

The *Beeldenstorm* and the Spanish Habsburg Response (1566-1570)

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In most textbooks, the punitive and military mission of the Duke of Alba to the Netherlands in 1567 embodies the Spanish Habsburg response to the *Beeldenstorm* of the previous year. This representation however, obscures the measures taken in the heat of the moment by Governor General Margaret of Parma, while it also downplays the numerous policy discussions to find the 'right remedy' for iconoclasm. This article argues that repression formed but one part of a broader pacification strategy that also included mediation, reconciliation and reform. The tactic employed by the Spanish Habsburg authorities combined the punishment of prominent leaders with a recognition that most of the participants in the 'troubles' could neither be apprehended nor punished properly, so that a pardon would eventually be necessary. Just such a pardon was issued in July 1570. Even if King and governor-general regarded iconoclasm as outright sacrilege and as divine *lèse-majesté* committed by heretics, the central authorities framed their response primarily as a legitimate action against worldly *lèse-majesté* and rebellion, in the short term to silence the religious violence of the iconoclasts, and in the longer term to maintain the initiative in safeguarding order, justice and peace, including in matters religious.

De Beeldenstorm en het Spaans-Habsburgse antwoord (1566-1570)

De strafmissie van de hertog van Alba in 1567 verschijnt in de meeste handboeken als het Spaans-Habsburgse antwoord op de *Beeldenstorm*. Deze voorstelling doet weinig recht aan de onmiddellijke maatregelen van de hertogin van Parma voor de komst van Alba, en nog minder aan de voortdurende zoektocht naar de 'juiste remedie' om de onrust te bedaren. De repressie onder Alba vormde slechts een deel van een bredere pacificatiestrategie, die ook verzoeningsgebaren

van koningswege inhiel. Zo combineerde de Spaans-Habsburgse tactiek strafmaatregelen tegen de voornaamste leiders van de Beeldenstorm met de erkenning dat niet alle aanwezigen bij de ‘troebelen’ konden worden gearresteerd. Om rechtvaardigheid te doen geschieden, werd daarom in juli 1570 een generaal pardon uitgevaardigd. Daarnaast beargumenteert deze bijdrage dat hoewel Filips II en zijn landvoogden in Brussel de Beeldenstorm als regelrechte blasfemie beschouwden, ze hun optreden hoofdzakelijk rechtvaardigden als een actie tegen rebellie en wereldlijke majesteitsschennis, om zo op de korte termijn de religieuze agenda van de opstandelingen te verzwijgen, en op de lange termijn het monopolie te behouden inzake ordehandhaving en godsdienst.

When around mid-August 1566 Governor-General Margaret of Parma learned that iconoclasm had turned into a mass movement in the Netherlands, she desperately wanted to flee Brussels.¹ Informed of the same news on 3 September, King Philip II instantly developed a fever and stayed in bed during the following weeks.² Both reactions are telling indications of how the Spanish Habsburg dynasty experienced the *Beeldenstorm* as an event turning worldly and divine order upside down. As the story goes in most textbooks, the straightforward response a year later consisted in the punitive and military expedition led by the third Duke of Alba.³ While this classic analysis enjoys the merit of clarity, it also obscures crucial dynamics

1 C. Steen, *Margaret of Parma: A Life* (Boston, Leiden 2013) 176-177. Her first letter to her half-brother is a witness to her shame, unrest and anger: Margaret of Parma to Philip II, 18 August 1566: AGS E 530 sine folio (hereafter s.f.) (autograph, Italian), summary in Gachard, *CPHII* I, 449-450 (453). List of abbreviations: Archivo General de Simancas, *Secretaría de Estado* (AGS E) or *Secretarías Provinciales* (AGS SP); Archives Générales du Royaume, *Papiers de l'État et de l'Audience* (AGR PEA); Koninklijke Bibliotheek/Bibliothèque Royale in Brussels (KBR); L.P. Gachard and J. Lefèvre (eds.), *Correspondance de Philippe II sur les affaires des Pays-Bas publiée d'après les originaux conservés dans les Archives royales de Simancas* (6 vols.; Brussels 1848-1936) (Gachard, *CPHII*); E. Poulet and C. Piot (eds.), *Correspondance du cardinal de Granvelle (1565-1585)* (Brussels 1877-1896) (Poulet or Piot, *CGR*); G. Glorieux, B. Op de Beeck and E. Cockx-Indestège, *Belgica Typographica 1541-1600: Catalogus librorum impressorum ab anno MDXLI ad annum MDC in*

regionibus quae nunc Regni Belgarum partes sunt (4 vols.; Nieuwkoop 1968-1994) (BT); *The Universal Short Title Catalogue*, ongoing catalogue made by Andrew Pettegree et al. at St Andrews University, www.ustc.ac.uk (USTC). Low Countries and Netherlands appear as synonyms in this article, covering the Seventeen Provinces under Habsburg rule.

2 On 18 September 1566 Philip II informed Granvelle of the fever from which he had still not fully recovered: Poulet, *CGR* I, 480 (CXV), cf. Gachard, *CPHII* I, 475; G. Parker, *Imprudent King: A New Life of Philip II* (New Haven, London 2014) 149.

3 The master narrative of the Dutch Revolt is currently being re-written: J. Pollmann, 'Internationalisering en de Nederlandse Opstand', *BMGN-Low Countries Historical Review* (hereafter *BMGN-LCHR*) 124 (2009) 515-535 DOI: 10.18352/bmgn-lchr.7045; L. Cruz, 'Reworking the Grand Narrative: A Review of Recent Books on the Dutch Revolt', *BMGN-LCHR* 125 (2010) 29-38, DOI: 10.18352/bmgn-lchr.7067.

of post-1566 Spanish Habsburg policymaking. In fact, the *Beeldenstorm* threw councillors into doubt as to the 'right remedy' for the sick 'body politic', and the shocking event made them try out a vast array of tactics.⁴ This piecemeal character of the Habsburg reaction will be demonstrated here through the juxtaposition of the immediate actions already taken by Margaret before Alba's arrival in Brussels in August 1567, and the follow-up measures under his governorship until 1570, the year when order and peace seemed to have returned.⁵

