

Under Construction?

The Catholic Community in Ghent after the *Beeldenstorm*¹

MICHAL BAUWENS

81

While the iconoclasm of 1566 has been a popular topic in the historiography of the Low Countries, we know little about the people who endured iconoclasm. Generally, Catholics in the Low Countries were regarded as being rather passive bystanders in the events of this period, but the case of Ghent illustrates that Catholics took various actions when faced with the threat of iconoclasm and the subsequent destruction. Even though religious militancy was lacking, certain aspects of Catholic religion were strengthened throughout the Wonder Year. Parishioners put a lot of effort in the repairs of their parish churches and the interest in traditional devotions and religious knowledge also increased. Rather than rendering them passive, the troubled period seems to have motivated Ghent Catholics to research their faith.

Onder constructie? De katholieke gemeenschap van Gent na de Beeldenstorm

De Beeldenstorm van 1566 is een populair thema in de historiografie van de Lage Landen, maar desalniettemin is onze kennis over de mensen die het iconoclasme ondergingen beperkt. De Nederlandse katholieken worden vaak als passieve toeschouwers van de troebelen omschreven, maar de casus van Gent toont aan dat katholieken wel degelijk actief waren in de aanloop naar de Beeldenstorm en tijdens de maanden na de vernielingen. Een religieuze militante houding was inderdaad afwezig, maar andere aspecten van het katholieke geloof werden tijdens het Wonderjaar juist versterkt. Parochianen focusten op een snel herstel van hun parochiekerk en versterkten bepaalde devoties. Ook de aandacht voor religieuze kennis nam toe. In plaats van passief, toonden de Gentse katholieken zich door de 'troebele tijden' gemotiveerd om hun geloof nader te onderzoeken.

Introduction

On more than one occasion, attacks on and the destruction of sacred places occurred in the Low Countries. Andrew Spicer has illustrated how warfare and individual acts of violence desecrated church spaces before the *Beeldenstorm* of 1566 swept through the region. Yet both the observers who lived in the sixteenth century and the historians who later studied the Low Countries have regarded this *Beeldenstorm* as a unique event that changed the course of history. Indeed, the nature and spread of the violence was unusual, and its link with Protestantism and the protest against reforms, both in the ecclesiastical and in the political spheres, reinforced the special status of the iconoclastic riots of 1566.² Its prelude can be found in diverse political and religious events; Andrew Spicer, Peter Arnade and Violet Soen have discussed in detail the political landscape both on the eve of the *Beeldenstorm* and during its aftermath.³ Guido Marnef studied the particular role of Protestants in higher politics and on the local level.⁴ Unfortunately, we know little about those who endured iconoclasm. Therefore, instead of focusing on the political and religious backgrounds that contributed to the *Beeldenstorm*, this article discusses the impact of the *Beeldenstorm* of 1566 on the local community. The city of Ghent will be used as an example to help clarify how Catholics were or were not affected by the *Beeldenstorm*.

Ghent experienced two important waves of iconoclasm at the end of the sixteenth century that seemed to alter the course of its history in different ways. The context of the second upwelling of iconoclasm was very different

- 1 This research was made possible by FWO Vlaanderen and IAP 'City and Society in the Low Countries' of Belgian Science Policy Office. Many thanks to Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, Susie Sutch, and the reviewers and editors of *BMGN-Low Countries Historical Review* for their help and suggestions.
- 2 A. Spicer, 'After Iconoclasm: Reconciliation and Resacralisation in the Southern Netherlands, c. 1566-1585', *Sixteenth Century Journal* 44:2 (2013) 411-434, at 415-417.
- 3 Spicer, 'After Iconoclasm'; V. Soen, *Vredehandel. Adellijke en Habsburgse verzoeningspogingen tijdens de Nederlandse Opstand* (Amsterdam 2012); V. Soen, 'Between Dissent and Peacemaking: The Dutch Nobility on the Eve of the Revolt (1564-1567)', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis* 86 (2008) 735-758; P. Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, London 2008); G. Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY 1977).
- 4 G. Marnef, 'Multiconfessionalism in a Commercial Metropolis: The Case of Sixteenth-Century Antwerp', in: T.M. Safley (ed.), *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World* (Leiden, Boston 2011) 75-97; G. Marnef, 'Chambers of Rhetoric and the Transmission of Religious Ideas in the Low Countries', in: H. Schilling et al. (eds.), *Religion and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400-1700* (Cambridge 2006) 412; G. Marnef, 'The Dynamics of Reformed Religious Militancy: The Netherlands, 1566-1585', in: Ph. Benedict et al. (eds.), *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555-1585* (Amsterdam 1999).

from that of the first *Beeldenstorm* in 1566. From 1577 to 1584 Ghent and its surroundings were ruled by a rebel regime that openly promoted Calvinism.⁵ This seven-year period of Calvinist rule during which a second outbreak of iconoclasm took place, impacted emotionally on the Catholics of Ghent differently than the first. This was also the case in other areas in the Southern Netherlands that had been controlled by Calvinist regimes. Judith Pollmann has claimed that in this period ordinary Catholics in the Low Countries were important agents of change. She found proof of this in the initiatives of many believers after the fall of the Calvinist Republics around 1585. These believers were at the centre of the Catholic Reforms that often preceded the top-down implementation of the decrees instituted by the Council of Trent (1545-1563). However, according to Pollmann, before 1584 Catholics seemed to react only passively in the face of rising Protestantism.⁶

She provides several reasons for this apparent passivity. One reason was that in the specific political climate in the Netherlands in the 1560s, overly fervent displays of Catholicism, as well as sympathy for the Tridentine reforms, were linked to the Inquisition, which was opposed by almost everyone. The Netherlands also had a long tradition of demanding reforms within the Church. As a result, Protestant ideas did not immediately seem to clash with traditional (Catholic) Christianity. At the same time however, the clergy claimed to be in charge of the fight against heresy and demanded that laypeople remain uninvolved. The clergy did not discuss or counter heretical ideas in public but rather pushed believers to show penitence as heresy was considered God's punishment for misdemeanours committed by Christians. Thus it was believed that neither oppression nor violence could solve these problems; rather piety and the better education of the clergy were necessary. Moreover, the stress on civic peace and the fact that practically everyone had friends, neighbours and family members with heretical ideas hindered the creation of a distinct division between good Catholics and evil heretics. In addition, the imprudent policy of the Duke of Alba after the first eruption of iconoclasm pushed Catholics to sympathise with their oppressed Protestant neighbours.⁷

