The problem of justification of disobedience or resistance against the prince was not new; from the Middle Ages scholars and theologians had discussed whether disobedience could be justified. The root of the problem was the question about the origin, scope and function of the power to reign. The origin of power was obvious: God, and therefore obedience to the prince, who had received his power from God, was a religious duty. This duty was only limited by the conscience that is imputed in each human. Only a call on this conscience, and thus natural law (*ius naturale*), could justify disobedience or resistance to the prince.15 It is not surprising that the Act of Abjuration

referred to natural law as reason for abandoning the king: "Therefore, despairing of all means of reconciliation and left without any other remedies and help, we have been forced (in conformity with the law of nature...) to abandon the king of Spain..."16

What was new is that the Act also used positive law to justify the renouncing of the king. The prince has the duty to govern with the wellbeing of his subjects in mind. When the prince however, act as a tyrant, he forfeits his right to govern. We see this argument clearly in the following text: "...the prince is created for the subjects (without whom he cannot be a prince) to govern them according to right and reason and to defend them as a father does his children and a shepherd does his sheep when he risk his body and life for their safety. It is clear therefore that if he acts differently and instead of protecting his subjects endeavors to oppress and molest them and to deprive them of their ancient liberty, privileges and customs and to command and use them like slaves, he must be regarded, not as a prince but as a tyrant. And according to right and reason his subjects, at any rate, must not longer recognize him as a prince (notably when this is decided by the States of the country), but should renounce him."17

Note that the text of the Act implies the role of the States as the representative body of the people.

The ‘Joyous Entry’ of Brabant and the edict of 1477, granted by Mary of Burgundy, were often seen as contracts between the king and his subjects, which gave the subjects, under certain circumstances, the right to disobey the king.18 The Act made reference to this principle, however without mentioning the ‘Joyous Entry’ or the edict of

17 Ibid., 217.
1477.\(^{19}\) "And this should happen particularly in these countries which always have been
governed in accordance with the oath taken by the prince at his inauguration...Moreover,
nearly all these countries have accepted their prince conditionally, by contract and
agreement and if the prince breaks them, he legally forfeits his sovereignty."\(^{20}\)

The Act had now to prove that Philip II was a tyrant and had broken his
agreement with his subjects. Therefore it gave a long summation of what the Act
describes as horrible acts of king Philip. Surprisingly, the Act did not use religious
freedom, or Philip's stubborn unwillingness to grant even the smallest freedom of
religion as an argument to justify their abandonment.

Now that the United Seven Provinces had declared themselves free from the
Spanish king, little changed in the political organization. The option of becoming a
republic was hardly considered; the Dutch had already offered the sovereignty of the
United Provinces to the Duke of Anjou. For reasons we have previously seen, the reign of
Anjou was not a success. Nevertheless, after Anjou's death in 1583, the States General
tried to persuade Queen Elisabeth of England to accept the sovereignty. She refused the
offer, but sent her confidant the Lord of Leicester, who was given the function of
governor general. Leicester failed, and after he had left in December 1587, the States
General did not try to find a new sovereign. The Seven Provinces were now de facto a
republic, but they did not want to consider themselves a republic; in no official document
the name republic was mentioned.

As we have seen, the Union of Utrecht was not a blueprint for a new state, but a
covenant between the provinces to help each other with external defense by setting up a

\(^{19}\) Mout, *Plakkaat van Verlatinge*, 36.

centrally organized defense. Defense and coinage would become a common responsibility. In all other matters of government, the provinces had their own responsibility.

POLITICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF FREEDOM

The first and most obvious characteristic of freedom in the Dutch Republic was course its independence from any foreign sovereign. This seems so self evident that one can question why it should be mentioned. It is relevant to mention, because when the Dutch cut their ties with the Spanish king, they looked for a prince to be the sovereign of their country. Only when this turned into a fiasco did they abandon the idea of finding a foreign sovereign. The second characteristic of freedom in the Dutch republic was self-governance. The government was highly decentralized; most tasks of government were given to local authorities: town councils and States of Provinces. Only external defense and coinage were centrally governed. The provinces were sovereign, and the authority of the States General, the political body that performed the tasks of a central government, was based on the sovereignty of its member provinces. Schama argued that self-governance roots in the organization that had been created in the Netherlands to deal with the threat of flood. As early as the eleventh century, local organizations, called “heemraadschappen” were established for building and maintaining dykes. These heemraadschappen were locally elected and they taxed the community for the costs needed to provide security against floods.21

The traditional privileges, together with the Union of Utrecht formed the legal framework of the Dutch republic. Self-governance was no democracy, the ruling class of regents was an oligarchy and the common people had no formal influence on the government. The regents made sure with regulations and restrictions that the common people had no opportunity to get involved with or have formal influence on politics. Nevertheless, the local magistrates were not so powerful that they could ignore completely the wishes of the people; the threat of social unrest and riot was often a successful weapon used by the lower classes to yield influence on the regents.

The Union of Utrecht guaranteed freedom of conscience, but law forbade the exercise of the Catholic religion. Because the enforcement of law was in the hands of local authorities, and regents were often lax in the enforcement of the anti-Catholic laws, Catholics had in practice the opportunity to exercise their religion. This was in striking difference with the surrounding European countries which adhered to the principle of <i>cuius regio, eius religio</i>. That implied that religion was a matter of society and therefore a country could only have one common religion. People who had a different religion had to emigrate to a country in which their religion was the state sanctioned one. The religious treaty of Augsburg of 1555 is a good example of this principle.

The decentralized form of government, in which particularism played such a large role, was the opposite of a general tendency in the European countries towards a stronger, more effective central government. Remarkable is however, that the Republic with its

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decentralized government was more efficient than the contemporary states. One can argue whether a strong, centralized government or a highly decentralized form of government gives more freedom. Arguments in favor of decentralized government are: (1) more people are directly involved in the government, (2) local magistrates are more susceptible to influence of their own population.

In general the Republic followed a liberal economic policy. As trade was the most important source of income for the Republic, it will not be a surprise that it promoted free trade and opposed measures taken by other nations to restrict free trade. The liberal economic policy was based on pragmatic motives, in cases where this policy did not favor the Dutch they adhered to more restrictive economic practices. Much of the profit on the staple market resulted from monopolies, and the sea traffic to and from Antwerp was restricted to protect the interests of ports of Holland and Zeeland.

THE STATE CHURCH RELATIONSHIP

The role of the Reformed Church, especially the relationship between the Church and the secular magistrates (the state) became a fiercely disputed issue, and became intertwined with the Remonstrant – Counter Remonstrant religious conflict. In his book *Holland and the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century* Price quite rightly came to the conclusion that all opponents in the discussion had one thing in common: they all considered that the Reformed Church had a peculiar position in the political life of the

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24 Price, *Culture and Society*, 76.
Dutch state because it functioned as one of the few unifying symbols which the
decentralized and heterogeneous Republic displayed.\textsuperscript{26} As the official church it had a
political significance which the other churches and sects lacked. While membership of
the church or attendance at its services was not imposed on the inhabitants of the
country at large, the law required that all holders of public office at every level were
members of the Reformed Church. Initially, there were two parties in the dispute about
the role of the Church: the magistrates, or regents and the Reformed Church, with its
ministers as its advocates. Later, in the period of the Truce, within the Reformed
Church, the Remonstrants and the counter Remonstrants had different ideas about the
position of the Church relative to the state. The regents feared too much political
influence of the Church; they blamed the loss of the southern Netherlands on the
Calvinists who had taken over towns in Flanders and Brabant after the Pacification of
Ghent. The Calvinist radicals who had supported the earl of Leicester against the States
of Holland were seen in a similar light; only their defeat, the regents argued, had saved
the Revolt in the northern provinces.\textsuperscript{27} The Reformed Church argued that it was the
primary and ultimate function of the state to defend and serve the Church as God’s
preeminent instrument on earth.\textsuperscript{28} It was the task of the Church to define its doctrine and
to lay down its disciplinary decisions; the task of the state was to repress contrary
doctrines and support the discipline decreed by the Church.\textsuperscript{29} Later, the counter
Remonstrants aimed at a monopoly position for the Church within the country, but they