Much ink has already been spent on the military, legal and even fiscal repression under Margaret and Alba. Still, the following paragraphs will show that this repression was chiefly directed against those whom the King and his representatives identified as the leaders of the unrest, while in the end considerable energy was expended on the question of how to reconcile the remaining masses compromised by the *Beeldenstorm* to Crown and Church. Rather than with a predetermined or 'grand strategy'⁶, Spanish Habsburg authorities countered iconoclasm and the ensuing 'troubles' with a patchwork of pacification measures, of which four will be discussed here: 1. a prohibition of iconoclasm, 2. an agreement with the local nobility, 3. an extraordinary criminal tribunal and, in the logic described above, also 4. a general pardon. Furthermore, these four initiatives will reveal how Spanish Habsburg authorities framed their response foremost as a legitimate reaction against worldly *lèse-majesté* and rebellion, even if they thought of iconoclasm as divine *lèse-majesté* and as an outright sacrilege. In this way, King and governor-general attempted in the short term to silence the religious violence of iconoclasts, and in the longer term to maintain the initiative in safeguarding order and peace, including in matters religious.⁷

- 4 V. Soen, *Vredehandel. Adellijke en Habsburgse verzoeningspogingen tijdens de Nederlandse Opstand (1564-1581)* (Amsterdam 2012); L. Kattenberg, 'Het goede dieet voor de Nederlanden. Fadrique Furió Ceriol en het Spaanse denken over de Nederlandse Opstand 1566-1573', *Skript. Historisch tijdschrift* 31:4 (2014) 206-219, 210. Furió Ceriol constantly applied the metaphor of the prudent doctor, and the 'remedios' serve in this discourse as a means of obtaining pacification.
- 5 G. Janssens, 'Le Duc d'Albe, artisan de la paix et initiateur de la bonne gouvernance aux Pays-Bas?', in: C. De Moreau de Gerbehaye, S. Dubois and J.-M. Yante (eds.), *Gouvernance et administration*

dans les provinces belgiques (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècles). Ouvrage publié en hommage au Professeur Claude Bruneel, tome premier (Brussels 2013) 131-152.

- 6 G. Parker and F. González de León, 'The Grand Strategy of Philip II and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1559-1584', in: P. Benedict et al. (eds.), *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War in France and the Netherlands 1555-1585* (Amsterdam 1999) 215-232.
- 7 For the antecedents of the search of a state monopoly in religious affairs: J.A. Fühner, *Die Kirchen- und die antireformatorische Religionspolitik Kaiser Karls v. in den sieben Provinzen der Niederlande 1515-1555* (Leiden, Boston 2004).



When the *Beeldenstorm* started in Steenvoorde on 10 August 1566, the Spanish Habsburg dynasty had long been aware of comparable acts in other regions, with the Swiss Cantons and the Holy Roman Empire in the vanguard, and England and France experiencing more recent episodes. Nevertheless, the outburst of iconoclasm in their Low Countries came as a shock to King Philip II and his governor in Brussels, Margaret of Parma, as thus far they had been able to present themselves as the triumphant guardians of Catholicism north of the Alps. Confronted with iconoclasm in the neighbouring French Pyrenees from 1561 onwards, the King of Spain had fervidly rejected the pacification edicts of King Charles IX and his mother Catharina de' Medici, which granted preliminary rights for Protestant worship in certain circumscriptions. Philip II often repeated that these 'concessions' towards Protestants would only lead to 'major evil', a conclusion he felt was justified by examples from the history of the early church, the 1555 Augsburg Peace to 'which his father had been compelled', and above all, the ongoing religious violence in France despite the pacification measures. In May 1565 he even sent his consort Elisabeth de Valois to Bayonne to convince her brother the King and their mother that the recently concluded decrees of the Council of Trent were a far better instrument for restoring peace and order.⁸ He had recommended this very same policy to Margaret to counter the rapid advance of Calvinism, entrusting her with the promulgation and implementation of the Tridentine decrees in the Seventeen Provinces.⁹

As the recent work of Peter Arnade has made clear, Dutch iconoclasm did not explicitly attack royal authority, and blatant assaults on Habsburg symbols remained rare. Even so, iconoclasts expressed discontent with the exclusive Catholicism promoted by the dynasty, and with its persecution of Protestants.¹⁰ *Beeldenstormers* might have relied mainly on a local tradition of collective action and repertoires of revolt, yet they were also encouraged by the biconfessional agreements obtained in the Holy Roman Empire and France.¹¹ Guido Marnef therefore has stressed that iconoclasm should also be

8 V. Vázquez de Prada, *Felipe II y Francia (1559-1598). Política, Religión y Razón de Estado* (Pamplona 2004), chapter 6-7 and especially 103, 131, 152.

9 V. Soen, 'The Council of Trent and the Preconditions for the Revolt in the Netherlands (1563-1566)', in: W. François and V. Soen (eds.), *The Council of Trent (1545-1563): Reform and*

Controversy in Europe and Beyond (3 vols.; Göttingen, in press).

10 P. Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts & Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY 2008) 93.

11 T.M. Safley (ed.), *A Guide to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World* (Leiden, Boston 2011).



understood as an *acte de présence* of churches which until then had operated clandestinely ‘under the Cross’, but which then boldly asserted their existence within the city walls.¹² Conscious of these politico-religious demonstrations, Margaret despairingly confessed to her closest advisors that the restoration of religion should now be the first priority, and Philip II proclaimed that the rioters had committed divine *lèse-majesté*. Both coincided in their assessments of iconoclasts as *canaille* acting upon emotion instead of reason.¹³ Despite this context of outraged indignation about the sacrilege and heresy committed by iconoclasts, this article will argue that the Spanish Habsburg authorities mostly adopted a politico-juridical discourse to counter iconoclasm, and it will explain why they did so.

The first official reply on 25 August 1566 – some fifteen days after the first iconoclastic riots in Steenvoorde, and only five days after the violent outburst in Antwerp – already provides a telling demonstration of this process. Iconoclasm and all future variants were instantly forbidden by a general law of the central authorities, as usual codified in a *placcart et ordonnance* (*placcaet ende ordinantie*) issued in Brussels in the name of Philip II.¹⁴ To be sure, the King had no hand in drafting this ‘prompt remède provisional’, as the news had not even reached his ears (and in this instance it took longer than the average two weeks) and as he would be expected to approve the prohibition of iconoclasm in any case. Instead, the ordinance was proclaimed by the governor-general, and hastily drafted in the Brussels councils, leading to curious differences between its French and Dutch versions. The text itself insisted that the proscription of iconoclasm had been endorsed by the ‘very beloved and loyal Knights of our Order’ (of the Golden Fleece) and the members of the Council of State adjunct to the governor-general. Margaret could proceed so quickly because she had already convoked a crisis meeting with provincial governors and Knights of the Golden Fleece before any act of iconoclasm had actually occurred, in order to deal with the penury of the treasury, and the quick spread of Protestantism.

12 G. Marnef, ‘The Dynamics of Reformed Religious Militancy: The Netherlands 1566-1585’, in: P. Benedict et al., *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War*, 51-68.