A closer look at Pollmann's analysis however, shows that militancy was the main aspect absent from Catholicism. It is an interesting observation that there was almost no violent opposition by ordinary Catholics towards

5 J. Dambruyne, *Corporatieve middengroepen. Aspiraties, relaties en transformaties in de 16de-eeuwse Gentse ambachtswereld* (Ghent 2002) 660-664; A. Despretz, 'De instauratie der Gentse Calvinistische Republiek (1577-1579)', *Handelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent (HMGOC)* 17 (1963) 170-183.

6 J. Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635* (Oxford 2011) 3, 6.

7 Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 18-19, 30, 38-43, 48, 56, 58, 61, 65-72, 77-93; The idea of a large middle group in between Protestantism and Catholicism could also explain a lack of militancy. See: J.J. Woltjer, *Tussen Vrijheidsstrijd en burgeroorlog. Over de Nederlandse opstand, 1555-1580* (Amsterdam 1994) 14-17.

Protestantism in the Netherlands, whereas the case in France is a very different story.⁸ However, to believers, Catholicism, or traditional Christianity, was more than militancy. This article therefore will shift perspective and examine the actions taken by local Catholics to maintain, defend or reform their faith in the immediate aftermath of the *Beeldenstorm* in 1566. Instead of explaining the lack of expected actions, this contribution will focus on the dynamics within the community and the actions of ordinary believers in an attempt to illustrate the features of traditional Christianity in Ghent during this period.

In the sixteenth century, Ghent had a population of between 40,000 and 50,000 people. Since the Middle Ages the city had consisted of seven rather large parishes that were patronised by the abbeys of St. Peter and St. Bavo. The central parishes were St. Michael, St. John, St. James and St. Nicolas, whereas the parishes of St. Martin, St. Saviour and Our Lady were situated outside the city's walls.⁹ Because of the favourable archival situation of St. James, this article will focus mainly on this parish. Furthermore, we have a very valuable eyewitness account by the famous chronicler Marcus Van Vaernewijck, who was a parishioner and a churchwarden at St. James during the period under study. His chronicle was consulted along with a diary written by the Ghent Catholic brothers Cornelis and Philip Van Campene. Cornelis was the elder brother and began writing from the beginning of the troubles, but he died in September 1567. Philip, a member of the Council of Flanders, took over the diary after his brother's death and added his observations until 1571.¹⁰ Likewise, Van Vaernewijck, in his account, described what happened in Ghent from the arrival of the first hedge preachers until his death in 1568. Van Vaernewijck came from an old and wealthy Ghent family. In addition to being an active member in his parish church, he was also a playwright in the chamber of rhetoric Marien Theeren. From 1562 on he served in various political functions as well.¹¹ His own position as a firm Catholic is obvious

8 Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 2, 172; P. Benedict, 'Un roi, une loi, deux fois: Parameters for the History of Catholic-Reformed Co-existence in France, 1555-1685', in: O.P. Grell and B. Scribner (eds.), *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge, etc. 1996) 65-93; J. Pollmann, 'Countering the Reformation in France and the Netherlands: Clerical Leadership and Catholic Violence 1560-1585', *Past & Present* 190 (2006) 83-120.

9 See: G. Declerq, M.-C. Laleman, 'Archeologie van de stedelijke ruimte', in: M. Boone and G. Deneckere (eds.), *Ghent, stad van alle tijden*

(Ghent, Antwerp 2010) 48; W. Prevenier and M. Boone, 'De stadstaat-droom', in: J. Decavele (ed.), *Gent. Apologie van een rebelse stad* (Antwerp 1989) 48.

10 Frans De Potter (ed.), *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip Van Campene behelzende het verhaal der merkwaardigste gebeurtenissen voorgevallen te Gent, sedert het begin der godsdienstberoerten tot den 15e april 1571* (Ghent 1870) ix-xi.

11 K. Lamont, 'Het wereldbeeld van een zestiende-eeuwse Gentenaar Marcus van Vaernewijck', *VMGOG* 30 (Ghent 2005) 51, 57-58.

throughout the entire account. When he described Protestant behaviour and ideas, he countered them with Catholic theology and history, indicating that he hoped his eyewitness account would one day serve an educational purpose and reveal that the Protestants were wrong. This polemical aspect is revealing because it helps us to understand Van Vaernewijck's position in society and provides deeper insight into Catholic attitudes during this period. As neither of the two accounts discusses the period after 1571, this article focuses primarily on the first years after iconoclasm. Studying the churchwarden accounts of St. James enables us to make some general comments on the parish community over a longer period of time and discover the biases of the more descriptive narrative sources.

The shock of iconoclasm

When iconoclasm passed through Ghent on 22 and 23 August 1566 it left the town in ruins. Seven parish churches, a collegial church, twenty-five convents, ten hospitals and seven chapels were attacked. According to the account of our eyewitness, Marcus Van Vaernewijck, St. James was one of the most severely damaged buildings.¹² As a churchwarden responsible for the subsequent repairs, he might have exaggerated somewhat the extent of the damage; regardless, the repairs recorded in St. James's churchwarden accounts note that a large part of the church interior was destroyed. Altarpieces, the tabernacle, stained-glass windows, sculptures and epitaphs were smashed. Van Vaernewijck witnessed that at the last minute, the iconoclasts decided to spare the oak choir stalls because they could be used as seats for the faithful during Calvinist sermons.¹³ The three stone seats and the iron seats of the priests however, were toppled with ropes and broken up.¹⁴ The shock that these attacks brought to the people of Ghent is well described in Van Vaernewijck's chronicle¹⁵, which evokes the silence, fear and sorrow that dominated the