\textsuperscript{26}J.L. Price, \emph{Holland and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century: the Politics of Particularism}
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 186.
\textsuperscript{28} \emph{The Belgic Confession}, trans. David Th. Stark (Anderson: 1995.
\textsuperscript{29} Kossmann and Mellink, \emph{Texts}, 114.
denied the government any right to rule over it: the Church would be over, not under the state. The Remonstrants, on the other hand, took a different position. Wtenbogaert stated that the state had the right to oversee the Church.\(^{30}\)

What made it difficult for the Reformed Church to function as a unifying agent in the Republic was the fact that its members were a small minority. At the end of the sixteenth century no more than 10 to 20 percent of the population was a member of the Reformed Church.\(^{31}\) There was probably the same percentage of the population that was sympathetic to Calvinism and often attended Reformed Church' services, but did not want to accept the ecclesiastical discipline of the Church. Furthermore, another 30 percent was Catholic, and then there was a large group of the population not connected to any church. The members of the Reformed Church saw the Republic primarily as a Calvinist state, the result of a Revolt inspired by Calvinism. In the eyes of the Calvinists a religiously pure and independent Reformed Church was essential for the survival of the Republic. The regent had an ambivalent view of strengthening the Reformed Church. They did see that a stronger church would better be able to unify the population, but at the same time they feared that a stronger Reformed Church would have more political influence. They favored a more comprehensive official church, which would also be more subservient to the civil authorities. They hoped that a church with a more flexible theology and loosened discipline would draw a greater proportion of the population than the rigidly orthodox one.\(^{32}\) When we see how much the Remonstrants and regents had in


\(^{31}\) Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, 363.

\(^{32}\) Prince, *Holland and the Dutch Republic*, 86.
common regarding the position of the church in relation to the state, it is not surprising that many regents took the side of the Remonstrants in their conflict with the counter Remonstrants. This explains why the conflict between Remonstrants and counter Remonstrants was not only a religious conflict, but also a political one.

When the Remonstrants were faced with serious opposition within the ranks of the Reformed Church, they were forced to look to the town governments and the State for support and protection; and in return they acknowledged the ultimate authority of the civil power in church affairs. A similar combination of religious and political motives also played a role in the fanatical opposition of the counter Remonstrants. The counter Remonstrants did see in the Remonstrants not only a threat to the purity of the church, they were also a threat to the survival of the Republic. The counter Remonstrants were correct in the observation that the religious conflict jeopardized the mere existence of the Republic. At the end of the Truce the political situation was ripe for a civil war. The coup of the stadholder, prince Maurice, in which he took the side of the counter Remonstrants, and the following Synod of Dordrecht, successfully defused the highly explosive political situation.

Why were the Remonstrants the losers in the conflict in which they had the support of the state? The support of the state was basically the support of the most influential province: Holland with its advocate van Oldenbarnevelt. When the conflict developed, the other provinces, in which few Remonstrants lived became more reluctant to support Holland in its policy towards the Remonstrants. The counter Remonstrants had the majority in the Reformed Church; they were highly motivated, if not fanatical, well

\[33\] Ibid., 194.
organized, and very united. It was the lack of solidarity within the States of Holland that undermined its dominant position in the Republic and thus its policy to protect the Remonstrants.\textsuperscript{34}

We have seen what the Reformed Church gained from the Synod in matters of religion and doctrine, but what changed in its relationship with the state? Could it now operate more independently from the state? The answer is no; the Church did not gain freedom from the civil authorities, but the church now trusted the new civil authorities.\textsuperscript{35} For nearly the next two centuries, the formal church state relationship would not change. However, that did not mean that in practice the relationship did not change. That the formal church-state relationship was decentralized and not well defined made adaptation to the changing political and social situation easy. However, for a major change in the church state relationship we had to wait until after the end of the Republic.

\textsuperscript{34} A.Th. van Deursen, \textit{Bavianen en Slijkgeuzen: Kerk en kerkvolk ten tijde van Maurits en Oldenbarneveldt} (Franeker: van Wijnen, 1991), 305.
\textsuperscript{35} van Deursen, \textit{Maurits van Nassau}, 277
CHAPTER V
FREEDOM AND TOLERATION

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDEAS OF FREEDOM AND THE REVOLT

If we compare the American Revolutionary war with the Dutch Revolt, we notice that when the founding fathers decided to revolt against the British rule, they had a well defined idea of freedom, based on the ideas of the Enlightenment. This ideology of freedom was for the Americans the leading principle for their struggle with the England. The Revolutionary War was the result of this ideology of freedom, and when the War was successfully ended, the Americans had realized their ideals of freedom, for which they had started the War. In the Dutch Revolt however, the ideas of freedom that were the basis of the first acts of opposition of the nobles were was very much different from the ideas of freedom at the end of the Revolt. During the Revolt the ideas about freedom changed and developed as the result the interaction of the political, social, religious, and even economic forces during the Revolt. Unlike the Revolutionary War, in the Dutch Revolt, when people were fighting for their freedom, that idea of freedom changed, depending on the development of the Revolt. The successes they achieved, or not achieved, the change in circumstances, over which they had often little control; that all gave them both the idea and the practice of freedom. “It was generally speaking not the logic of a principle, but the force of a situation which brought about the freedom prevailing in the Netherlands.”¹

The freedom that was the object and the result of the Revolt was primarily political and religious, and should not be interpreted as individual freedom. In the

¹ Kossmann, Freedom, 297.
sixteenth century the fight for freedom was between groups, political groups and religious groups. For the fight of individual freedom we have to wait till the enlightenment. That does not mean that there was no interest at all for individual freedom, freedom of conscience is an example of individual freedom. And of course the libertine thinkers with their humanist background did approach freedom more from an individual perspective.

CONCEPTS OF FREEDOM

To better understand the conflicts between the Calvinists and the group in the middle we have to realize that both groups had different concepts of freedom. For the group in the middle freedom was based on the concept of negative freedom, whereas the Calvinists found in the concept of positive freedom the origin of their idea of freedom. The concept of negative freedom sees freedom as the reduction of restrictions imposed on the life of people. This is what most people consider freedom. But when freedom means to enable you to do what you want, simply removing restrictions may not be enough. You must have the means to do what you want. To give you these means is basically the concept of positive freedom. In the positive concept of freedom, freedom gives people the opportunity and the means to achieve goals, they could not achieve before. When we analyze freedom in a specific situation, we often see a combination of negative and positive freedoms. Positive freedom can have the form of restrictions or obligations; every civilized society has rules and laws, because people realize that without rules and laws there is no real freedom.
The idea of freedom that the nobles and the town governments had in mind when they started their opposition to the Spanish rule, was based on the concept of negative freedom. They saw the political reorganization Philip wanted to impose as a limitation to their role in government, and considered that reorganization as a reduction of their freedom. Their strive for freedom was to remove the restrictions on their political role in the government and regain their political influence in the society. Even their opposition to the persecution of heretics can be seen in the same light. The inquisition worked independently from the nobles and town governments as it reported directly to the king, but it had the power to order the nobles and the town governments to carry out the execution of heretics they had sentenced to death. For the nobles and town governments the inquisition was infringing on their political responsibilities. Particularly the "jus de non evocando", the right to be put on trial only by the court of Aldermen in one's own town.\textsuperscript{2} The local authorities feared that the inquisition would reduce their power, and that it would pave the path towards an absolute, centrally organized government. That was against their idea of freedom, which consisted of decentralized government based on privileges.

The Calvinist idea of freedom on the other hand, was based on the concept of positive freedom. The goal of life was the glorification of God as the almighty creator of this world. For the Calvinists freedom was providing and enhancing all means that would lead to this goal, even if these means in itself were restrictive. As Calvin stated, Christian freedom consist of:

\textsuperscript{2} van Gelderen, \textit{The Dutch Revolt}, 11.
- Freedom of the impossible demands of self-salvation,³
- Freedom to be obedient to religious doctrine out of gratitude and
- Freedom in the use of ‘moderate means’⁴

“Freedom is subordinate to love, as love is subordinate to the purity of faith”.⁵ For the Dutch Calvinists individual freedom of conscience was not their primary concern; their main goal was freedom of public worship for the Reformed Church and the freedom to organize state and society according to their religious norms, which they equated with God’s word.