13 A. Lottin, ‘Pour une nouvelle lecture de l’iconoclasm aux Pays-Bas (1566)’, in: A. Lottin, *Être et croire à Lille et en Flandre xvii-xviii siècle: Recueil des études* (Arras 2000) 277-285; Steen, *Margaret*, 176-177.

14 *Placcart et ordonnance du Roy nostre Sire, pour remédier aux saccaigemens, pilleries & Ruynes*

des Temples, Eglises, Cloistres & Monasteres: Et donner ordre à l’Emotion populaire en ces Pays d’embas (Brussels 1566) (USTC 13085); *Placcaet ende ordinantie ons heeren des Conincx om die plunderinghe, pillerye, scheydinghe ende bederffnisse vanden kercken, cloisters ende Godshuysen te verhoeden ende remedieren. Ende teghens die beroerte ende commotie vanden volcke in desen Nederlanden ordene te stellen* (Brussels 1566) (USTC 402953).

As such, the prohibition of iconoclasm with severe capital punishments supplemented the already impressive body of anti-heresy legislation that the Habsburg dynasty had elaborated ever since the famous Edict of Worms of 1521. Especially in the Netherlands, the central authorities had defined and redefined with general laws (*placcarts* or *placcaeten*) which acts of divine *lèse-majesté* entailed worldly lese-majesty as well, and thus had to be brought before their (rather than ecclesiastical) jurisdictions.¹⁵ In practice, almost all *deeds* linked with Protestant ideas had been identified as an infringement upon these anti-heresy laws (*contravention aux placcarts*), making capital punishment and confiscation tangible threats for Protestant believers and their sympathisers. The anti-heresy legislation in the Seventeen Provinces was acknowledged as the most rigid in Europe, even by Philip II himself. As a result, and much as had happened in France around that time, a league entitled the ‘Compromise of the Nobility’ protested publicly against this repressive system. By April 1566 it submitted a Request asking for the abolition of all kinds of religious persecution, conveniently labelled as ‘the Inquisition’. Despite its lobbying for more religious freedom, in June and July 1566, a quadrupally issued edict forbade Protestant hedge preaching and conventicles occurring all over the country.¹⁶ The decree of 25 August prohibiting iconoclasm thus was added to the list of proscribed heterodox acts: iconoclasts henceforth would be tried before secular courts, despite the recent Tridentine assertion of episcopal visitations and courts to control orthodoxy. This prohibition thus went into far more detail about forbidden acts than about beliefs. Iconoclasm was described first as the sacking of church buildings and the pillaging of books, and only thereafter as the destruction of statues and other sacred ‘things’, amongst which the blasphemy of the Holy Sacrament counted as the ‘worst act’. Offenders were only occasionally qualified as iconoclastes or *kerkscheynders*, with the word heretics never mentioned and *sectarissen* only once. Rather, iconoclasts appeared as villainous robbers, thieves, enemies of ‘God’, of ‘Us’, and of ‘the Country’ (in the Dutch version) and ‘the World’ (in the French version) and even more secularly, as *séditieux* (traitors), rebels and disturbers of the public peace. Accused of acting against the ‘common land of *herwaertsovere*’ (in the Dutch version) or the ‘Fatherland’ (in the French version), they were denounced as giving a bad

15 A. Goosens, *Les inquisitions modernes dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux (1520-1633)* (2 vols.; Brussels 1997-1998).

16 *Ordinantie s'conyncx [...] daerby verboden ende gheinterdicteert werden alle conventiclen, ende ongheoirloofde vergaderinghe secrete oft openbare (Ghegheven in [...] Bruessele [...] den derden [...] julio*

xvc zessentsestich) (Ghent 1566) (BT 7271), forming part of the series 6 June, 18 June, 3 July and 18 July. A Spanish councillor annotated a copy in AGS E 531, f. 98 and noted down that the punishments were less severe than the Caroline legislation of 1555.

example to *le peuple* and engaging it in popular ‘commotion’ and ‘emotion’. Hence, iconoclasts were degraded as more regular traitors, rebels or thieves, by which their religious motives were largely passed over in silence, perhaps in a final attempt to deprive them of any forum other than iconoclasm itself.¹⁷ Moreover, the prohibition also included a ban on carrying weapons, except by soldiers on duty. Those who continued to take up arms were to be punished as rebels. As such, in a final act of degrading iconoclasts, they lost (at least legally) their opportunity to die taking up the sword to defend their religious ideas. Even more directly, the edict licensed everyone and anyone to kill iconoclasts ‘as one does with a common enemy’. This prescription originated in medieval common law, which declared disturbers of the public peace to be outlaws; hence, again iconoclasm was framed as a disturbance of public order rather than as an act of divine *lèse-majesté*.

Given the longer tradition of heresy laws casting Protestantism as worldly *lèse-majesté*, the discourse of the *placcart* seems remarkably subtle though. With the impending risk of civil war, the straightforward prohibition of the ‘sack of temples’ truly became an exercise of diplomatic phrasing: rather than to punish, the ordinance was said to remedy and to restore order. This remediation discourse had been ‘in the making’ since the 1560s when the metaphor of the ‘sick body’ of the state euphemised the rapid spread of the Reformation and the critical state of the treasury. The *placcart* formulated the appropriate punishments even more carefully, given the ongoing controversy about the usefulness (for some) and the harshness (for most others) of the anti-heresy legislation. Margaret had already proposed a so-called ‘Moderation’ of the penalties, in order to meet the first Request of the Confederated Nobility, but the King had rejected her approach.¹⁸ Surprisingly then, the 25 August *placcart* included alleviated penalties: it announced that iconoclasts would not be burnt at the stake (as Philip still wanted), but that the gallows would be applied as a means of ‘pacification’. Confiscation would only occur in those regions where confiscation for religious matters was already permitted, in an attempt to soften the loud criticism of the infringement of privileges. Those magistrates failing to prohibit iconoclasm would receive arbitrary (instead of the usual capital) punishment. Despite the accommodation in tone and punishment, the practice of persecution and punishment did not fundamentally change, and the mitigation of stake to gallows was mainly cosmetic. Just as the iconoclasts were downgraded to rebels, they were also deprived of the opportunity (and forum) to be burnt as a martyr. The decree of 25 August 1566 thereby became another milestone in the Habsburg quest to

17 D. Nicholls, ‘The Theatre of Martyrdom in the French Reformation’, *Past & Present* 121 (1988) 49-73.

18 *Concept de placcart de la moderation des anciens placcartz sur le fait de la religion*, AGS SP 2604, s.f. (French, copy), further discussed in Soen, *Vredehandel*, 59-64.

be the first resort for persecuting heterodoxy and safeguarding Catholicism in the Seventeen Provinces. Still, the mitigations had to demonstrate that the Habsburg authorities were to some extent willing to meet the criticism of the malcontents, and its political tone had to make the overture in the ongoing negotiations with the Compromise of the Nobility.