12 It is beyond the scope of this article to explain the iconoclasm itself, but it should be clear that it was not simply an attack of foreigners but that citizens of Ghent also participated. Furthermore, when we discuss the reaction of the Ghent people to the *Beeldenstorm*, we cannot single out 'innocent' Catholics only. Among the group of people whose reactions we follow, there were probably also iconoclasts, Protestants and a middle group whose confession cannot be pinned down. M. Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden in die Nederlanden, en voornamelick in Ghendt, 1566-1568*, F.F.E. Van Der Haeghen (ed.) (5 vols.;

Ghent 1872) II, 139; M. Cloet, *Het bisdom Gent (1559-1991). Vier eeuwen geschiedenis* (Gent 1992) 47; J. Scheerder, *Het wonderjaar te Gent (1566-1567)* (Unpublished PhD University of Leuven 1971) 14, 15, 20, 21, lxxii, lxxix; Woltjer, *Tussen Vrijheidsstrijd en burgeroorlog*, 14-17.

13 Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 147-152, II, 138.

14 *Ibid.*, I, 148.

15 'Waerinne sommighe lieden zoo verwondert, verscricte ende onstelt waren duer de nieuwe groote wonderlicke veranderinghe, die scheen in veel pointen voor handen te wesen, dat zij



A view of the city of Ghent with its many churches, surrounded by the coat of arms of its most prominent families and guilds. Coloured illustration by Pieter de Keyser, 1524, Ghent.

University library, Ghent.

streets of Ghent. When encountering their friends, many people neither greeted them nor initiated conversation, and the clergy was especially scared.¹⁶ Based on descriptions meant to illustrate the devastation wrought by iconoclasm, the Ghent Catholics indeed appeared passive and immobile. However, this passivity was of short duration. Some developments prove that for many of the citizens of Ghent the years before and after the *Beeldenstorm* were crucial moments for their Catholic faith. Furthermore, the lack of violent opposition (on the part of the Ghent Catholics) to other confessions was not necessarily the result of passivity or indifference. In Ghent, in addition to the growing number of Protestants, the emphasis on upholding civic peace and protecting the community functioned as a check on ‘religious extremism’.¹⁷

This emphasis on civic peace is illustrated by the fact that the demand by the Governess Margaret of Parma to form a militia to both protect the town and prevent the people from attending Protestant sermons was met with opposition in Ghent. Van Vaernewijck, who had a role in the organisation of this guard, reported how difficult it was to get all the men sworn in. Most people wanted to protect the King and the Law, but not the Church. Some men cried, ‘Let them protect themselves, they have persecuted us long enough. Why would we defend that scum!’¹⁸ The male citizens of Ghent felt that the magistrates demanded that they put their own lives and those of their families at risk for the ‘papists’. Furthermore, many men believed that the clergy had caused the problems themselves ‘by their bad lifestyle, avarice, pride and tyranny over simple people who only wanted to forsake the world and follow the narrow path as Christ had taught’.¹⁹ Although some Protestant influences can be read into these remarks, they primarily touch upon the notion of communal peace. The idea was that the ‘papists’ had infringed upon this peace

spraken: de lucht en verandert niet, als oft haer jeghen reden ghedocht hadde, dat Godt daeromme gheen meerckelicke teekenen in de lucht en vertoochde, recht als of hij gheslapan hadde [...] Ander werden daeraf zieck, ander laghen snachts in haer bedden ende zuchten ende en weenden, ende laghen met ghevauden handen, mans ende wijfs’: Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 118.

16 Scheerder, ‘Het wonderjaar te Gent, 1566-1567’, 121, 122; Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 112.

17 Civic peace is closely connected to the concept of the common good. See R. Stein, A. Boele and W. Blockmans, ‘Whose Community?: The Origin and Development of the Concept of Bonum Commune in Flanders, Brabant and Holland

(Twelfth-Fifteenth Century)’, in: E. Lecuppre-Desjardin and A.-L. Van Bruaene (eds.), *De Bono Communi: The Discourse and Practice of the Commun Good in the European City (13th-16th C.)* (Turnhout 2010) 149-169.

18 Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 57-58; M. Delmotte, ‘Het Calvinisme in de verschillende bevolkingslagen te Gent (1566-1567)’, *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 76 (1963) 145-176, at 154; Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*, 154.

19 M. Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 56-60; Other reactions of the men were: ‘[...] Laet zij haer zelve bescheermen, zij hebben ons langhe ghenouch ghepersiqueert ende vervolcht, ende zullen wij zulck gheboufte moeten bescheermen?’; ‘[...] ic en begheere niet te vechten, ic en ben niet gram, [...] Hebbens

by their support for the persecution of religious dissidents. Furthermore, the community – family and neighbours – was too high a price to pay for the protection of the church. Van Vaernewijck wrote that out of forty men, he would have trusted only four with the job of guarding the church. Based on the official reports that have survived, Marcel Delmotte calculated that approximately only eighteen percent of the men who were considered for the guard were prepared to defend the church and the clergy against a possible attack. Thus on the eve of the *Beeldenstorm* Ghent was extremely vulnerable; only a minority of the adult men was willing to defend the church, the gates of the city did not close, and no weapons were available as the gunnery had been removed in 1540 after the revolt of the city against Emperor Charles V.²⁰

Considering this situation, the *Beeldenstorm* was not entirely unexpected. Although there had been warnings, few citizens made an effort to prevent it.²¹ Yet, there were also only a few people who were actively involved in carrying out the destruction.²² Based on the remarks Van Vaernewijck recorded in his manuscript, anti-clericalism and reformation ideas seemed omnipresent, but we should not go as far as Delmotte and state that Ghent was a Calvinist town. After all, anti-clericalism and the plea for reforms had been part of the long history of the Catholic Church.²³ According to Arnade, the social profile of the Ghent iconoclasts resembled that of rebels in previous political and social protests, such as those who participated in the Ghent rebellion of 1539.²⁴ The general protests in the 1560s also had a political foundation from the beginning. It was not just the Protestant groups but also many Catholics who supported opposition against the ecclesiastical policy of King Philip II, including opposition to the reforms of the bishoprics in the Netherlands. Although the agenda of the political protests and calls for reform only partially coincided with that of the iconoclasts, this might have been another reason for the difficult organisation of the guard to protect the churches.²⁵

Nevertheless, after the *Beeldenstorm*, few people found it difficult to condemn the iconoclasts' behaviour; iconoclasm had defied the communal

de papen te veel ghemaect, dat zijt beteren jeghen die haer anvallen willen'; [...] zoo wart dan ghenouch, zeijden zij, dat elc zijn ghebuerte met conincstafelrijen waecte, ende liever zijn eijghen huijsen bewaerde dan haer elder te ghaen verstroyen ende haer ghoet ende huijsghezin in perijckel te laten [...].

