

## 'A Rotterdammer Teaches the World How to Reform'. The Image of Erasmus in Remonstrant and Counter-Remonstrant Propaganda<sup>1</sup>

Throughout the seventeenth century Dutch men of letters representing a whole range of disciplines and opposite religious persuasions were agreed on a positive appreciation of the great humanist Desiderius Erasmus. To illustrate this we refer to the militant leader of the Counter-remonstrants, Franciscus Gomarus, who in a lengthy letter dated 10 June 1627 wrote to his friend Gerardus Joannes Vossius that Erasmus and the Scaligers, father and son, had to be ranked among the most eminent of the world's scholars. In his editions of the Church Fathers and his annotations to the New Testament Erasmus evinced admirable erudition; with his apologies, paraphrases on the New Testament and *Adagia* he had acquired eternal fame. His letters were of such sublime quality that they could not but enhance the reader's own erudition and wisdom. The only criticism one could make was that he had sometimes published his writings too quickly, but nevertheless it was easier for educated readers to denounce his works than to improve on them. Gomarus had not the slightest doubt therefore that, as long as the world continued to exist, Erasmus's best books would inspire scholars with love and admiration.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, we must put such eulogies into their proper perspective: Gomarus was writing to Vossius in confidence, in the secure knowledge that his words would not fall on deaf ears — had Vossius in the past not mentioned Erasmus's reputation to Gomarus, even then comparing him with the two Scaligers? In his view Erasmus was on a par with the prodigious Scaligers, particularly when one took into account the fact that he lived in unpropitious times. Amidst ignorant monks and a limited number of partly corrupt texts he had risen to the highest level of erudition. By setting the Scaligers against Erasmus and by emphasising that this confrontation certainly did no harm to the latter's stature, Vossius was providing grist for Gomarus's mill, for both scholars had an aversion to the maliciousness of Scaliger the Younger, who had delivered vitriolic attacks on a common relative of theirs, Franciscus Junius, professor in the University of Leiden.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The quotation ("Een Rotterdammer leerd de werelt reformeren") is taken from a poem on Erasmus by G. Brandt, *Historie der Reformatie en andre kerkelijke geschiedenissen in en ontrent de Nederlanden* 1 (Amsterdam 1671) 64-65.

<sup>2</sup> See G.P. van Itterzon, *Franciscus Gomarus* (The Hague 1930, reprint 1979) 416-419, Fr. Gomarus to G.J. Vossius, 31 May/10 June 1627. Gomarus referred to the *Ciceronianus* (ASD 1-2, 680-681), where Erasmus introduced himself as a prolific writer who published his works too hastily, without polishing and revising them.

<sup>3</sup> *Gerardi Joannis Vossii et clarorum virorum ad eum epistolae*. Ed. P. Colomesius (Augsburg 1691) 116-118, Nr. 65, Vossius to Gomarus, 11 May 1627. Vossius answers a letter from Gomarus, written in

Even if we must view Gomarus's praise of Erasmus against the background of his connections with Vossius, nevertheless it is remarkable that two scholars of such different temperaments — the orthodox theologian Gomarus and the late-humanist polymath Vossius, with his Remonstrant leanings, should agree in the sincere esteem in which they held Erasmus. As far as this appreciation of Erasmus is concerned, these men are to be numbered among many other 17th-century learned theologians and humanists.<sup>4</sup>

Quite a lot has been published on Erasmus's image in the literature of the Truce Controversies.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless it is worth while subjecting some 17th-century testimonies to fresh scrutiny, in order to enhance our understanding of the reasons why the appreciation of Erasmus's works has been so prone to fluctuation. This will entail reference to both Counter-remonstrant and Remonstrant humanists and professional theologians, with a view to demonstrating that the appreciation of Erasmus as a historical figure varies according to the religious convictions of representatives of these two groups.

This essay takes as its starting-point the *Apologia pro Erasmo* by the orthodox Calvinist Martinus Lydius (1539-1601), professor of theology at the University of Franeker from 1585. Lydius wrote his apology around 1596.<sup>6</sup> He does not say exactly against whom he is defending Erasmus's reputation; all he states is that — to his great sorrow — he repeatedly has to hear Erasmus being accused of a heresy such as Arianism and of being a mocker of all religions.<sup>7</sup> Lydius presented the reader with a description of Erasmus as an instrument of God who had given new inspiration to the study of the 'bonae literae'. Furthermore, Erasmus was a fundamentally orthodox theologian who for plausible, if not always justifiable, reasons had refused to give the Reformation his full support. To illustrate this proposition, Lydius explained that Erasmus was always annoyed by Luther's coarseness and fanaticism. Unlike Luther, Erasmus was eager to please, perhaps a little timid, and was even prepared to bend

December 1626. Scaliger's contempt for Junius became widely known after publication of his *Epistulae* (1627). Vossius also suggested that depreciative remarks on Junius in the *Historiae sui temporis* of Jacques-Auguste de Thou (Geneva 1620-1621 or 1626) had to be ascribed to Scaliger the Younger, who had blackened Junius's reputation in his letters to De Thou. Cf. C.S.M. Rademaker, *Life and Work of Gerardus Joannes Vossius (1577-1649)*. *Respublica literaria Neerlandica* 5 (Assen 1981) 210-211.