It will be obvious that the Calvinistic ideas of freedom were fundamentally different from those of the nobles and town governments. To put it simply: the nobles and town governments, and later the regents, wanted to reduce restrictions, whereas the Calvinists were willing to impose restrictions, if they contributed to the achievement of what they saw as the spiritual goal of life. Their different ideas about freedom we see clearly illustrated in their opinion on religious freedom. The group in the middle, in which we find the nobles, town magistrates and regents thought that nobody should be forced in faith. Calvinists had only freedom for their religion in mind; other religions should not have the same freedom. Over the whole period of the Revolt the tension between the Calvinists and the group in the middle was largely based on the differences in what they considered as freedom.

Freedom as political independence was not an issue in the first years of the revolt. Only when the duke of Alva had established his terror regime, and the king had made clear that freedom to any religion other than the Catholic one was unacceptable to him, the Calvinists were forced to strive for a Netherlands independent of the Spanish king.

Tolerance is a special form of freedom, basically it is the acceptance of the 'otherness' of an individual or a group. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the meaning of the concept of toleration is more limited. Its scope is primarily political; it is a ruling group allowing other groups to be different. The tolerance in the Dutch Republic was far away from the modern idea of toleration, which include equal rights and equal treatment for all groups in the society. The Dutch Republic can only be called tolerant, when compared with the other countries in Europe. The Dutch Republic was the only country in Europe, which accepted that its society was pluralistic, and it tried to find a way in which the different groups could live peacefully together. The way the Republic successfully dealt with its diverse society was by toleration. Most other European countries saw uniformity of its society as an essential requirement for internal peace. In their view toleration would undermine the uniformity and consequently the stability of the state. Therefore none of the European countries had even the most elementary form of toleration: freedom of conscience.

HOW TOLERANT WAS THE REPUBLIC

One of the most unique characteristics of the Dutch Republic was its toleration. As Sir William Temple in 1673 admiringly observed: "It is hardly to be imagined how all the violence and sharpness, which accompanies the differences in Religion in other
Countreys [sic] seems to be appeased or softened here, by the general freedom which all men enjoy, either by allowance or connivence... Men live together like Citizens of the World, associated by the common ties of Humanity, and by the bonds of Peace, Under the impartial protection of indifferent Laws, With equal encouragement of all Art and Industry, and equal freedom of Speculation and Enquiry [sic].

What was exactly the nature of Dutch toleration? What was its scope, and what were the legal and practical aspects of it? How can we explain toleration from a historical, philosophical/religious, social, economic, and, not unimportantly, from a pragmatic perspective?

The current meaning of toleration is acceptance of the “otherness” of an individual or a group. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century the meaning of the concept toleration was more limited. First, in the Republic toleration meant more ‘to allow’ than ‘to accept’, and second, its scope was primarily political and restricted to the relationship between the ruling Calvinist group and the non-Calvinist group.

The catholic historian Rogier argued that, seen from the perspective of the catholic part of the population, there was little toleration. Freedom of conscience was guaranteed, but the exercise of the catholic religion was forbidden. There was a plethora of laws, rules and ordinances at state and town level forbidding and making punishable even private catholic masses or meetings. That the Catholics in practice had the opportunity to attend masses and other services of worship was the result of lax execution of the law by local magistrates. For Rogier, this did not make the Dutch society

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7 van Gelder, *Getemperde vrijheid*, 118.
a tolerant one. Rogier’s arguments make sense: freedom of conscience without the freedom to exercise the religion is not religious freedom. However, Rogier based his arguments on a concept of toleration, which is more of the twentieth century than of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Compared with the surrounding countries, where people still were persecuted just for their faith, the Dutch freedom of conscience was clearly a form of toleration. We must not confuse toleration with nondiscrimination. Without any doubt, the Catholics and all members of non-Reformed Churches were discriminated against. But in an era in which the meaning of toleration was still limited, the term discrimination had not come over the horizon yet. Compared with the Catholics, the dissident Protestants such as the Mennonites, the Lutherans, the Remonstrants after 1625, and the Jews had religious freedom. That is, they were allowed to exercise their religion. The reason for the limited tolerance towards the Catholics was not only a religious one; for many Protestants the Spanish king and Catholicism were one. Catholics were seen as politically unreliable, and therefore a danger to the survival of the Republic. Although history has shown that the majority of the Catholics were loyal to the Republic, the Calvinists had reasons to be suspicious. In 1578 Pope Gregorius XIII had forbidden the Catholics to recognize the sovereignty of the States, and he had threatened Catholics who supported the rebellion with excommunication. The first apostolic vicars, the highest clergy in the Dutch Catholic mission, declared openly that the government of the Republic was heretic and therefore illegal, and in 1607, Pope Paul V tried to influence

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11 van der Sande, “Roomse buitenbeentjes”, 89.
the peace negotiations by persuading the Spanish not to accept peace if it would not include complete religious freedom for the Catholics. This explains why the seventeenth century Dutch historian Brandt, who argued that most of the Catholics deserved religious freedom because they had taken part in the Revolt, added that it was just that their (secular) rights were limited.

Toleration in the Dutch Republic was more than religious toleration; it also extended to the practical freedom of the press. Although the Republic had laws that gave the magistrates authority to censor the press, the reality was the regents so rarely applied censorship that we can say that the Republic had freedom of press. As a result, in the seventeenth century, Holland was probably the greatest center of book production in the whole of Europe, and it was particularly important as a place where books, which would have been, or had been banned elsewhere, could legally be published.

Individual freedom was further safeguarded and even extended by the working of the greatly decentralized political system. In the defense of their privileges, local jurisdictions were often prepared to protect individuals against the central courts. As a consequence, many restrictive laws were difficult to enforce, and their application was far from uniform as it was at the discretion of the local authority.

The Republic, were the expression of opinion was almost unrestricted, became a haven for those who would have been, or had been, persecuted for their opinions in their own countries. Even many thinkers, who were not directly threatened by persecution,
found the atmosphere in the Republic more open and inspiring than that of any other country, as the case of Descartes illustrates. The French government had not persecuted Descartes, or even censored his books; however, in order to avoid any risk of persecution or censorship, and to be able to discuss his ideas freely, Descartes decided to live in the Dutch Republic.

TOLERATION EXPLAINED

When we look at the history of the Revolt, we see that in periods when the Calvinists have significant influence or power, as for example in the period after the Synod, the toleration is at ebb. A quick conclusion could be that without the Calvinist the Dutch Republic would have been more tolerant. In response to that I would like to bring forward the following points: first, that without the Calvinists the Republic would not have existed, and that toleration was directly connected with the Republic. No Republic, no toleration. Second, toleration was the result of a political and social balancing act, in which the Calvinists played an important role. Without the Calvinists the balance would have been upset, and although it is difficult to speculate on the outcome of such an imbalance, a less tolerant society is one of the more probable outcomes.

Having said that toleration was then result of a balancing act, the question arises as to who were the players in this act and what were its characteristics? The players were the secular magistrates or the regents on one side, and the ministers of the Reformed Church on the other side. When the balancing act is seen from the perspective of political power, we can call the parties respectively state and church. When we take an ideological

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17 Ibid., 170.
 point of view, we can call them libertines and orthodoxes. Characteristic of this balancing act was that circumstances, more than the parties themselves, determined the outcome.

Toleration of exercise of religion was not a policy, for it did not exist officially. What is called religious toleration is the non-enforcing of anti-religion laws by local magistrates. Note that each town, even each village had magistrates who individually decided how these laws should be enforced. Toleration was determined at the local level. Each town had its own balancing act, with its own players. Circumstances could be different for each town. Despite the local differences is it possible to draw general conclusions.

Given the local character of toleration, it is not correct to describe the parties in the balancing act simply as opponents; it was not uncommon that a regent was an alderman in the Reformed Church, or that regents had friendly personal relationships with members of the church council. In one way they were opposing parties, but on the personal level there was understanding, respect, and perhaps sympathy for the opinion of the other party.

Regents and ministers of the Reformed Church differed in their view on the political order. As magistrates, the regents were responsible for peace and order and therefore they valued very much political and social stability. They realized that to achieve this stability, pragmatism would in many cases bring them further than ideology. In contrast, the ministers had as ultimate goal a theocratic state. As peace and order were not their responsibilities, their primary concern was a Protestant state as pure as possible. They were driven by their Calvinist ideology, and their strife to stay as closely as possible to the ideology led to a rigid and uncompromising political attitude. The ministers saw flexibility and compromises as weakness, or even worse.
Regents and the ministers were in a way opponents, but it is incorrect to draw the conclusion that the regents were in favor of toleration and the ministers against it. Both had an antipathy against the Catholics, both wanted a national church that could unite the population, and both had reasons to be intolerant of Catholics; only the regents were willing to subdue their feelings against the Catholics and give them more freedom, if it benefited the general good and their own interests. The ministers, for reasons we have seen, were not willing to compromise.