Reassuring

Rather than on the prohibition of iconoclasm, historiography has concentrated on the Habsburg agreement with the malcontent nobility reached on the same date of 25 August 1566.¹⁹ As the most remarkable and probably most unexpected result of the *Beeldenstorm*, the Compromise of the Nobility was forced to disband.²⁰ Only three weeks earlier, the league of noblemen and urban elites had felt strong enough to submit a second Request in Brussels, yet now the leaders were obliged to swear solemnly in the same Coudenberg Palace that their confederation was ‘nil, broken and dissolved’.²¹ A double dynamic forced this dissolution. First, some members themselves had been traumatised by the ‘fury’ and become frightened of the ‘popular’ forces which seemed to be beyond their control, and most were troubled that public opinion blamed them for starting the whole iconoclastic movement. Second, the crisis meeting concluded that the confederated noblemen should use their authority for the restoration of order, and no longer to protect hedge preaching, as had happened in lordships all over the Seventeen Provinces. The metaphor of the ‘sick’ body politic was advanced again: during the Fury and Rage of the ‘lower parts’ of society, the nobility had to act as the ‘reasonable head’, defending King and Faith according to the duties inherent to their estate. The agreement in fact was mediated by the Knights of the Golden Fleece, and especially by the triad of the Prince of Orange and the Counts

19 *Copie des lettres patentes en forme d'assurance que la duchesse de Parme, regente etc a donne aux gentilzhommes confederez* (Brussels, 1566) (USTC 79032) (BT 2490, KBR LP 1433 A), *Copie des lettres d'assurance aux confederez*, 23 (25) August 1566: AGS SP 2604, s.f., a Dutch translation in P.C. Bor, *Oorsprongk, begin, en vervolgh der Nederlandsche oorlogen, beroerten* (4 vols.; Amsterdam 1679-1684) I, 96. An English translation was printed in London. Margaret later considered the pressure to amount to compulsion, a valid reason to rescind any agreement. The version was printed only after 27 of August, as it mentions that the

lord of Tilly and François d'Haesten had pledged their oath and signed the agreement on that date.

20 H.F.K. van Nierop, ‘A Beggars’ Banquet: The Compromise of the Nobility and the Politics of Inversion’, *European History Quarterly* 21 (1991) 419-443; see for their relationship with the high nobility: L. Geevers, *Gevallen vazallen. De integratie van Oranje, Egmont en Horn in de Spaans-Habsburgse monarchie (1559-1567)* (Amsterdam 2008) 165-171.

21 ‘nul, cassé, absolu’: *Serment solempnel faite par les confederez le 25 d'aoust 1566 d'entretenir les poinctz icy declarez*, 25 August 1566: AGS SP 2604, s.f.

of Egmond and Hornes, who had never adhered to the Compromise of the Nobility and could cast themselves as honest brokers. The governor-general, refusing to be in the same room with the confederated nobility, felt forced to accept the deal to recover the malcontent nobility for the Catholic cause.

This agreement also took a mild tone, validating this contribution's main argument: the members of the disbanded league obtained open letters in the form of an 'assurance' (*lettres patentes en forme d'assurance*). They would be absolved in perpetuity from any accusation of having initiated iconoclasm, and the text confirmed that they had always dutifully served the King. Their lives and goods would be safe, as long as they helped to restore order and to prevent iconoclasm (in this text labelled 'robbery'). The *assurance* in fact was something the members of the league had asked for themselves in their second Request: they did not want 'pardon', as they had done nothing wrong, but an 'assurance' of life and goods would provide them with the immunity they sought. In return for these concessions, they had to 'chase' all those sacking churches and to cast out all 'foreigners', 'rebels' and 'enemies of the King'. Despite the mild tone, the agreement formally limited the role of the nobility from the religious peacemakers they aspired to be (like their German and French counterparts) to being defenders of Catholicism.

The arrangement included an important caveat, which the late Juliaan Woltjer identified as the 'first victory' for the moderate party as it allowed provisional rights for Protestants.²² Still, the caveat was more curious and confused than Woltjer suggests, and the messy drafting process of the agreement added to the many misunderstandings about the clauses: the *lettres patentes* were first signed on 23 August, reissued with modifications on 25 August, and published only some days afterwards with the oath pledged by the majority of the leaders of the Compromise on 25 and 27 August. The Compromise indeed seemed to have obtained in a first stage the concession that Protestant preaching was henceforth allowed in those places outside the city walls where it had occurred before 23 August. This clause was thus in apparent contradiction to the July prohibition of all Protestant preaching mentioned above, but it was most probably vetoed by Margaret. In any case, it was changed in the final printed version which stated that former adherents of the Compromise had to prevent preaching where it had never taken place, and where it had taken place before 23 August it could no longer occur under armed protection, and above all, the preachers could not cause 'scandal' or unrest in the body social. The permission for unarmed Protestant preaching (not even worship) was thus implicit, and had to be deduced from the text. Still, the governor-general allowed 'the inquisition of which they

22 J.J. Woltjer, 'De vrede-makers', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 89 (1976) 229-321 and an updated version in idem, 'Political Moderates and Religious Moderates in the Revolt of the

Netherlands', in: P. Benedict et al., *Reformation, Revolt and Civil War, 185-200*; and a final evaluation by idem, *Op weg naar tachtig jaar oorlog* (Amsterdam 2011) 381-383.

complained' would stop, and abrogated the handful of inquisitorial titles granted by King and Pope. She also promised to re-initiate the plan for the 'Moderation' with the King in order to mitigate the heresy laws in force. It is clear that confederates refusing to drop their opposition and many Calvinists summarised the agreement as 'the end of the inquisition', and spread the message in this sloganeering way. The unofficial but most charismatic leader of the movement, Hendrik, Lord of Brederode, did not agree to the dissolution consented to by his confrères, and deftly exploited the textual differences between the agreements of 23 and 25 August. All this caused misconceptions as to what was permitted and what not.²³