<sup>4</sup> My search for seventeenth-century statements on Erasmus made clear that it is difficult to determine exactly to what extent his works were as yet known. Whereas many scholars and publicists went no further than perfunctory declarations of sympathy on Erasmus as a champion of tolerance and practical piety, Gerardus Joannes Vossius in particular gave evidence of being well read in Erasmus's works, especially his letters.

<sup>5</sup> B. Mansfield, *Phoenix of His Age. Interpretations of Erasmus c. 1550-1750* (Toronto etc. 1979) 115-151; J. Trapman, 'Grotius and Erasmus', H.J.M. Nellen - E. Rabbie ed., *Hugo Grotius Theologian. Essays in honour of G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes* (Leiden etc. 1994) 77-98. See also A. Flitner, *Erasmus im Urteil seiner Nachwelt* (Tübingen 1952) 90-105, and G. Degroote, 'Erasmiaanse echo's in de Gouden Eeuw in Nederland', J. Coppens ed., *Scrinium Erasmianum. Mélanges historiques publiés ... à l'occasion du cinquième centenaire de la naissance d'Erasmus* (Leiden 1969) 391-421.

<sup>6</sup> W. Nijenhuis, 'Riskante Toleranz: Martinus Lydius's *Apologia pro Erasmo*', H.A. Oberman et al. ed., *Reformiertes Erbe. Festschrift für Gottfried W. Locher zu seinem 80. Geburtstag 2* [= *Zwingliana* 19, 2 (1991/2 - 1992/2)] (Zürich 1993) 245-261. On Lydius see also *Biografisch Lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse protestantisme* 1 (Kampen 1978) 146-148 (C. van der Woude).

<sup>7</sup> LB 9, 1761A: "Dolet ... mihi ex animo quoties ab aliis illum in *Arianismi* suspicionem vocari, ab aliis tanquam irrisorem omnis religionis accusari, audio."

the truth for the sake of peace and harmony.<sup>8</sup> Nor was he willing to forfeit his good name with princes and dignitaries by throwing in his lot with Luther, fearing as he did that his plans to implement his programma for the advancement of 'bonae literae' would be jeopardised by his support for the German reformer.<sup>9</sup> Lydius's conclusion, however, is that reformers after Luther brought more and more light to bear on the matter and that initial uncertainty on questions of dogma were now a thing of the past. Moreover, Protestants in many countries had wrest themselves free from oppression by the Roman Catholic hierarchy and this struggle for freedom had led to a status founded in law. Therefore Erasmus would have had no reason to maintain his ambivalent attitude if he had still been alive — indeed, Lydius avers, Erasmus would have embraced the Reformation wholeheartedly. With his apology for Erasmus Lydius confirms the Calvinist view of the Reformation as an event marking the end of a period of decay and heralding a period of profound change.<sup>10</sup>

Whereas Gomarus's confidential letter about Erasmus was evidently not for publication, Lydius's apology certainly was. At least, 17th-century literature is brimming with references to it as an important tract worthy of publication. It was not in fact brought out until 1706, the year in which it appeared in the tenth volume of the Leiden edition of Erasmus's *Opera omnia* by Johannes Clericus.<sup>11</sup> The delay is noteworthy, since it is precisely the emphasis on Erasmus as a transitional figure in the development towards a fully-fledged Reformation that must have made Lydius's image of Erasmus acceptable to Protestants of a wide range of religious colour. In August 1606 one of Martinus Lydius's sons, Johannes (1577-1643),<sup>12</sup> added a dedicatory letter to the apology with the intention of having Paullus Merula publish it together with Erasmus's autobiography *Compendium vitae*. Although the Synod of South Holland at Gorinchem agreed to this plan in 1606,<sup>13</sup> the apology remained in manuscript. This is primarily because another son of Lydius's, the Dordt preacher and confirmed Calvinist Balthasar Lydius (1576/7-1629), had advised his brother against publication.

Merula was greatly in favour of publication but he apparently had no success in his attempts to overcome the brothers' qualms.<sup>14</sup> Merula, together with scholars such as Heinsius, Scriverius, Baudius, Cunaeus and Barlaeus, was a member of a circle of

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1761C-1763A.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1763A-1765C.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1765C-1766A.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1760-1780, with a dedicatory letter by Johannes Lydius to the municipality of Rotterdam, dated Oudewater, 1 August 1606.

<sup>12</sup> On Johannes Lydius see also G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes, 'De editie van Nicolaas van Clémanges, *Opera omnia*, bezorgd door Johannes Lydius (Leiden 1613)', J.A.A.M. Biemans et al. ed., *Boeken verzamelen. Opstellen aangeboden aan mr. J.R. de Groot bij zijn afscheid als bibliothecaris der Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden* (Leiden 1983) 231-248.

<sup>13</sup> *Acta der provinciale en particuliere synoden, gehouden in de noordelijke Nederlanden gedurende de jaren 1572-1620 3 (Zuid-Holland 1593-1620)*. Ed. J. Reitsma - S.D. van Veen (Groningen 1894) 249.