What made the situation more complex was the interdependence between the regents and the ministers. The ministers had quite a lot of influence in the middle and lower classes of the population. The regents had therefore to be careful to keep the conflicts with the ministers contained. The regents, as all public figures, were supposed to be members, or at least supporters of the Reformed Church, and that implied a certain level of loyalty towards that church. Which other factors played a role in the balancing act of the regents? Even to the liberal regents, Roman Catholicism remained an evil system, and they were not free from the fear that Catholics could be a potential fifth column. The political and social influence of the Reformed Church in the Republic could not be ignored; it basically defined the limits in which the regents could operate. However, the Calvinists were a minority, smaller in numbers than the Catholics. For the regents it was obvious that any attempt at effective action against the Catholics was doomed to be a disaster. The state had not the power to take on such a large minority of the population. In general, as long as Catholics did not threaten public order, the regents were unlikely to act against them.
Although the regents did not have a strong ideology, they had a general dislike of persecuting people over details of belief, or other matters, which were simply beyond human comprehension. This established tradition of toleration, or at least a reluctance to persecute, was rooted in the Spanish period. The regents, with their distrust of the potential political influence of the Reformed Church, used toleration as a tool to limit and control that influence. With tolerance the regents were assured of the support of the Catholics, and that support could be used as a counter-weight for the pressure of the Reformed Church. Foreign policy also played a role; in times that the Republic had a Catholic ally, it did not want to jeopardize the alliance by clumsy handling of Catholics at home. Last, but not least, self-interest, or even corruption in the attitude of the civil authorities towards the Catholics, was an important element of the practice of toleration.

In the course of the seventeenth century, it slowly became accepted that Catholics would perform their religious services in formal secrecy, and as long as the Catholics made pretence at secrecy, the local police officers levied an unofficial tax on them for not disturbing their meetings. The profits gained this way were probably substantial, and so the officials directly responsible for enforcing the laws against catholic worship had a strong financial motivation for ensuring that both this worship and the law against it continued.\(^{18}\)

However, it is important to not exaggerate the degree of religious toleration in the Republic: while the practical circumstances of the time propelled the regent oligarchy towards a wide measure of toleration, there were distinct limits, equally determined by the contemporary situation, on how far that toleration could go.\(^{19}\)

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19 Ibid., 89.
Kaplan in his book *Calvinists and Libertines* approached the phenomenon of toleration from an ideological perspective. He saw toleration as directly related to the struggle between the orthodox Calvinists and the Libertines. When the Dutch Republic was a society dominated by an intolerant, militant Calvinism, how could it then be that that same society was so tolerant? Kaplan wants to solve this question by seeing toleration as the result of the reaction of libertines against the international development of confessionalism. Confessionalism is a reform movement that started in the middle of the sixteenth century, in which the churches increased their discipline in doctrine and organization. The Counter Reformation is the confessionalization that took place in the Catholic Church and the Synod of Dordrecht was the result of the confessionalization in the Reformed Church. Confessionalism with its aim for stricter doctrine and internal discipline was exclusive, increased the gap between the churches, and was therefore intolerant in nature.

In this light, Kaplan sees the Dutch Revolt as a reaction of the Dutch people against the confessionalization program of the Spanish king. Most of the people who supported the Revolt were not driven to do so by any commitment to Protestantism. For them the Revolt was no conventional religious war, it was a violent rejection of confessionalism and of the socio-political transformation associated with it. After the success of the Revolt, the Calvinists, ironically, became the champions of confessionalism in the Dutch Republic, taking over the role formerly filled by the Tridentine reformers. The Libertines opposed the rise of confessionalism in the Reformed Church, just as they had previously done in the Catholic Church, but their efforts did not

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20 Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*, 12.
give them the result they had wished. After the Synod the Reformed Church was more orthodox in its doctrine and stricter in its discipline than ever. The Libertines may have failed to resist confessionalism in the Church, but they achieved great success in thwarting off the effects of confessionalism in the society by promoting religious toleration and stimulating the traditional civic culture. This explains the peculiar combination of severe Calvinism and religious freedom that characterized the Dutch Republic. Within the Reformed Church confessionalism triumphed, whereas in Dutch society as a whole, confessionalism had failed. There was a trade off between the two. The more confessional the church became, the more lenient the regents ruled.

For the Remonstrants and the liberal historians toleration was a part of Dutch tradition that had its roots in the Modern Devotion and the writings of Erasmus. Modern historians play down the role that had been given to Erasmus and put more emphasis on the political and social circumstances to explain Dutch toleration; a direct link between Erasmus and toleration is denied. However, the importance of Erasmus must not be underestimated; the following illustrates his popularity. In 1549, Rotterdam erected a wooden statue of Erasmus that was smashed by the Spaniards in 1572. Subsequently a stone statue replaced it, which was one of the first non-royal, non-mythological and non-saintly figures ever erected in Europe.

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21 Ibid., 13.
24 Israel, The Dutch Republic, 392.
Coornhert was one of the few Netherlanders who developed a theory in defense of toleration that included the right to public worship. What is distinctive in his ideas was that he rejected the thought that religious beliefs ought to be formed in the institutional setting of a church. He wrote in vernacular to make his work accessible to the general public, but his ideas were often too radical to make them acceptable for many of his contemporaries. The Rijnsburger Collegiants were influenced by his ideas, and his influence on the Remonstrants is assumed, but the perfectibilism in Arminius theology is unmistakable. Coornhert’s ideas on toleration were based on his three Spiritualist convictions: (1) belief in the all-subduing power of truth; (2) the notion of complete dichotomy between the world of flesh and that of the Spirit, and (3) the idea of the impossibility of objective judgement of heresy. He argued that conscience was free by saying: “Only God has the right to be master over man’s soul and conscience; it is man’s right to have freedom of conscience.” To speak the same language as his Reformed opponents, Coornhert often used texts of the Scripture for his defense of toleration. He referred to Gamaliel’s counsel (Act 5:34-39) in which the Pharisees are warned not to fight the Christians because they might find out that they had been fighting God. For Coornhert the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-30 and 36-43) is Christ’s express command against killing of heretics. Coornhert used the ethical law of reciprocity, or Golden Rule, as can be found in Matt. 7:12, to defend religious freedom.

26 Voogt, Constraint on Trial, 235.
27 Bangs, Arminius, 345-47.
28 Voogt, Constraint on Trial, 103.
29 D.V. Coornhert, Werken, vol 2, fol. 471B; quoted in Voogt, Constraint on Trial, 104.
30 Voogt, Constraint on Trial, 118-120.
Because every human wants to be free to exercise his religion, nobody has the right to deny others this freedom. Coornhert is one of the first thinkers who considered religious freedom a fundamental human right.\textsuperscript{31} He even got as far as to argue that atheists should be tolerated; he compared heretics and even atheists with a blind person who should be guided and helped, and not punished for his blindness.\textsuperscript{32} This is connected with his idea that faith is a gift of God. Another compelling reason not to persecute heretics, Coornhert argued, is that coercion simply does not work, and even is counterproductive.\textsuperscript{33} Liberty would bring peace and order while suppression would, sooner or later, lead to violence and resistance.\textsuperscript{34}

Justus Lipsius, a contemporary of Coornhert, shared Coornhert's idea about freedom of religion. Faith could not be forced, but the state had the right to suppress public exercise of a dissident religion. Lipsius distinguished between the inner faith, which was free, and the outward ceremonies of a religion, which fell under the authority of the state.\textsuperscript{35} He was a member of the Family of Love, a religious group that was indifferent to the outward forms of Christianity, and allowed its members to assimilate and conform to the dominant religion.\textsuperscript{36}

The Remonstrants, as we have seen, had a more tolerant attitude than the counter Remonstrants, but their plea for toleration was initially focused on acceptance of their ideas by the Reformed Church. After the Synod, when they were expelled from the