Many local histories of the post-*Beeldenstorm* period have noted the inconsistent reception of the 23-25 August Agreement in the Seventeen Provinces. Some cities never proclaimed the *lettres patentes en forme d'assurance* at all, while others implemented local agreements with the Protestants that stretched what had been permitted.²⁴ Some former confederates helped in the punishment of iconoclasts, others alleged that they were not obliged to do so for acts that had happened before 23 or 25 August. Most provincial governors proceeded with the exemplary banishment or punishment of iconoclasts, although they were not able to stop the Protestant movement altogether, as Orange, Egmond and Hornes were to experience respectively in Antwerp, Ghent and Tournai. The legal uncertainties caused many subjects to flee, fearing repression as 'outlaws', while other exiles returned anticipating the 'end of the inquisition' and further multi-confessional arrangements. Internationally, the curious formulation of the 23-25 August Agreement led to speculation: during an embassy in Brussels in 1567, some Lutheran princes of the Holy Roman Empire suggested to Margaret that she should enlarge it along the lines of the Augsburg treaty while excluding the Calvinists from the deal.²⁵

To sum up, the immediate response to the *Beeldenstorm* by central authorities consisted of two hastily drafted legal texts: one *placcart* (general law) for all inhabitants of the Netherlands, and one set of *lettres patentes* (particular privileges) for its formerly confederated nobility. The two

23 For the different 'kinds' of inquisition, see G. Gielis and V. Soen, 'The Inquisitorial Office in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries: A Dynamic Perspective', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 66 (2015) 47-66; on the 'myth' created around all kinds of persecution together: F. Beemon, 'The Myth of the Spanish Inquisition and the Preconditions for the Dutch Revolt', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 85 (1994) 246-264.

24 Amongst the many local histories, M. Hageman, *Het kwade exempel van Gelre. De stad Nijmegen, de*

Beeldenstorm en de Raad van Beroerten, 1566-1568 (Nijmegen 2005).

25 M. Weis, 'La Paix d'Augsbourg de 1555: Un modèle pour les Pays-Bas?: L'ambassade des princes luthériens allemands auprès de Marguerite de Parme en 1567', in: *Entre Royaume et Empire: Frontières, rivalités et modèles* (Neuchâtel 2002) 87-100.

sets of law and the deliberate vagueness of some clauses gave leeway to misinterpretations, most often exploited by the opponents of royal authority. By November 1566 the governor-general and the Council of State agreed on a first phase to restore order in those cities where before 25 August no hedge preaching had taken place (and thus there could be no legal contestation). In a second phase they would restore religion in all cities, including Valenciennes and Antwerp, where Calvinists had obtained some rights of worship in local deals. Here, they proceeded following the legal argument that the August agreements had been concluded under duress and thus could be revoked, and that Protestant preaching in any form caused ‘scandal’. By May 1567, Margaret was able to finish her task in Antwerp, where she withdrew all earlier concessions to Protestants, though providing some symbolic mitigation of their persecution.²⁶ She soon insisted on the restoration of damaged churches and required ‘justifications’ of city magistrates.²⁷ So while the legal answers temporarily conveyed an impression of experimenting with multi-confessionalism, in practice everybody understood that in the long run Spanish Habsburg authorities meant to promote Tridentine Catholicism.

Punishing

The Madrid deliberations only started after the King’s recovery from his fever. To that end, the *Consejo de Estado* assembled and reassembled over the autumn of 1566, and in its meetings heated clashes occurred over the proper strategy to pacify the Netherlands.²⁸ By the end of September all agreed that after the ‘heretical attacks’ a military intervention was the safest option to defend the honour of God and King. The possibility of Philip II travelling to the Netherlands in person remained a point of discussion. According to

26 G. Janssens, ‘De ordonnantie betreffende de pacificatie van de beroerten te Antwerpen (24 mei 1567). Breekpunt voor de politiek van Filips II ten overstaan van de Nederlanden’, *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Commissie voor de uitgave der oude wetten en verordeningen van België* 50 (2012) 105-132, including text edition.

27 Amongst other ordinances, she issued on 14 February 1567 an instruction to repair and restore the damaged churches: A. Spicer, ‘After Iconoclasm: Reconciliation and Resacralization in the Southern Netherlands, ca. 1566-85’, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 44 (2013) 411-433.

28 There was no separate ‘Consejo de Flandes’, though Joachim Hopperus, Keeper of the Seal, acted as main advisor on policy for the Netherlands. P.D. Lagomarsino, *Court Factions and Formulation of Spanish Policy towards the Netherlands* (PhD University of Cambridge 1974) suggested the existence of a more ‘pacifist’ Eboli faction and a ‘vindictory’ faction around the Duke of Alba. His rigid interpretation of these factional clashes has been nuanced in several respects. For an overview see: V. Soen, ‘Philip II’s Quest: The Appointment of Governors-General during the Dutch Revolt (1559-1598)’, *BMGN-LCHR* 126 (2011) 3-29, DOI: /10.18352/bmgn-lchr.7217.

medieval tradition his presence was considered a (somewhat magical) solution to appease rebellion and, more recently, a remedy to contain the Reformation. In 1559 Philip II had travelled from Brussels to the Iberian Peninsula after the discovery of crypto-Protestant circles in Madrid and Valladolid. In the following years the Pope, the Emperor, Cardinal Granvelle and Margaret of Parma all urged the King to return to Brussels to stop Protestantism there as well. While after the *Beeldenstorm* royal councillors unanimously agreed on the necessity of a journey, they could not agree on its timing: should Philip travel immediately with the army, or did an army first have to restore order so that the King would arrive as a Forgiving Father? The dilemma came to an end when the Ottomans attacked in the Mediterranean, and when in less than half a year Philip II became a widower without an heir. In these times of dynastic instability and military mobilisation, the voyage was postponed indefinitely (and as it would turn out, permanently).²⁹

Out of necessity, the royal pacification strategy was now to consist of two phases – an army would precede the arrival of Philip II, pre-empting the fear of an ‘escalation of potential disasters’ and a domino reaction in the Spanish Habsburg Empire. The rest of the ‘grand strategy’ has been well documented by Geoffrey Parker and others: hearing the reassuring news of Margaret’s campaigns, the size of the military contingent was reduced to ‘only’ 10,000 soldiers. After two other captains refused the honour, the Duke of Alba accepted the command, despite his advanced age and his hope of staying near the King. Remarkably, while the *Consejo de Estado* emphasised defending ‘God’s Holy Name’, the military reaction was framed and staged as an intervention against rebels, even before William of Orange fled the country and started an open revolt against his overlord. In this case, this mostly secular argumentation enabled the King to recruit mercenary troops from the Holy Roman Empire, while raising support for his cause there as well, even amongst Lutheran princes.³⁰

The royal deliberations repudiated most of the earlier measures taken by Margaret. The King annulled the *lettres patentes* of August 1566, and even withdrew her agreement with the city of Antwerp of May 1567. For this and other reasons, she decided to resign upon the arrival of Alba. The result was that the Duke arrived not only as commander-in-chief of the troops but also as the new governor-general. His strictness and severity had been long known from previous interventions in the Empire, while his new

29 G. Parker, ‘1567: The End of the Dutch Revolt’, in: A. Crespo Solana and M. Herrero Sánchez (eds.), *España y las 17 provincias de los Países Bajos. Una revisión historiográfica (xvi-xviii)* (2 vols.; Cordoba 2002) I, 269-290; G. Janssens, *Brabant in het verweer. Loyale oppositie tegen Spanje’s bewind*

in de Nederlanden van Alva tot Farnese 1567-1578 (Kortrijk, Heule 1989).