20 Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 59-60; Delmotte, 'Het Calvinisme in de verschillende bevolkingslagen', 152.

21 Scheerder, 'Het wonderjaar te Gent, 1566-1567', 41, 57-59. Some priests, guildsmen, brotherhoods and parishioners did bring valuables from their

church or chapel in safety before iconoclasm broke out.

22 Delmotte, 'Het Calvinisme in de verschillende bevolkingslagen', 156.

23 Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 32, 34, 39, 40; J. Barrow, 'Ideas and Applications of Reform', in T.F.X. Noble and J.M.H. Smith (eds.), *Early Medieval Christianities*, c. 600 c. 1100 (Cambridge 2008) 345-362.

24 Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts, and Civic Patriots*, 156-157.

25 Marnef, 'The Dynamics of Reformed Religious Militancy', 51.

peace. David de Boer has shown that Van Vaernewijck in fact was stricter with the iconoclasts, whom he accused of committing a capital crime, than towards heretics. Furthermore, in general, people made a distinction between the ideas of those who favoured the reformed religion, who were considered misled, and the destructive actions of the iconoclasts.²⁶ Therefore, the stress on civic peace and the initial shock of iconoclasm functioned as a brake on Catholic militancy, but it did not render traditional Christians immobile. The more active side of the Ghent Catholics can be witnessed in three aspects of their religion: they showed interest in their church and faith through their assistance with the repairs of their parish church, their involvement in Christian rituals and celebrations, and their interest in religious knowledge.

Repairs

The first aspect that reveals the activity of Ghent Catholics after the *Beeldenstorm* is their involvement in the restoration of their parish church.²⁷ At first sight, Margaret of Parma, together with local officials, took the lead in stabilising the political field and initiating the more serious repairs.²⁸ In the second half of June 1567, in response to a letter from Parma, the magistracy ordered the deans of the guilds to begin with the repairs of the altarpieces in their chapels. However, the guildsmen reacted very slowly to this demand as many considered it unjust and believed that those responsible should pay for the repairs. According to Van Vaernewijck, the minority who had had a role in the destruction and wanted to pay for the repairs did not dare do so out of fear of punishment if they confessed. Other members of the community refused to betray them as well.²⁹ Thus, both attitudes could explain the initial reluctance

- 26 D. de Boer, 'Picking up the Pieces: Catholic Perceptions of Iconoclasm in the Netherlands, 1566-1672' (MA Thesis Utrecht University 2013) 68-70.
- 27 The organisation of the repairs of St. James after the first iconoclasm which is addressed here, is also discussed in more detail and in comparison to the restoration works after the fall of the Calvinist Regime in: M. Bauwens, 'The Institutional Nature of Parishes and the Restoration of the Church after Iconoclasm: The Case of St James and St Pharahild in Ghent (1566-1614)', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 93:3-4 (2015) 1-23. This article makes a comparison between the restoration works of St. James and those of St. Pharahild in Ghent.

- 28 A.-L. Van Bruaene, 'Exploring the Features and Challenges of the Urban Parish Church in the Southern Low Countries: The Case of Sixteenth-Century Ghent', in: A. Spicer (ed.), *Parish Churches in the Early Modern World* (Farnham 2016 forthcoming); A.-L. Van Bruaene and M. Bauwens, 'De Sint-Jacobskerk te Gent. Een onderzoek naar de betekenis van de parochiekerk in de zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanden', *HMOG* 65:1-2 (2012) 103-125, at 118; F. Verstraeten, *De Gentse Sint-Jakobsparochie* II (Ghent 1975) 173; A. Spicer, 'After Iconoclasm', 411-434, at 413.
- 29 Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerliche tijden*, II, 258-261: 'Maer dit en scheen bij vele niet recht ghedaen te zijne, dat men daer mede belaste die supposten der neeringhen ende andere, die

on the level of the repairs. Indeed, most of the repairs of the chapels and altars of the city guilds took place only after a second ordinance of the magistracy in March 1568, instigated by the Duke of Alba. Nevertheless, other concrete measures had already been taken in September 1567 after the magistrates had ordered that an estimate of the total damages be determined.³⁰

In any case, it is important to note that by 1568 many parishioners had offered money to the church. Van Vaernewijck was pleased to announce that major repairs had taken place and ascribed the good state of the church to the generosity of the parishioners. The highlight of that year was the inauguration of the new *sacramentshuis* or tabernacle.³¹ Although he sounded genuinely positive, generosity of course, is relative; Van Vaernewijck might have wanted to put his parish in a better light. In fact, the churchwarden accounts of St. James reveal that in or before 1568-1569, a large amount of money had been collected in the parish to pay for the repairs to the holy tabernacle and the rood screen. The records list 465 parishioners as having donated amounts of money varying between 1 denier and 240 deniers groten Vlaams³² (or 2 pounds groten Vlaams). Other parishioners were listed as having contributed unpaid work on the church building instead of money. In total, the parish collected more than 37 pounds, which means that donors gave on average slightly less than 12 deniers groten Vlaams, which was a little less than the average daily wage of a mason's journeyman at the time.³³ The diversity of the gifts (from unpaid work to a large sum of money) suggests that parishioners from different social backgrounds contributed. Yet only 465 names were listed (although the parish must have counted more than 3,000 adults), so it is obvious that only a minority of the parish had been 'generous'.³⁴ It is possible that parishioners

vele gheen schult van tbreken en hadden metter daet, [...]; 'Sommighe wilden: men zout diet ghebroken hadden, laten uprechten; dwelc wel de rechtveerdichste zake ware.'