\textsuperscript{31} Bonger, \textit{D.V. Coornhert}, 210 and 215.
\textsuperscript{32} Voogt, \textit{Constraint on Trial}, 149-150.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{34} Mout, "Limits and Debates", 42.
\textsuperscript{36} Mout, "Limits and Debates", 226.
Reformed Church and formed their own church, the Remonstrants’ main representatives Episcopius, Wtenbogaert and de Fijne, started a debate on toleration, arguing for a broader toleration applicable for all churches. Wtenbogaert eventually urged in a treatise addressed to the stadholder Frederic Henry for full and unrestricted toleration of Catholic worship. Episcopius developed in the late 1620’s and 1630’s a fully-fledged doctrine of toleration, breaking with the premises of the past, arguing for unrestricted freedom of practice for all Churches and individuals, and thereby accepting the value of each religion and human belief. His ideas had as much to do with the freedom of the individual, as with toleration of practice for each Church. Episcopius repeated Coornhert’s argument for toleration by referring to its stabilizing effect on the state. In a free society nobody will resent the state, and nobody will want to overthrow it.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Kaplan’s theory sheds a new light on the phenomenon of toleration, and certainly contributes to a better understanding of the Dutch society in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. It builds on the liberal interpretation of historians such as Busken Huet and Enno van Gelder, who saw the ruling class influenced and inspired by writers as Erasmus and Coornhert. However, some aspects of Kaplan’s interpretation are open for criticism. He more or less implied that Libertines and regents are the same group. That conclusion is an oversimplification and is not correct. Although the average regent was more liberal than

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40 Ibid., 504.
the average member of the Reformed Church, it goes too far to consider the regents Libertines. They may have been critical with regard to ecclesiastical discipline, probably inclined to limit the discipline, but they did not reject ecclesiastical discipline as such. According to Kaplan’s definition⁴², rejection of ecclesiastical discipline is a requirement for being termed a Libertine.

Martin van Gelderen saw religious tolerance as a political principle, which he considered to be the outcome of an ideology that valued liberty and concord. Because freedom of conscience was seen as the essence of liberty, and because concord was regarded as the foundation of the community, religious toleration became an important value in Dutch political thought.⁴³

Kossmann questioned whether the influence of Erasmus and Coornhert on the regents could be ascertained.⁴⁴ He struggled with the enigma that the civil authorities, who produced a massive anti heterodoxy legislation, and whose primary concern was civil obedience, rarely carried out those laws.⁴⁵ Kossmann drew attention to the character of Dutch freedom, that it is a result of practice rather than of principle. That the regents “used freedom, that is, independence, provincial autonomy, republicanism, and toleration, as an instrument to maintain a precarious equilibrium in an economically, and culturally dynamic society that was in constant danger of being disrupted by multifarious interests, ideals, convictions, ambitions, and traditions which characterized it.”⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ Ibid., 297.
⁴⁶ Ibid., 297.
Kossmann's end conclusion is that: "The Dutch experience showed that liberty is an excellent tool to keep a society going." 47

47 Ibid., 298.
CHAPTER VI
DEVELOPMENT OF CAPITALISM

CAPITALISM AND FREEDOM

As this thesis evaluates the influence of Calvinism on the development of freedom in the Netherlands, we have first to find the relationship between capitalism and freedom before we can ask what the influence of Calvinism was on the development of capitalism in the Dutch Republic. First, the fact that the development of capitalism in the Republic was more advanced than in any other country in Europe was a major, if not the major reason for the Republic’s dominant position in the economy of the seventeenth century. This dominance in trade and finances resulted in wealth that allowed the Republic to finance the war against Spain. Without the prosperity resulting from the successful application of capitalistic principles, the Republic would not have had sufficient financial resources to maintain its large standing army. Second, many see capitalism as a form of freedom. Especially in the twentieth century with its conflict between the western capitalist and eastern communist countries, capitalist countries emphasized that freedom in their countries was partly the result of the capitalist economic system. When the concept of negative freedom is valued over the concept of positive freedom the argument of the capitalistic countries is true. Each individual participant in the capitalist economy is free to do what he wants. The capitalist theory says that the economy will perform best when each participant seeks his own interest and satisfies his own needs. And these needs are economic needs, which are, almost by definition, secular ones. This emphasis on secular needs is a sharp contrast to medieval thoughts on economic behavior, in which all
human behavior was seen from the perspective of the overall spiritual meaning of this life. In the Middle Ages ethical rules were applicable for all aspects of life; that economic behavior would not be subject to these ethics was unheard of.

What was the influence of Calvinism on the development of capitalism in the Dutch Republic? There are two answers: one answer deals with a change in material circumstances, and the other answer focuses on the more spiritual circumstances. But, as I will explain later, these spiritual circumstances cannot be viewed in isolation from the material circumstances.

In the first part of the 1580s the duke of Parma carried out a successful military campaign, known as the 'reconquista'. He captured the southern part of the Netherlands, culminating in the fall of Antwerp in 1585. The success of his campaign was partly based on his moderate policy towards his opponents. All the people who did not want to live under the Spanish Catholic regime were free to leave the country, and were allowed to take with them all their possessions. Almost all Calvinist left the southern Netherlands and a large majority settled in the northern Netherlands. Most of the emigrants were skilled laborers and merchants; their expertise in trade and their capital gave a boost to the economy of the Republic that must not be underestimated. In one strike Antwerp had lost its position as the most important trading center of Europe. The rebel’s fleet blocked the river Scheldt that gives entrance to the port of Antwerp, and Antwerp’s economic soul, its merchants, had emigrated to Amsterdam.

CAPITALISM IN THE DUTCH REPUBLIC

When we discuss capitalism in the Dutch Republic in the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century we have to realize that the economy in the
Republic was still in a transition phase from the medieval economy to the full capitalistic economy of the nineteenth century. There are many definitions of capitalism; for this thesis I would like to quote Wallerstein who said that “What defines capitalism most fundamentally is the drive for the endless accumulation of capital,” because it puts emphasis on the forces behind capitalism rather than giving a description of the main characteristics of capitalism. When the question is: “What is the influence of Calvinism on the development of capitalism in the Dutch Republic.” It is relevant to evaluate the influence of Calvinism on the forces behind capitalism. As I will show with a short history of the development of the economy in the Netherlands, capitalism was already developing before Calvinism became a group of importance.

The foundation of the successful Dutch economic development was the production efficiency Dutch achieved in fishery and agriculture. The invention around 1400 of the *haringbuis*, a fishing vessel with greater maneuverability, seaworthiness and speed, without great losses in cargo space enabled the ships to stay longer at sea. This eventually resulted in the Dutch dominating the herring fishery in the North Sea, the cod fishery around Iceland, and the Spitzbergen whale fishery. For the preservation of herring salt was needed, and soon the Dutch dominated the salt trade. Fishery and salt trade stimulated the shipbuilding. The Dutch shipbuilding had become highly efficient, and with its cheaper and more efficient ships the Dutch were able to achieve a virtual monopoly in the Baltic trade.

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3 Ibid., 39-40.
Because the Dutch soil was particularly bad for arable agriculture, the Dutch were forced to find means to make agriculture more profitable. They achieved that by shifting to industrial crops as flax, hemp, hops and horticulture. At the same time they increased the livestock husbandry. The shift to industrial crops was possible because the Dutch could cheaply import grain from the Baltic countries.\footnote{Ibid., 41.}

The textile industry received a boost from the arrival of highly skilled refugees from the southern Netherlands. In general the Dutch industries were specialized in high value added production, such as textile finishing, shipbuilding, production of dyestuff and munitions.\footnote{Ibid., 44.}

The success in shipping was the foundation of trade; big profits were made through marketing and stapling in the great Amsterdam entrepot. The financial trustworthiness of the Dutch Republic allowed it to become the banker of the new world-economy, and soon after the \textit{Wisselbank van Amsterdam} was founded in 1609, the Dutch controlled the international money market. As financiers they exported Dutch capital, the remittance of which enabled the Dutch to live off productive surplus far beyond what they created themselves.\footnote{Ibid., 57.}

Wallerstein argued that the sequence of Dutch advantages in the world-economy is productive, distributional, financial.\footnote{Ibid., 56.} This sequence is illustrative for Dutch capitalism in its drive for endless accumulation of capital. When the possibilities for additional accumulation of capital in the productive industry were exhausted, the focus shifted to

\footnotetext[4]{Ibid., 41.}
\footnotetext[5]{Ibid., 44.}
\footnotetext[6]{Ibid., 57.}
\footnotetext[7]{Ibid., 56.}
trade with new opportunities for profit, when trade was well established, financing became the new chance for accumulation of capital.