30 G. Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road 1567-1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries’ Wars* (Cambridge 1972) and his other numerous publications.

letters of commission conferred upon him the right to punish ‘rebels’ and the instigators of the troubles, with the final aim being to restore order and justice. Invested with these exceptional powers, he proceeded immediately with the erection of a new tribunal, known as the Council of ‘Troubles’, with an overarching jurisdiction in all Seventeen Provinces, superseding the secular courts entrusted with the execution of the anti-heresy laws. This Council had to judge case by case, and could proceed swiftly to arrests, trials and confiscations in following up on the inquiries already carried out under Margaret. Its many executions (estimated at more than a thousand) and banishments (estimated at around 11,000) soon resulted in the Tribunal being nicknamed the Council of Blood.³¹

During the heat of the Iconoclastic Fury, the *lettres patentes* had tried to regain discontented noblemen for the Habsburg and Catholic cause, but under the governorship of Alba they faced persecution. For the King and his councillors, the *Beeldenstorm* only added to their much older mistrust that (the greater part of) the nobility in the Netherlands – high or low, member of the Compromise or not – was to be held responsible for the calamities. The grandees Orange, Egmond and Hornes were particular scapegoats: their mediation for the Agreement of 23-25 August and later local deals with Protestants discredited all of them even further at the Spanish Court. Also the allegation that they had not done enough to implement the decrees of the Council of Trent became a powerful denunciation against them. In this context, Alba had received two special commissions, on 24 March and on 15 April 1567, to proceed against the Knights of the Golden Fleece despite the privileges allowing them to be judged solely by and before their peers. Orange prudently fled before Alba’s arrival, while Egmond and Hornes were almost immediately arrested and by June 1567 executed. The two aristocrats had been shocked, believing they had fostered the peace-making process on the ground. Their trial before the Council of Troubles was framed mainly in terms of treason and worldly *lèse-majesté*. Alba considered this ‘dirty job’ as a means to pave the way for the arrival of the King, who would henceforth reign over loyal vassals and subjects, albeit who first had to be pardoned for their misconduct during the Troubles.

31 G. Marnef and H. De Schepper, ‘Conseil des Troubles (1567-1576)’, in: E. Aerts (ed.), *Les institutions du gouvernement central des Pays-Bas Habsbourgeois (1483-1795)* (2 vols.; Brussels 1995) I, 470-478. In this period the presence of the Augustinian monk Lorenzo de Villavicencio also added to the formulation of radical policies

regarding the Low Countries: G. Dorren, ‘Por la honra de Dios: Informadores del rey sobre la situación en Flandes (1564-1566)’, in: J. Martínez Millán (ed.), *Felipe II (1527-1598): Europa y la Monarquía Católica: Tomo I: El Gobierno de la Monarquía (Corte y Reinos)* (Madrid 1998) I, 161-168.

Still less well known than Alba's repression remain the plans for a general pardon after the *Beeldenstorm*.³² Though with hindsight the Habsburg repression might seem extremely well organised, most councillors in Brussels and Madrid acknowledged that the existing tribunals could only punish leading iconoclasts and that the military troops could only defeat the foremost rebels. A punitive expedition and an exceptional criminal court could restore order in the end, but they would neither return peace in the body politic, nor bring justice to those many inhabitants who had contravened the *placcarts* in attending hedge preaching or iconoclasm. So after the *Beeldenstorm*, a general pardon was proposed as a collective measure of grace for the 'multitude' which had been compromised during the troubles, in order to remove their crimes from the body politic and to start with a clean sheet. In the post-1566 policy the general pardon was the most concrete measure of appeasement that was discussed, and eventually also the first one to materialise.

Both in Brussels and Madrid the advantages of this pacification strategy were reformulated over and over, though with changing advocates and even more opponents.³³ The advocates argued that by means of a general pardon the King should demonstrate his innate clemency, a virtue cherished by such classical philosophers as Cicero and Seneca and cultivated by the Habsburg dynasty since Emperor Maximilian I. In the ideal case, these 'doves' argued, Philip II should proclaim a general pardon during his Entry into Brussels to inaugurate peace and mark the end of the repression. For his subjects, a collective grace could bring consolation in times of executions and confiscations: the remorseful minor sinners would have an opportunity for a formal and symbolic reconciliation with their overlord, and even those who had not done something wrong would be inspired by love for their ruler. As the repression under Alba hardened, some councillors argued that a general pardon would soften the edges of the severity of his regime. In the end, even Cardinal Granvelle argued that a general pardon would be necessary to win back the hearts and minds of the King's Dutch vassals. Also local bishops lobbied Alba and his confessor for a general pardon, using the religious repertoire of arguments: they insisted on the Christian virtues of forgiveness

32 The information in the following paragraphs stems from: V. Soen, *Geen pardon zonder paus! Studie over de complementariteit van het koninklijk en pauselijk generaal pardon (1570-1574) en over inquisiteur-generaal Michael Baius (1560-1576)* (Brussels 2007). Also under Charles v general pardons (understood as terms for reconciliation with the Catholic Church) were granted to Anabaptists. V. Soen, 'De

reconciliatie van 'ketters' in de zestiende-eeuwse Nederlanden (1520-1590)', *Trajecta. Tijdschrift voor de geschiedenis van het katholiek leven in de Nederlanden* 14 (2005) 337-362.

33 This and following paragraph was earlier developed in: V. Soen, 'C'estoio comme songe et mocquerie de parler de pardon. Obstructie bij een pacificatiemaatregel (1566-1567)', *BMGN* 119 (2004) 309-328, DOI: 0.18352/bmgn-lchr.6082.

and mercy, and were convinced that a pardon would spark new (or needed) conversions and reconciliations, especially as the spread of Protestantism had still not been stopped.