30 Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, III, 74-76, 91-92, 293-295; Verstraeten, *De Gentse Sint-Jakobsparochie*, II, 174-175; J.D. Bangs, *Church Art and Architecture in the Low Countries before 1566* (Kirkville 1997) 105-107; Van Bruaene, 'Exploring the Features'; Van Bruaene and Bauwens, 'De Sint-Jacobskerk te Gent', 118.

31 Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, IV, 203-204; Verstraeten, *De Gentse Sint-Jakobsparochie*, II, 175-181.

32 The denier groten Vlaams was the main unit of account in Ghent and its surroundings during the period under study. Twelve deniers formed one

shilling, and twenty shilling formed one pound.

For smaller amounts also the unit denier Parisis was used, which was 1/12th of the value of the denier groten Vlaams.

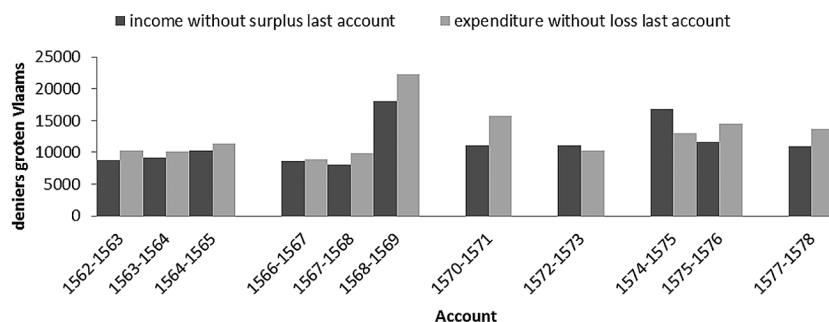
33 Dambruyne, *Corporatieve middengroepen*, 838.

34 The number of 3,000 adults is an estimate I made based on Blockmans's calculations for the population of St. James in the fifteenth century and on Dambruyne's for the population of Ghent in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. See: W. Blockmans, 'Peilingen naar de sociale structuren te Gent tijdens de late 15e eeuw', in: W. Blockmans et al., *Studien betreffende de sociale structuren te Brugge, Kortrijk en Gent in de 14e en 15e eeuw* (Ghent 1971) 248-249; J. Dambruyne, *Mensen en centen. Het 16de-eeuwse Gent in demografisch en economisch perspectief* (Ghent 2001) 72.

refrained from donating out of anti-clerical feelings and/or a particular sense of justice (i.e., believing that only those guilty of the destruction should have to pay), but the poor economy and other financial collections (see further) might also have played a role.

Although there can be doubts about the motivations of the parishioners, the gifts still produced spectacular effects for the church. As a result of the donations, the total income of the St. James's church fabric doubled compared to the previous year. The church's expenditures also more than doubled due to the repairs that followed. The few accounts we have on the period before the *Beeldenstorm* did not register anywhere near such a large collection from parishioners. On important restoration works that took place during 1563-1564, approximately 27 pounds were spent, which was about forty percent of the total expenditures of that year. The money for these works did not come from ordinary parishioners but from the parochial institution for poor relief.³⁵ This illustrates that the parishioners did not always directly finance the restoration of the church building, which makes the parochial collection in 1568 even more notable.³⁶

The doubling of the usual income and expenditures of the church was not repeated in the following extant account. In 1570-1571, a lower amount of money was spent on repairs, although it still exceeded the amounts in the years preceding 1566. In addition, the repairs made a large dent in the church finances.



Annual income and expenditures of the church fabric of St. James between 1562 and 1578 in deniers groten Vlaams.³⁷

35 State Archives Ghent (RAG), Old Archive of the church fabric and parish St. James in Ghent (OCA St. James Ghent), nrs. 341-387 (churchwarden accounts).

36 For a discussion of the finances of the repairs of St. James and St. Pharahild see: Michal Bauwens and Annelies Somers, 'The Institutional Nature of Parishes and the Restoration of Churches after Iconoclasm: The Case of St James and

St Pharahild in Ghent (1566-1614)', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis* 93:3-4 (2015) 1-23.

37 RAG, OCA St. James Ghent, nrs. 341-387 (churchwarden accounts). For certain years, we have no accounts: 1565-1566, 1569-1570, 1571-1572, 1573-1574, 1576-1577. This analysis is based only on the accounts that have survived until today.

The increasing number of repairs caused large deficits in the years following the *Beeldenstorm*, and only after 1571 did the expenses for the repairs finally begin to shrink. Furthermore, the income of the church raised from the parishioners only partly covered what was rapidly being spent on repairs.³⁸ In sum, the financial contribution from the parishioners was not spectacular, but important enough to show that at least a part of them cared about the church building.

Religious life after the *Beeldenstorm*

A second aspect that reveals the involvement of Catholics during the period under study can be found in the popularity of certain Catholic festivities and, after a period of decline, a rise in church attendance. Despite the shockwave of iconoclasm, particular Catholic traditions remained important to the citizens of Ghent. Van Vaerneuwijck and Cornelis Van Campene paid quite a lot of attention to the celebrations for St. Lieven on 28 and 29 June 1567. Before 1540 the focal point of these festivities was a procession with the reliquary of St. Lieven from Ghent to the village of Sint-Lievens-Houtem and back. The St. Lieven's procession was one of the oldest but also one of the most contested rituals of Ghent. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the princes ruling the Low Countries enacted repressive measures to stop this procession because they feared it was a precursor to social and political rebellion.³⁹ Although Emperor Charles V had abolished the procession and the translation of the reliquary in 1540 after the Ghent revolt, the devotional practices and celebration of the saint did not end.⁴⁰