The industry in the Dutch Republic was efficient, but not necessarily capitalistic; in many branches of industry guilds with their characteristic protectionism were still dominant. Van Dillen and Klein are therefore right when they concluded that capitalistic elements can be found primarily in trade and banking. ⁸

THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

With his book Die Protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus, published in 1905, Max Weber gave a new view on the development of capitalism. Before that time, economic historians explained the development of capitalism as the result of changing circumstances: new discoveries, better means of transportation, increase of money, development of technology, etc. Weber thought that changes in circumstances were not sufficient to completely explain the development of capitalism; for him the rise of capitalism was only possible when there was a change in mentality as well. He found that Calvinism, or Puritanism as it was called in the English speaking countries, provided the basis for this new mentality, which he called der Geist des Kapitalismus, or the spirit of capitalism. Weber’s thesis met much criticism; Tawney in his book Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, published in 1926, acknowledged Weber’s view of a causal relationship between Calvinism and the rise of capitalism, but argued

that the new spirit of capitalism, generated by Calvinism, could not sufficiently explain
the overall relationship between Calvinism and capitalism. He saw in the whole
Protestant movement, with its influence on the political, social and economic aspects of
the society, the causative role in relation to capitalism.® The theologian Winthrop Hudson
and the economic historian Henri See argued that Weber’s thesis was an
oversimplification of the economic and theological realities of the sixteenth and
seventeenth century. Hyma, a historian, vigorously attacked Weber by arguing that
Calvinism was not a progressive religion and therefore could not have had a decisive
effect on the development of capitalism.11 The many opponents of Weber agreed
however on one point: that there is a relationship between Calvinism and the
development of capitalism. It is not possible to describe the evolution from the medieval
economy into modern capitalism without mentioning Calvinism.

To explore the impact of Calvinism on economic thinking, we must first
understand the medieval society and its economic thoughts. At the same time we have to
realize that in the period of the Reformation, society was already developing from a
medieval society into a modern society. With so many aspects of society changing it is
difficult to determine which factors cause changes and which are the results of change.
The same is applicable for Calvinism and the economy: did the change in economic
circumstances have an influence on Calvinism, or did Calvinism influence the economy,
as Weber argued? When Calvin developed his theological ideas the society was already
changing. In the first part of the sixteenth century most parts of Europe, especially urban

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D.C. Health and Company, 1959), IX.
10 Ibid., IX.
11 Ibid., X.
areas, were not a full medieval society any more. We see the new ideas about economic practice reflected in Calvin’s theory.

“Trade is one thing, religion is another”; this slogan is representative of the doctrine that religion and economic interests are two separate fields in life and society, which cannot encroach on each other. Since the nineteenth century, this doctrine has been generally accepted in western societies, but in the middle ages the idea of separating the secular and spiritual was thought to be absurd. In medieval thinking life, and all human activities, had an ultimately spiritual purpose. Ethics derived from the relationship between human activities and the spiritual goal of life; there was no distinction between spiritual and secular activities. The legitimacy of economic transactions was judged with reference to the moral standard, not to utility. At the end of the middle ages, before the Reformation started, the unity of spiritual and secular concerns came under attack. Within two centuries this would result in a dualism, which regards the secular and spiritual aspects of life not as integral parts of a larger unity, but as parallel and independent entities, governed by different laws and judged by different standards. The role of the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages was clear: it had the task to guide the people in this life towards its eternal destiny. This guidance included, of course, the economic aspects of life, for which it had rules and laws, of which the one on usury was the most important.

The economic doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church had not changed since the middle ages; in contrast, Calvin took the economic reality of his time as the starting point from which he formulated his ideas on economics. Calvin’s ideas on credit and trade in

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money were a breakthrough. He took the ethic of money lending out of the overall framework of usury. He considered it as, “a particular case of the general problem of the social relations of a Christian community, which must be solved in the light of the existing circumstances.” This statement implies that he assumed that credit is a normal fact of economic life. He therefore dismissed the oft-quoted passages from the Old Testament and the Fathers as irrelevant, because the conditions for which these passages were written did not exist any more. To defend interest on loans, Calvin argued that interest on loans could be compared with rent for land. If rent for land is permitted, why should interest for a loan not be permitted? That Calvin used this comparison indicates that the society was open to the idea that money was not sterile, as proclaimed in medieval economic thought, but could bear fruit, just like land. Calvin accepted the reality of commercial practice of his time, and on this practical basis of urban industry and commercial enterprise he erected the structure of Calvinistic economic ethics.

For the Calvinist the world is ordained to show the majesty of God, and it is his Christian duty to live for that end. His aim in life is not personal salvation, but the glorification of God, which cannot be obtained by prayer only, but needs to be supplemented by action. Good works are not a way to achieve salvation, but they are the proof that salvation has been achieved. The duty of the Christian is to discipline his own life, and to create a sanctified society. Calvin saw the possibility to use qualities, which were demanded for economic success, such as thrift, diligence, sobriety, frugality as the foundation of Christian virtues. Such teaching was very well designed to liberate

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13 Ibid., 107.
14 Ibid., 107.
15 Ibid., 108.
16 Ibid., 109.
economic energies as it insisted on personal responsibility, discipline and asceticism. Calvin often quoted the words of St. Paul: “If a man will not work, neither shall he eat.”

For Weber and Troeltsch, this concept of labor as a “calling”, with its utilization of every chance of gain, and its confidence in the blessing of God, laid the foundation of the world of specialized labor, which taught men to work for work’s sake. It is this Calvinist mentality that work is a “calling” that relates Calvinism to capitalism. Calvinists saw work in a religious context. First, they considered hard and disciplined work as a virtue, and second the profits of this work were interpreted as a sign of God’s blessing. Therefore the drive for the endless accumulation of capital, which is a main characteristic of capitalism, fits well in the Calvinist view on work.

The reformed doctrine of the fundamental cleavage between worldly activities and divine purpose resulted in a separation of the tasks of the clerics and the secular functionaries. Ministers had the task to preach faith as it was laid down in the Scriptures, while the magistrates were charged with the preservation of the social order by law and force. This implied that religious leaders should be relatively unconcerned with specific regulations regarding matters of economic nature. A statement of the ministers of Leyden in 1579, in which they set forth clearly the theory of the two governments, illustrates that this principle of segregation was applied in the Dutch Republic. As we have seen in the controversy between the Remonstrants and counter Remonstrants, the

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17 Ibid., 114.
20 Ibid., 72.
orthodox Calvinists vigorously defended the system in which the religious and secular government worked separately.

As previously mentioned, Calvin had admitted the interaction between social and economic circumstances on one, and economic ethics on the other side. This inherent flexibility, together with the principle of segregation, paved the way for interest oriented behavior of the public authorities. "The conception of a segregated secular sphere of action left the authorities free to judge the requirements of a particular country in the given situation and to act accordingly." Economic actions had to be judged in relation to a concrete situation, and the appropriate authorities could sanction certain actions, even when they were traditionally regarded as sinful. "Under the influence of this Reformed doctrine on economic conduct, the necessities of the state were regularly invoked to justify actions that were not yet acceptable as actions of private persons." Although the magistrates remained subject to the moral supervision of the Church, they were empowered to give full weight to the demands of their country at a given moment. As a result, the Reformed doctrine on economic activities could be made compatible with high priority demands of the state. Now the Reformed opinion on what was proper economic conduct depended on the requirement of various political communities. It is not surprising that these opinions varied considerably in different countries; for example, in England the attitude towards usury was more severe than in Holland.

It is not correct to draw the conclusion that the Dutch Reformed ministers accepted all economic conduct without criticism. They were aware of their responsibility

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21 Ibid., 75.
22 Ibid., 75.
23 Ibid., 81.
24 Ibid., 82.
as guardians of morals in the Dutch society, and when, in their opinion, morals were breached, they used their authority as spiritual leaders to point out to the individuals the immorality of specific commercial practices.\(^{25}\) As medieval economic ethic was very much focused on pricing, Dutch Calvinist literature on the morality of commercial conduct emphasized something new, and something that seems to us more comprehensible: the policy of quality of goods.\(^{26}\) A fine example of a Calvinist moral advice book is Godfried Udeman’s *Geestelijk Roer van het Coopmans Schip* (Spiritual Rudder of the Merchant Ship). In this book, ethical commercial behavior is defined in terms of using correct weight and providing good quality. The general rule is that the partner should not be deceived in the overall quality of the product sold. Price is only a moral issue when it is artificially high as the result of monopoly.\(^{27}\)

Although Calvin had allowed interest on loans, usury was still a major ethical problem in the Republic. The way the state and the Reformed Church handled the issue of usury clearly illustrates two characteristics of Calvinistic doctrine on economic ethics: (1) separation of the spiritual and secular domain, including different judgement of proper economic conduct by state and private person, and (2) the adaptability to changing circumstances.