Opposition to the proposal meant that a general pardon only materialised after four years of discussion. ‘Hawks’ were mostly afraid that a general pardon would be interpreted as a sign of weakness. Lawyers argued that it was impossible to permit collective mercy, as it would ignore the variety of crimes committed and thus create further injustice. Prudent advisors only wanted to apply a general pardon as the ‘final remedy, when the doctor had run out of other medicine’; in the meantime they preferred to await the results of the work of the Council of Troubles. Even if one approved of a pardon, all agreed that certain individuals or categories still had to be excluded from this royal grace: a general pardon was never meant to be general, in the old Senecan adage that forgiving everyone was as unjust as punishing everyone. The discussions of who could and who could not be included dragged the whole process out even longer. Finally, all were of the opinion that the general pardon should come at the ‘right’ moment, and that the military campaigns of William of Orange and his brothers meant that the King should wait a little longer. Alba in particular played upon this last argument and often singlehandedly deferred the pardon. When in 1567 Philip II cancelled his journey to the Netherlands and proposed to send his half-brother with a general pardon, the Duke vetoed the plan. In 1568 when the King argued that the anticipated victory over Orange would be the ideal occasion to promulgate a pardon, Alba did not answer, leading the King to think that a courier had got lost. Afterwards, he delayed further by sending four possible drafts and formulations of a general pardon to be discussed in Madrid, and when Philip II finally signed the pardon in November 1569, the governor-general still postponed the promulgation by six months, allegedly waiting for the ‘right moment’.

The final text of the pardon³⁴, mostly drafted by Alba and his councillors and only slightly changed in Madrid, set out at length why the King had first implemented the *voie de force* and now opened up the *voie de douceur*. It insisted that a ‘multitude’ had been involved in the troubles (by then the generic term for the *Beeldenstorm* and the military confrontations combined) out of ‘curiosity or inconsideration’, others out of ‘youth’ or ‘simplicity’. It also stressed the innate royal virtue of clemency, imitating God’s mercy. Those who were prepared to be reconciled first with the Catholic Church – facilitated by an accompanying pardon from Pope Pius V – could

34 *Grace et pardon general donné par le Roy nostre Sire : A cause des troubles passez* (Brussels 1570) (USTC 4066 digitised copy from Ghent University Library in Google Books). A more extensive list

of versions of this publication (and the general pardons of 1572 and 1574) is to be found in Soen, *Geen pardon zonder paus*, appendix II-III-IV.

receive grace and pardon within a reconciliation term of two months (later extended to three months to match the papal pardon). Applicants did not have to file a separate request for a letter of remission with the local or central administrations, yet they had to be reconciled with the delegated priests, accept the Tridentine confession of faith and perform penance. Policy debates had hesitated long over whether it would be preferable to exclude categories of persons or to exclude named individuals, but Alba had decided to omit broadly defined groups from the royal grace. Besides Reformed ministers and rebel leaders, the general pardon excluded those who had destroyed or burned cloisters, churches and images, or who would do so in future.

It was with much pomp and circumstance that Alba announced the general pardon on Sunday 16 July 1570. The city of Antwerp became the preferred place to demonstrate the return of peace, to both local citizens and international merchants. During a pontifical mass in the cathedral, the newly installed bishop of Antwerp, Franciscus Sonnius, first made Pope Pius V's pardon known. Court preacher and bishop of Arras, François Richardot, elucidated the divine and royal virtue of clemency and mercy during his sermon, (probably literally) pointing out the marks of iconoclasm in the nave of the church. He emphasised the analogy between the general pardon and the temple of God, which should be decorated, maintained and, after the unrest, restored.³⁵ In the afternoon, Alba promulgated the general pardon during a ceremony which underlined royal forgiveness: servants were dressed in white (innocence) and gold (royalty), and a specially constructed stage before the city hall marked the solemnity of the event. Later on, the text of the general pardon was read out in most cities on Sunday 30 July, usually after a sermon in the main parish church proclaiming the papal pardon. According to most contemporary observers, the carefully planned pardon ceremonies were a failure in communication and appreciation: there were no immediate signs of joy, but instead murmuring and noise, and after a while, much overt disappointment and discontent.

Just as with every other Habsburg action in these critical years, a counter propaganda campaign questioned the sincerity of the general pardon, merging it into the Black Legend and the earlier criticism of 'the Inquisition'. The summary in the chronicle of the Lutheran Godevaert Van Haecht neatly illustrates the bad reception of the pacification measure amongst the Antwerp citizens: the general pardon 'is in effect no other than the Spanish Inquisition which has been read out, because the conclusion of the pardon is that henceforth one should live according to the Catholic Faith or one

35 G. Janssens, 'Superexcellat autem misericordia iudicium: The Homily of François Richardot on the solemn announcement of the General Pardon in the Netherlands (Antwerp, 15 July 1570)', in:

J. Pollmann and A. Spicer (eds.), *Public Opinion and Changing Identities in the Early Modern Netherlands: Essays in Honour of Alastair Duke* (Leiden, Boston 2007) 107-123.

Translaet van de brief-
uen van gratie ende pardoen generael/by-
der Co. maiesteyt gegeuen ter za-
ken vande boirledene
troublen.



Met Praeilegie der Co. Maiest.
Geprent inde Princelijcke Stadt van Brusselle by Mi-
chiel van Hamont/geswozen boeckprinter/woe-
nende opde Dongelmerct/dit on-
der het Stadthuys.
M.D.LXX.



The official translation [translaet] of the general pardon, Brussels,
Michel de Hamont, 1570.

Copy in the possession of the author, gift from Gustaaf Janssens.

Photo by Sophie Verreyken.

incurs danger. And that is for sure'.³⁶ Pamphlets and songs contended that the pardon was not necessary, as Dutch subjects had done nothing wrong; citizens warned each other that the invitation to approach local priests was an underhand means for the Council of Troubles to arrest those it had not yet apprehended. These rumours, pamphlets and songs ensured that the general pardon had a lukewarm reception, and the Duke of Alba came to consider the pardon a missed opportunity and an unnecessary measure. He also did little to foster the pardon, as soon as possible initiating prosecutions and executions of those 'who had not taken advantage of the pardon'. Still, the nay-saying of Alba and of his opponents contrasted with the hopeful reports of most bishops, who worked hard to put the pardon into effect. The bishop of Ghent discussed the possibility of pardon repeatedly in his Sunday sermons, while the bishop of Roermond informed locals about it during his visitation travels. From their reports, most bishops seemed to be quite satisfied: the bishop of Antwerp reported 14,128 *reconciliati* within the city walls, the bishop of Ghent 6,000, and the bishop of 's-Hertogenbosch 4,000. To calculate exact numbers remains impossible, as there were many uncertainties about the validity of the reconciliations carried out by priests but not (yet) endorsed by local administrations. Guido Marnef has indicated that these impressive numbers of *reconciliati* belonged to the 'middle groups', which did not make definitive confessional choices but were prepared to obtain at least an official reconciliation with Church and King in those troublesome years.³⁷ Hence, for thousands of the inhabitants of the Seventeen Provinces, the pardon had created a highly welcome immunity. Still, the general pardon was also designed to crown the restoration of order in society, and to inaugurate a new era of peace, a hope that the intervention of the Sea Beggars less than two years later was to destroy.