The *Beeldenstorm* had presented another threat. However, the reliquary of St. Lieven was one of the few religious valuables in Ghent that had been kept safe as it had been moved on 18 August 1566 to the Spanish Castle. For traditional Catholics, these festivities seemed to have been among the most important events of the year. Therefore, undoubtedly the survival of the

38 RAG, OCA St. James Ghent, nrs. 341-387 (churchwarden accounts).

39 M. Boone, *Geld en Macht. De Gentse stadsfinanciën en de Bourgondische staatsvorming (1384-1453)* (Ghent 1990) 96-98; A whole historiography of the procession of St. Lieven of Ghent can be found. Two of the more recent contributions are: M. Boone, 'De Sint-Lievensbedevaart. Bouwsteen van de stedelijke identiteit van Gent (late middeleeuwen en vroege 16de eeuw)', *HMOG* 61 (2007) 105-122; P. Trio,

'Handel en wandel met een heilige. Organisatie van en deelnemers aan de laatmiddeleeuwse Sint-Lievensprocessie vanuit de Gentse Sint-Baafsabdij naar Sint-Lievens-Houtem (tot 1540)', *HMOG* 61 (2007) 83-104, at 97, 104.

40 P. Trio, *Volksreligie als spiegel van een stedelijke samenleving. De broederschappen te Gent in de late middeleeuwen* (Leuven 1993) 119-120 (11); J. Gessler, 'De aloude bedevaart naar Sint-Lievens-Houtem', *Oostvlaamsche Zanten* 16 (1941) 65-74, at 72.

reliquary was a great relief to many of the city's inhabitants. The fact that the celebrations had been downsized earlier by the prince had only enhanced its importance as a symbol of Ghent. This peculiar background played a role in the success of the festivities in 1567. Van Vaernewijck was amazed at the huge amount of market activity during these days. With the beautiful sound of bells, the reliquary of St. Lieven was presented to the public in the church of St. Bavo on 28 June, where a few thousand people came to visit it. According to Van Campene, even miracles took place. Clearly, both chroniclers were impressed and pleased by what they saw. For Van Vaernewijck, the number of candles and wax votives offered were proof of the reverence shown to the reliquary. Many people from outside Ghent had also come to the city centre and offered money. Van Vaernewijck noted that if none of the 'Protestants' had criticised the religious feast, it would have seemed that there had never been any *ghueserie*.⁴¹ Because of its success, the reliquary was exhibited again the following week, on Sunday, 7 July.⁴² Based on these excited descriptions, the *Beeldenstorm* did not seem to have negatively affected the popularity of local traditional Christian festivities, but quite the contrary. Even though the rituals had been contested by Protestants and the official worldly and ecclesiastical governments, obviously a large group of citizens did not want to lose this aspect of Christianity.

Van Vaernewijck was less pleased about the ordinary Catholic services as they became significantly less popular in the months that followed the *Beeldenstorm*. In the summer of 1567 the Dominican preacher Lieven Van den Bossche declared in his sermon that the priests of the four principal parish churches in Ghent had complained that although a few years earlier every parish had four to five thousand parishioners who received the Eucharist at least once a year, since the rise of the hedge sermons, only four to five hundred now attended traditional church services. Thus, according to this view, only one in ten former church members still took communion in their church.⁴³ Although these numbers will have been exaggerated, the general perception was that the Ghent citizens no longer cared about church practice. Earlier that year Van Vaernewijck himself had noted that attendance at mass and offerings during holy days had vastly diminished in St. James.⁴⁴ During the Holy Week of 1568 Van Vaernewijck finally saw signs pointing to a reversal of the decline in church attendance and in the interest of parishioners in their church. On the Wednesday before Easter the pastors, churchwardens and masters for poor relief went throughout the parish to gather a collection to

41 Although 'geuzen' refers usually only to adherents of the political rebellion, Van Vaernewijck clearly uses it here in a broader sense, including Protestants and iconoclasts.

42 De Potter (ed.), *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip Van Campene*, 64; Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II 282-283.

43 *Ibid.* II, 50, 331-332.

44 *Ibid.*, II, 50.

fund the sermons preached during Advent and Lent and for the Sacramental Mass (*sacramentsmesse*). In total, they collected approximately 5 pounds and 8 shillings groten Vlaams. This was more than they had expected as the people had already been heavily burdened by the Spanish garrison and the bad economy. Moreover, there had already been collections for the poor, and the large collection for the repairs to the church tabernacle had most likely already taken place in the same period.⁴⁵

However, the people did not only give money. On Easter (18 April) 1568 approximately 500 men and women stood in line for more than an hour to receive Holy Communion in St. James. Van Vaernewijck called this a miracle but was simultaneously realistic enough to acknowledge that some people must have come out of fear, to hide the fact that they were *geuzen*.⁴⁶ Similarly, in Antwerp, a spectacular rise in offerings to several devotional sites was witnessed over the course of the 1570s.⁴⁷ A change in the behaviour of the Catholic population, considering the political climate, was not strange. The reversal made by many could only be expected after the several months of pressure by the Duke of Alba, the Council of Troubles and Alba's army. However, we should not forget the material state of the church immediately following the *Beeldenstorm*. The destruction of the church interior and the devotional accoutrements necessary for the celebration of the Holy Mass could have reinforced the diminished importance of church services in the first year after the *Beeldenstorm*. Therefore, restoration of the church building and of church practice went hand in hand.

Sermons

The Catholics of Ghent were not merely interested in maintaining their local privileges, communal ties and traditional festivities, such as the veneration of the reliquary of St. Lieven. A third form of Catholic response that surpassed the other Catholic public activities in popularity in the years following iconoclasm was sermon attendance. A direct interest in understanding religion and theological ideas, new and old, could be witnessed, beginning sometime in 1566. No one seemed indifferent towards Christian theology, even though anti-clericalism was rampant. During a heavily attended Catholic sermon in St. James on 29 September 1566, Van Vaernewijck noted that the audience consisted mainly of women because, as he claimed, they were more devout than men.⁴⁸ However, from other parts of his account, we know that it was not only women who were interested in religious knowledge and piety.