In the Dutch Republic there were urban lending institutions and private moneylenders (lombards); the city government directly controlled the urban lending institutions, whereas the lombards, although they had to obtain a license from the city, were not controlled by the city. Johannes Cloppenburg, a minister in Brill, wrote that

\[^{26}\text{Ibid., 1853.}\]
\[^{27}\text{Ibid., 1848.}\]
persons working in an urban lending institute were free of sins, but private moneylenders, or lombards, because of their iniquitous occupation, should be excluded from the communion.  

Cloppenburg’s opinion, which was representative of that of the Reformed Church, was attacked by the libertine Salmasius, professor at Leyden. He asked why the trade in money should be treated as if it were sinful and dishonest. And if it was sinful, he argued, why were only the lombards excluded from communion, and not the magistrates who issued the licenses? The theologians of the Reformed Church had developed a distinction between toleration and justification of the lombards’ activity. Toleration was the domain of the secular state; justification was the prerogative of the Church. However, when the libertine ideas about money lending received wider public support, the Calvinist ethic doctrine is able to adapt to the changing circumstances. Starting in Leyden in 1657, the Reformed Church, initially still reluctantly, admitted private moneylenders to the communion. This issue of money lending was clearly an example of the same economic activity judged moral differently, depending whether the actors were public authorities or individuals. The same attitude we find in 1599, when the directors of the Amsterdam East India Company had managed to acquire a monopoly on pepper. When asked for an opinion, the ministers of Amsterdam admonished the directors, but at the same time they maintained that the matter was political and therefore subject to the discretion of the magistrates. The Amsterdam Company later merged into the East India Company, which had a public charter, and was officially granted a monopoly. The Reformed

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29 Claudius Salmasius, *De usuris liber* (Leiden: Elsevier Bonaventura, 1638); quoted in Riemersma, *Religious Factors*, 78.


31 van Dillen, *Van Rijkdom en Regenten*, 326.
Church never objected to this monopoly. Economic activities thus received approval or disapproval depending on whether or not they had the sanction of public authority.

INFLUENCE OF CALVINISM ANALYZED

Simon Schama in his book *Embarrassment of Riches* argued that a “strong sense of the reprehensible nature of money-making persisted, even while the Dutch amassed their individual and collective fortunes.” The Reformed Church therefore maintained as its official doctrine that money brought more evil than good in the world, and that riches, like works, were at no avail of salvation. Quite correctly, Schama observed that the Church was incapable of enforcing its doctrine on social and economic matters, due to the division of the world into a secular and a spiritual sphere. His remark that, “the more passionate his Calvinism, the less likely was an entrepreneur to fit in the “modus operandi” of Amsterdam capitalism,” can only be explained by assuming that much of the common practice of the Amsterdam merchants could not (yet) be justified by the strict Calvinistic economic ethic.

Van Deursen affirmed that the ministers of the Reformed Church often expressed their criticism of the economic behavior of regents and merchants, but generally applied ecclesiastical discipline only when the borders of (secular) law were crossed. For example, the ministers never took disciplinary actions against a merchant who had taken advantage of the inexperience of his partner; yet, people who could not pay off their debts, and as a result went bankrupt, were in many cases excluded from communion.

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33 Ibid., 340.
34 van Deursen, *Bavianen en Slijkgeuzen*, 223.
Van Deursen is harsh, but not completely incorrect in his judgement that the Church has never fought against the fundamental immorality of commerce.\textsuperscript{35} That many merchants and regents were members of church councils certainly has influenced the attitude of the Reformed Church with regard to commercial practices.\textsuperscript{36} That many merchants and regents were members of church councils certainly has influenced the attitude of the Reformed Church on commercial practices.\textsuperscript{37}

In the evaluation of the influence of Calvinism on the development of capitalism in the Dutch Republic, it is useful that we distinguish between two concepts of influence. First, the "active" concept of Protestant influence, like Weber saw it, was a causally significant factor in the development of capitalism. Second, there is the "passive" concept of Calvinistic influence, which suggests that faced with the irresistible tendency towards secularization and commercialism, and pressed by the changing circumstances, Calvinism relaxed the restraints on economic conduct which originated from the middle ages. Calvinism had a dualistic relationship with capitalism. In one way, it was afraid of the materialistic character of capitalism, and it still adhered to some of the medieval rules for economic behavior. But in the other way, Calvinism admired people's economic achievements. We see this dualistic attitude illustrated in the Dutch ministers who disapproved of the activities of private lenders, but at the same time idealized economic expansion, because it was clearly connected with their country's struggle against Spanish rule.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 223.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 222.
\textsuperscript{37} van Deursen, \textit{Bavianen en Slijkgeuzen}, 222.
\textsuperscript{38} Riemersma, \textit{Religious Factors}, 84.
Because the circumstances in other, non-Calvinist countries were completely different, active influence of Calvinism on capitalism is difficult to prove. The faster development of capitalism in the Dutch Republic can be better explained by referring to circumstances that were more favorable in the Republic, than to a different spirit of capitalism inspired by Calvinist doctrine. That active influence is difficult to prove does not mean that there was no causal influence of Calvinism on capitalism. I'm convinced that Calvinism actively influenced capitalism in the Dutch republic, but its influence was subordinate to the traditional economic circumstances, which normally are considered to be the causal factors of the development of capitalism. Therefore, Protestant ideas contributed more than any independent factors in a development which had started long before. We can derive from the fact that the economic moral doctrine varied between Calvinist countries with different economic situations and interests that Calvinism allowed itself to be influenced by the economic climate. With its principle of segregation of the spiritual and secular sphere of action Calvinism was a half-way station between medieval economic thoughts and full capitalism, and by viewing work as a ‘calling’ it prepared men’s minds for a concept of economic striving that is characteristic of capitalism.\(^{39}\)

When evaluating the influences on the development of capitalism we must not forget the inner strength of capitalism: “The great cause of the rise of the spirit of capitalism has been capitalism itself.”\(^{40}\)

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 86.

Tawney wrote: “History is a stage where forces which are within human control contend and cooperate with forces which are not.”¹ When reflecting on the Dutch Revolt, we must come to the conclusion that the forces that were not under human control were stronger than the forces that were. Incidents that were highly accidental, international political developments, which were not related to the Revolt, and miscalculations by all parties involved in the Revolt, determined the final outcome of the revolt. Jan and Annie Romijn stated in their book Erflaters van onze beschaving that "the Republic of the United Provinces is born out of a series of mistakes"². They sum up the mistakes: The high nobility, which in their strive to regain their old role in the government, took the lead in the opposition against the government, only to bow their heads again for the government, when they realized that the Calvinists were taking the opposition movement too far. Mistakes as well by the Calvinists, who as a result of their radical and intolerant attitude lost the southern provinces, and never were able to make the Republic into a Calvinist state. Then the Spanish king’s effort to establish a central government had a boomerang effect, and eventually ended in the breaking up of the Netherlands. His policy to defend Catholicism with all means possible resulted in Calvinism becoming the official religion in half of the Netherlands. And finally William of Orange, who had been mistaken, first in the king, then in the high nobility, and finally in the low nobility. He

¹ Tawney, Rise of Capitalism, 280.
² Romein, Erflaters van onze beschaving, 128.
fought for a free, united Netherlands, in which the different religions would peacefully co-exist. When he died, the Netherlands was divided, and in neither part of the Netherlands was the religious toleration he had dreamed of.\(^3\)

This illustrates that history, and history of the Dutch Revolt in particular, is not the result of a development that is inevitable. There were many moments in the history of the Revolt in which a different outcome of an event would have changed the result of the Revolt completely. And there were many events of which the outcome was accidental and could well have been different. When we realize the important role circumstances, coincidences and accidental occurrences play in history it is easier to understand why the Dutch Republic differed in so many aspects from other European countries.