Conclusion

Geoffrey Parker has repeatedly insisted that distance complicated policymaking in the Spanish Monarchy, and the *Beeldenstorm* provides a telling example of this fact: when Philip II fell ill after the news of the iconoclasm, the deliberations in Madrid were suspended, while Margaret of Parma – obliged to stay in Brussels against her will – already started to

36 Godevaert van Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen van 1565 tot 1574 te Antwerpen en elders*, R. Van Roosbroeck (ed.) (Antwerp 1929) II, 129: "t Is in effectt niets anders dan de Spaensche inquisitie dat er is gelesen, want de conclusie van den perdon is, dat gy voortaan moet een catolyck leven leyden of gy valt in 't dangier. Ende dat

is seker.' (text edition available online through www.dbnl.org).

37 G. Marnef, 'Protestant Conversions in an Age of Catholic Reformation: The Case of Sixteenth-Century Antwerp', in: A.-J. Gelderblom, J.L. de Jong and M. van Vaec (eds.), *The Low Countries as a Crossroads of Religious Beliefs* (Leiden 2004) 49-64.

restore order with provisional measures. The different pacing between Madrid and Brussels generated constant miscommunications and delays, adding to the complication of events. Even so, neither distance nor time constituted the biggest challenge for a coordinated action during the summer and autumn of 1566: recent research has made it increasingly clear that the primary test for King and governor consisted in finding the ‘right remedies’ to pacify iconoclasm and armed rebellion, the most serious threat to the politico-religious order so far in the already rebellion-prone Netherlands. Time and again, Philip II and his governors-general rejected any pacification strategies tending towards the sort of bi- or multi-confessionalism previously implemented in the Holy Roman Empire and France, fearful of losing souls from the ‘right’ religion. Within the geopolitical context, they also feared losing the Netherlands to (and a possible domino-reaction within) the Spanish Habsburg realms. Hence, King and governors insisted on the necessity of an exclusive position for Catholicism in society, and advocated the implementation of the Tridentine decrees as a means to contain the Reformation. Considering themselves to be ‘guiding lights’ on a wider European scene, they aspired to convince the King of France and the Emperor to act likewise.

That does not imply that after the *Beeldenstorm* the Spanish Habsburg authorities set out on a straightforward course of castigation and retribution as described in most textbooks. Rather, as has been demonstrated here, military repression formed only part of a broader strategy of pacification that also included mediation, reconciliation and reform. The tactic employed combined the punishment of prominent leaders with the recognition that most of the participants in the ‘troubles’ could neither be apprehended nor punished properly, so that a pardon would eventually be necessary, as it transpired in the end. This old dilemma regarding the use of clemency towards adversaries had been epitomised by then popular classical philosophers such as Cicero and Seneca, and equally by such contemporary thinkers as Machiavelli and Erasmus. Even so, after the *Beeldenstorm* Christian virtues and commonplaces more visibly underpinned the Habsburg debate on punishment and forgiveness. The Spanish Habsburg response therefore came down to a continuous patchwork of punishments for the main instigators, balanced by forgiveness for the many inhabitants willing to live in the Catholic faith. In practice, the Habsburg alternation between repression and reconciliation created great confusion about the actual possibility to solicit a remission of sins or a restitution of goods, and the longer-term genuineness of this policy of pacification. In times of enduring persecutions, executions and confiscations, it was easy for dissidents and insurgents to denounce ‘Habsburg clemency’ as another act of ‘Spanish duplicity’.

Finally, this contribution elaborates how Spanish Habsburg authorities made sure to describe the *Beeldenstorm* foremost as a sequence of acts of worldly *lèse-majesté*. Sacrilege and iconoclasm were largely framed as

an infringement of the welfare of the commonwealth, rather than as mere blasphemy and desecration. Iconoclasm and *kerkenschenderye* were said to have been carried out by ordinary thieves and dangerous rebels, inciting a revolt among the populace, rather than by heretics propagating a dissident faith. Even if the authorities experienced iconoclasm as outright heresy, they had many reasons to adopt this political discourse. First, equating divine *lèse-majesté* to worldly *lèse-majesté* had long been a favoured strategy of the Habsburg dynasty to bring religious prosecution under their control and to pre-empt ecclesiastical jurisdiction. The secular and legal discourse helped the Habsburg dynasty to safeguard authority and jurisdiction in matters of religion. Secondly, the laws and arrangements drafted after the *Beeldenstorm* never created a platform for religious dissidents, who were downgraded to ordinary thieves or rebels. Whereas executions of Protestants could create a forum for spreading heterodoxy, the legal documents almost literally passed over the religious agenda of iconoclasm in silence. Thirdly, by legitimating repression in the Low Countries as a lawful action against rebels, the Habsburg dynasty could obtain assistance from the Emperor or from German mercenaries in countering the *Beeldenstorm*, while opening a margin to bargain with those who only opposed the Habsburg regime for political motives.

Most unexpectedly, the *Beeldenstorm* called into play the role of the local nobility in these royal strategies of pacification. In the summer and autumn of 1566, most local elites claimed a crucial part in the peace-making process, especially as the Habsburg military presence was weak and the treasury empty. The agreement of 23-25 August after all, had licensed local lords to stop hedge preaching and iconoclasm. During the immediate aftermath of iconoclasm, aristocrats also engaged in organising capital punishments for rioters, but in some cases they also felt forced to make local deals with Protestants, most notably those brokered by Orange in Antwerp, Egmond in Ghent and Hornes in Tournai. Already under suspicion in Madrid, the Dutch nobility were now thought to have stirred up iconoclasm, or if not causing it, at least allowing it or even abetting it. As a result, the Council of Troubles took its mission to include especially the exemplary execution of leading aristocrats. All this should have paved the way for the entry of the merciful King, who in the end never came. In his absence, on 16 July 1570, the Duke of Alba promulgated a general pardon for the multitude who had been compromised in the troubles, in an ultimate attempt to restore order and pacify Dutch society. Hence, the King and his governor general implemented different strategies than did their French counterparts, who tried to accommodate both Protestant and Catholic nobility at court and whose pacification edicts conceded limited rights of worship to Protestants. With the benefit of hindsight, one can argue that neither of the opposite strategies of the King of Spain and the King of France stopped the religious and political turmoil in its tracks. After all, it remains mostly a rhetorical question whether princely power

alone could have pacified the profound divisions in society caused by the Reformation.

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