45 *Ibid.*, IV, 28.

46 *Ibid.*, IV, 34-35.

47 Pollmann, *Catholic identity*, 83-85, 102.

48 '[...] mits dat zij devoter dan de mans schijnen zijnde': Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 264-266.

Many other Catholic sermons that took place in 1566 attracted huge crowds. Some people would have been intrigued by the controversies, whereas others had a genuine hunger for religious knowledge. Whether it was officially Catholic and clerical seemed less important; many people attended both the traditional Catholic sermons and those of the new religion outside the city centre.⁴⁹ On the birthday of Our Lady in 1566, Protestants preached in the open air near the convent of the Carthusians while the popular Dominican preacher Jan Vanderhaghen gave a sermon in the church of St. Michael in Ghent. Both events attracted masses of people, and Van Vaernewijck stated that this caused a strange division within the citizenry of Ghent, with many undecided as to where to go.⁵⁰ This confirms Pollmann's argument that for a long time many traditional Catholics did not see Protestant ideas as opposing their faith but rather discussed them along with the other cries for reform with which they were already familiar. Although she observed this for the 1520s, the Ghent public of the 1560s seemed at least as eager to debate different religious ideas.⁵¹

This interest in theology had been visible in the Netherlands for a longer period of time. From the fourteenth century onwards, books and pamphlets in the vernacular had become increasingly important in several distinct, urbanised European regions. The important position of the Low Countries in international trade enabled easy access to new books and ideas. Antwerp even became the main centre for printed vernacular Bibles between 1523 and 1545. The Low Countries had a high level of literacy, and laymen had a particular interest in Bibles.⁵² Apart from books and other reading material,

49 Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 1, 48 Van Vaernewijck often described the success of the sermons of the Catholic brother Jan Vanderhaghen and other preachers. See for example Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden* II, 12-13: '[...] voorleden vier daghen, in Ste Jans keercke, voren ende naer noene, ghepredict, met grooten toeloop van volcke; ende zoo neerstich als hij daer inne was, alzo neerstich quam ooc tvolck te sermoene; zoo dat hij in tmidden vanden winter oft curte daghen, als hij smorghens ten zeven hueren predictte, som haer in de keercken vonden met dat zij open ghijnghen, ende som daer te voren, van voor den vijven, zittende voor der lieden dueren, om, zoo aest als die keercke open ghijnghen, daer in te ghane ende ghoede plaetse te moghen hebben.' Van Vaernewijck was not simply boosting Catholicism as he described in the same chapter

(page 13) also the successes of the Protestants: 'Maer wel alzo neerstich ende veel neerstigher vielen daer ane die predicanten buten der stadt; die en spaerden haer zelve niet, ende hadden met grooter begheerten wel willen alle daghen ij of iij waerf prediccken, haddet haer toeghelaten gheweest [...]', '[...] datmen wart predicckende te velde, bij eenighe vrende mannen, de leer van Johannes Calvinus ende datter veel toegheloopt van volcke was, ghelijc tvolck zeer nieuloopich es tot veranderinghe ende nieuwe dijnghen altijts gheneghen, daer dicwils groote schade ende verdriet uut comt [...]'.
50 *Ibid.*, I, 230-231.
51 Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 39.
52 J. Spaans, 'Reform in the Low Countries', in: R.P.-C. Hsia (ed.), *A Companion to the Reformation World* (Malden, Oxford 2004) 118-134, at 119-120; P. Arblaster, "'Totius Mundi Emporium': Antwerp as a

theatre plays were an important element in the entertainment and education of an urban audience. In particular, religious processions combined with competitions organised by the chambers of rhetoric rendered civic religion, according to Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, more open and creative compared to other European cities.⁵³ Given this long tradition in which laymen read, listened to and discussed religious ideas, they could hardly be considered ignorant. Many had a keen interest in a wide variety of ideas and had become accustomed to listening to various viewpoints on specific religious themes. The clergymen themselves often highlighted the faults of other ecclesiastical members (often of another religious order).⁵⁴ All of this added responsibility to the laity and strengthened their demand for religious knowledge. It is important to underline that both Reformed and Catholic preachers used sermons to compete for the hearts and minds of the masses.

The rise in Catholic sermons after the *Beeldenstorm* was an answer to the laymen's demand for knowledge and a reaction to the hedge sermons. Furthermore, the Catholic Church finally believed that education was crucial in winning back former church members who had been 'seduced'.⁵⁵ Van Vaernewijck highlighted the popularity of the sermons before and immediately after the *Beeldenstorm*, but various other sources also point to the increased presence of Catholic preachers from at least 1568 onwards. The diary of Cornelis Van Campene reveals that, from 1568 onwards, in addition to Augustinians, Dominicans, and Franciscans, St. James was frequented by the Jesuit Francis Costerus.⁵⁶ Additionally, from 1568 onwards, the first bishop of Ghent, Jansenius Cornelius, regularly gave sermons in the parish churches of Ghent. From 1574 to 1577, the church fabric of St. James spent four to five times more money on preachers during Advent and Lent than in the previous

Centre for Vernacular Bible Translations 1523-1545', in: A.-J. Gelderblom, J.L. de Jong and M. Van Vaec (eds.), *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs* (Leiden, Boston 2004) 9-31, at 9; A. van Dixhoorn and S. Speakman Sutch, 'Introduction', in: *The Reach of the Republic of Letters: Literary and Learned Societies in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (2 vols.; Leiden 2008) 1-16, at 1.

53 A.-L. Van Bruaene, "'A Wonderfull Tryumf, for the Wynnnyng of a Pryse": Guilds, Ritual, Theater, and the Urban Network in the Southern Low Countries, ca. 1450-1650', *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006) 406-439, at 396-398.

54 Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 34.

55 M. Bauwens, 'Restoration and Reform in the Parish after Trent: The Case of St James in Ghent

(1561-1630)', in: W. François, V. Soen and D. Vanysacker (eds.), *Church, Censorship and Reform in the Early Modern Habsburg Netherlands* (Leuven forthcoming).