We see the influence of Calvinism best reflected in these three area’s: (1) the history of the Revolt and the Dutch Republic, (2) the freedom and toleration in the Dutch Republic, and (3) the development of capitalism in the Republic.

The influence of Calvinism or Calvinists on the history of the Netherlands is basically the influence they had on the behavior of the group in the middle. In the southern Netherlands their fanatic, uncompromising, intolerant and stubborn attitude alienated the Calvinists from the group in the middle; in the northern Netherlands the same attitude was for the group in the middle reason to cooperate with the Calvinists.

Analyzing the first Revolt, my conclusion is that an absolute requirement for any success was an effective cooperation between the Calvinists, the nobles and the town governments. The end of the coalition of the Calvinists and the group in the middle was therefore the major reason for the failure of the first Revolt. The radical behavior of the

\(^3\) Romein, *Erflaters van onze beschaving*, 129.
Calvinists, as we have seen demonstrated in the iconoclasm of 1566 and in the uproar in the years after the Pacification of Ghent, was for the group in the middle reason to terminate the cooperation with the Calvinists. It is however, not correct to blame solely the Calvinists for the loss of the southern Netherlands, as for example van Oldenbarnevelt did. I think that even if the Calvinists had adopted a more moderate attitude, the outcome of the first Revolt probably would not have been different. King Philip had made clear that religious freedom was under no circumstances acceptable for him. This inflexible policy of the Spanish king left the Revolt with only one option if it wanted to realize religious freedom: political independence from Spain. It was obvious that King Philip would never give up his sovereignty over the Netherlands voluntarily, and that the Dutch population would have to fight for their independence. This independence could therefore only be achieved by war. In the southern provinces the Calvinists were the only group willing to wage a war. The strategic position of the south was less favorable than that of the north. The northern provinces had the advantage of the rivers Rhine and Meuse as natural borders and the low level of the land, which allowed inundation as a mean of defense. Furthermore, the rebel’s fleet, which controlled the sea and all its estuaries, seriously hampered logistics of the Spanish army in the northern provinces by making transport over water impossible. Therefore, I think that it is reasonable to conclude that even if the Calvinists had not scared the nobility out of the Revolt, the nobility never would have taken the step to fight for independence. Even in the highly improbable case that the nobility would have taken up arms to fight for independence, the possibility of defeating a large and experienced Spanish army would have been very slim. My conclusion therefore is that the Calvinists contributed to the temporary successes and the
eventual failure of the first Revolt, but that the Calvinists share the blame for the loss of
the southern Netherlands with the nobles and town governments who did not want to
wage a war against the Spanish regime for freedom of conscience.

In the second Revolt the coalition of Calvinists and regents stayed intact. It was
very effective and contributed as much to the success of the second Revolt, as the failure
of a similar coalition contributed to the defeat of the first Revolt. There are several
arguments which explain why the coalition of the second Revolt was successful and the
coalition of the first Revolt was not. (1) The regents of the northern provinces did not
have the allegiance with the Spanish king as the nobles of the southern provinces had.
(2) The social uproar after the Pacification of Ghent, instigated by the Calvinists, only
took place in the southern provinces. The impression it made on the regents of the
northern provinces was significantly less than the impression it made on the nobles of the
southern provinces. (3) The northern Netherlands could be better defended against
Spanish troops than the southern Netherlands.

The second revolt, and thus the independent Dutch Republic, would not have been
possible without the Calvinists. Many times during the Revolt the situation was so
desperate that defeat by the Spanish troops seemed to be only a matter of time. In these
situations, the Calvinists with their stubborn devotion to the Revolt and their strong belief
in a good end of the Revolt against all odds, inspired the rest of the Dutch population and
made them continue the fight against the Spanish regime. The role of the Calvinists in the
second Revolt was therefore absolutely instrumental.

The Republic rewarded the Calvinists for their contribution to the Revolt by
making the Reformed Church the official state sanctioned and supported church. The
Calvinists had wanted more, their ultimate goal was a theocratic state, but their numbers were too small and their power too limited to overcome the opposition of the regents.

During the truce an initial theological discussion about predestination within the Reformed Church developed into a nationwide conflict, in which the political aspects were as important as the religious ones. When this conflict threatened the mere existence of the Republic, stadholder Price Maurice forcefully intervened. His intervention was possible because he had the support of the orthodox Calvinists. As a reward for their support, Prince Maurice convened the National Synod of Dordrecht, which, as expected, was a victory of the orthodox Calvinists over the liberal ones. Although the Synod of Dordrecht was important for Calvinism and the Reformed Church, because it embraced orthodoxy definitively, its long-term influence on the political and social situation was limited.

The society of the Dutch can be characterized as opposing groups in a stable situation of balance. The major groups were the Reformed Church, or Calvinists and the magistrates, or regents. A minor group was the Catholics. The Reformed Church was driven by a religious ideology and it was inflexible and intolerant. The regents were pragmatic and flexible. The Catholics played no active role, their importance was derived from the fact that they were a large group with the potential to cause social unrest if seriously dissatisfied. The regents’ primary concern was a stable society with peace and order. Additionally, they wanted to keep the influence of the Reformed Church limited in political matters. We have seen that with toleration the regents could achieve both goals. The balance in the Dutch Republic was a stable one, because when one group gained influence and threatened to tip the balance, the same threat of imbalance caused a
reaction in which the other group gained strength. The influence of Calvinism on tolerance must be seen in this framework of the balance which was so characteristic for the Dutch society. The intolerance of the Calvinists was compensated by the tolerance of the regents. In a way, the intolerance of the Calvinists was an incentive for the regents to be tolerant. This lead to the ironic conclusion that the Calvinists contributed to the religious toleration in the Dutch Republic by being intolerant. The Synod of Dordrecht, which was a victory for the counter Remonstrants almost created an imbalance in favor of the orthodox Calvinists. Soon after the Synod we see the liberal groups regaining power, and after the death of Prince Maurice the balance was completely restored.

At first glance, it is surprising that Calvinism, which was inherently inflexible and intolerant, was so flexible and tolerant in economic matters. As a result of the separation between a spiritual sphere and a secular sphere of activities, which Calvinism promoted, the Reformed Church did not consider the judgement of economic conduct her first priority. The state was primarily responsible for controlling the secular activities, including economic activities, by law and force. The flexibility of the Reformed Church in economic issues was not so much the result of flexibility in its doctrine on economic ethics, but more of an attitude of non-involvement.

There will probably never be a definite answer to the question whether Calvinism stimulated the development of capitalism by changing the mentality of the people. Without any doubt, the mentality of the people changed over the period that capitalism developed, and Calvinism certainly contributed to that change in mentality; probably into a direction more favorable to capitalism. That gives some foundation for the idea that Calvinism stimulated the development of capitalism. I am not opposed to this idea, as
long as we realize that the development of capitalism was a complex process in which many, often interrelated factors played a role. I think the fact that Calvinism had little moral objections to new commercial practices, contributed more to the development of capitalism in the Dutch Republic than the alleged change in mentality.

In conclusion we can say that Calvinism had a very significant influence on freedom in the Netherlands. First, without Calvinism there would not have been a Dutch Republic with freedom and toleration which was unique for its era. The second conclusion is that given the peculiar balance in the Dutch Republic, its tolerance was the reaction to the intolerance of the Calvinists. Third, the failure of the first Revolt demonstrates that for the success of Calvinism the circumstances must be favorable and the group in the middle must be willing to cooperate. And finally, Calvinism allowed capitalism to develop faster in the Dutch Republic than in any other country in Europe.
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The author was born in Rotterdam, the Netherlands where he was educated through high school. In 1962 he joined the Royal Netherlands Navy and pursued a 35 years. He graduated in 1965 from the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Marine (Naval Academy) in Den Helder. Over the period he served in the Navy, he followed a variety of national and foreign courses, most of which focused on above water warfare and surface weapon systems.

In his career he served on board ships, at the staffs of national and international headquarters and at the ministry of defense. Towards the end of his career he specialized in project management of weapon systems. His last position was at the NATO headquarters in Norfolk, USA.

After his retirement in 1997 he decided to broaden his horizon by starting a study in humanities. He wanted to build on his existing general knowledge, rather than the specialized knowledge that he had acquired during his career in the Navy.

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