56 De Potter (ed.), *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip Van Campene*, 90, 107, 126, 147, 199, 205, 211, 225, 247; Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroelicke tijden*, II, 122, IV, 29; M.J. Marinus, 'Kampioenen van de contrareformatie (1562-1773)', in: H. Van Goethem (ed.), *Antwerpen en de jezuieten 1562-2002* (Antwerp 2002) 14; L. Brouwers, *De Jezuieten te Gent 1585-1773, 1823-heden*, 30-31; F. De Potter (ed.), *Chronijcke van Ghendt door Jan Van den Vivere en eenige andere aanteekenaars der xvie en xvii eeuw* (Ghent 1885) 234-235.

years.⁵⁷ The renewed focus on education and penance went hand in hand with other efforts by the bishops to restore the Catholic sacral landscape and offer a general pardon to unify the Catholic community.⁵⁸

Beyond passivity and polarisation

Only for those men and women willing to go so far as to break with the church and become members of the new religion inspired by Calvin might the *Beeldenstorm* have served as a turning point. Calvinists in Ghent took advantage of the chaotic situation to structure themselves more efficiently, organise preachers and sermons and even build a temple at the city gates. This was their moment of radicalisation and politicisation. For the majority of the population however, community or family ties made a strict division based on religious opinions difficult. Although traditional Christians did not yet become radicalised in opposition to this new religion, they remained active in many ways and valued their faith. The moment of polarisation for the Catholics in Ghent would come with the fall of the Ghent Calvinist Republic (1577-1584). In addition to the experience of repression under a Calvinist Regime, the loss of approximately 15,000 inhabitants who migrated in the following years and the returning Catholic refugees profoundly altered the town's Catholic identity.⁵⁹ Pollmann has discerned a more militant mentality among the Catholics of many more places in the Low Countries after 1585. The experience of repression by the Calvinists had alienated these Catholics from the Revolt and had triggered polarisation and confessionalisation.⁶⁰

In this contribution, I have argued that the more introspective or inward-oriented phase of Catholicism in the Netherlands before 1585 has been mistaken for passivity. The initial shock of iconoclasm and destruction of the church interiors postponed the start of the repairs and rendered the

57 RAG, OCA St. James Ghent, nr. 351, fo. 24r (churchwarden account).

58 V. Soen, 'La réitération de pardons collectifs à finalités politiques pendant la Révolte des Pays-Bas (1565-1598)', in: *Actes de la journée d'études de Louvain-la-Neuve* (Louvain-la-Neuve 2007) 97-123; V. Soen, 'De reconciliatie van "kettters" in de zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanden (1520-1590)', *Trajecta* 14 (2005) 337-362, at 349-353; Spicer, 'After Iconoclasm'. See the contribution of Violet Soen to this theme number.

59 This is also visible in St James. See: Bauwens, 'Restoration and Reform'.

60 Pollmann, *Catholic Identity*, 113, 122-124, 131, 142; G.H. Janssen, 'The Exile Experience', in: A. Bamji, G.H. Janssen and M. Laven (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation* (Burlington 2013) 73-90; G.H. Janssen, 'The Counter-Reformation of the Refugee: Exile and the Shaping of Catholic Militancy in the Dutch Revolt', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 63:4 (2012) 671-692; Dambruyne, *Mensen en centen*, 87-89. The government supported this Catholic restoration movement as well. See: Soen, 'De reconciliatie van "kettters"', 355.

celebration of mass less attractive. However, this was of short duration and should not be understood as indifference. The same accounts for the lack of militancy. Even though many people were not willing to defend their church against possible aggression, the majority still condemned the *Beeldenstorm*. After the destruction the focus was on restoring the community and getting rid of the iconoclasts instead of on further polarisation. Because the secular government was responsible for punishing vandalism, there was no need for ordinary Catholics to become more militant at this stage.⁶¹

This study has shown that after the *Beeldenstorm* of 1566 the Catholic community showed interest in their church on various levels; after the initial shock they invested in the repairs and joined enthusiastically in important festivities. From 1568 onwards they again became more involved in Catholic rituals such as Mass and Communion. Most striking was the important role of the preachers. The Catholic Church intensified its sermon offerings and used this channel to educate the public about heresy and the Tridentine viewpoints. In doing so, it accentuated the need for reform and penance within the Church and the community and kept the doors open for reconciliation. The population of Ghent had an active interest in processing this information against the background of political difficulties and a growing Calvinist church. In fact, instead of intensifying polarisation and distancing themselves from the Protestants, Ghent Catholics used the period following the *Beeldenstorm* to learn more about their faith.⁶²

Michal Bauwens (1979) is doctoral researcher at the University of Ghent (funding FWO and BELSPO via IAP 'City and Society in the Low Countries'). Recent publications include: Michal Bauwens and Annelies Somers, 'The Institutional Nature of Parishes and the Restoration of the Church after Iconoclasm: The Case of St. James and St. Pharahild in Ghent (1566-1614)', *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Filologie en Geschiedenis* 93:3-4 (2015) 1-23; Michal Bauwens, 'Sint-Jacobs: de parochie: hoeksteen van het gelovige leven', in: Ruben Mantels and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene et al. (eds.), *Geloven in Gent. Plaatsen van het religieuze verleden* (Ghent 2015) 179-185; and Michal Bauwens, 'Parish Studies and the Debates on Religious Life in the Low Countries (Late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period)', *History Compass* 13:2 (2015) 64-77. Email: michal.bauwens@ugent.be.

61 See the contribution of Violet Soen to this theme number.

62 This delay in the process of confessionalisation has also been witnessed in other cities of the Low Countries and European regions, such as

Germany, in this period. See: Woltjer, *Tussen vrijheidsstrijd en burgeroorlog*; M.R. Forster, *Catholic Revival in the Age of the Baroque: Religious Identity in Southwest Germany, 1550-1750* (Cambridge 2004) 1-2.