<sup>14</sup> *Sylloges epistolarum a viris illustribus scriptarum* t. 2 Ed. P. Burman (Leiden 1727) 376-377: Johannes Lydius to Paullus Merula, 3 August 1606. Further information on the history of the *Apologia pro Erasmo in Insignium virorum epistolae selectae ... ex bibliotheca Jani Guilielmi Meelii* (Amsterdam 1701) 82-85, 85-88 and 111-114, P. Scriverius to J. Lydius, 20 November 1614, prid. Kal. December (30 November) 1614 and in ante diem extremum Maii (30 May) 1626; Leiden, University Library, Ms. BPL 748, [Johannes] Lydius to P. Scriverius, 15 September 1606; BPL 293 B, J. Lydius to P. Scriverius, 12 and 29 November 1614; BPL 246, J. Lydius to P. Scriverius, 17 May 1621.

Leiden humanists whose admiration for Erasmus was so well known that Leiden rather than Erasmus's place of birth Rotterdam<sup>15</sup> was regarded as the very centre of Erasmus veneration.<sup>16</sup> Not only was emphasis placed on Erasmus's philological qualities as the restorer of 'bonae literae', in the Leiden publications he emerges as the representative of a religious frame of mind worthy of being held up to the faithful as a shining example.

Balthasar Lydius's objections to publication of the *Apologia* can easily be accounted for by the tense atmosphere that had meanwhile arisen in Holland as a result of the controversies which had blown up on account of the predestination disputes. As a philologist, exegete and translator Erasmus was accorded general esteem, but it was only the followers of the moderate Arminius, soon also to be known as Remonstrants, that showed this esteem without reserve. They revered Erasmus as a patron, deriving inspiration from his works. Orthodox Calvinist writers were more cautious with their declarations of support for fear of unpleasant repercussions in the controversy with the Remonstrants. Such was the effect of the religious conflicts on the reception of Erasmus's intellectual legacy: they led to polarisation which made it impossible — or at the very least extremely difficult — to present Erasmus in neutral terms.

This development can be best illustrated by the way Erasmus was portrayed by representatives who, unlike Balthasar Lydius and Daniel Heinsius, were not members of the orthodox Calvinist community. It is not easy to pinpoint what common ground these admirers of Erasmus had: on the whole they were men of letters who combined an interest in philology and history with tolerance and a healthy disregard for theological sophistry. They were mainly humanists with unmistakable Remonstrant sympathies and they were Remonstrant professional theologians.

The fact that Erasmus became a symbol for this group is shown by the satire *Sardi venales* (Ne'er-do-wells for sale), by the Leiden professor Petrus Cunaeus (c. 1586-1638). *Sardi venales* appeared in 1612, in a period when the religious controversies were escalating as a result of the debate on the appointment of the heterodox theologian Conradus Vorstius as successor to Arminius at the University of Leiden. In his satire Cunaeus describes a meeting of scholars from the life to come.<sup>17</sup> The meeting had been called to discuss the admission of recently deceased scholars, men of letters, historians, physicians, philosophers and theologians. Erasmus chaired the meeting,<sup>18</sup> but despite his guidance he could not prevent feelings running very high.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, both the statue, erected in 1622, and many editions of Erasmus's works by local printers testify to his popularity in Rotterdam. See S.W. Bijl, *Erasmus in het Nederlands tot 1617*. Bibliotheca bibliographica Neerlandica 10 (Nieuwkoop 1978) 309-318, 319-333, 335-338 and 404-407.

<sup>16</sup> *Erasmus en Leiden. Catalogus van de tentoonstelling gehouden in het Academisch Historisch Museum te Leiden van 23 oktober tot 19 december 1986*. Ed. R. Breugelmans et al. (Leiden 1986).

<sup>17</sup> P. Cunaeus, *Sardi venales, satyra Menippea in huius seculi homines plerosque inepte eruditos* ([Leiden] 1612), critical ed.: C. Matheeußen - C.L. Heesakkers ed., *Two Neo-Latin Menippean Satires: Justus Lipsius, Somnium; Petrus Cunaeus, Sardi Venales*. Textus minores 54 (Leiden 1980) 79-191. On Petrus Cunaeus, from the beginning of 1612 professor extraordinarius of Latin, see *Biographisch woordenboek van protestantsche godgeleerden in Nederland 2* (The Hague [1903]-1949) 326-330.

<sup>18</sup> P. Cunaeus, *Sardi venales* (ed. Matheeußen-Heesakkers) § 32.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, § 33-37.

An eloquent majority sounded the tocsin and put up fierce resistance to a relaxation of the admissions policy. After the heyday of what was later to be called the Renaissance the scholarly world had rapidly gone downhill. Barbarianism had triumphed once more, and things had got to the stage that not only Cassander and Melanchthon, but even Erasmus himself had reason to feel aggrieved: his books were in bad odour for the simple reason that he had always felt it wise to admit his doubts.<sup>20</sup> Referring to the predestination disputes<sup>21</sup> Cunaeus openly declared that it was primarily the theologians whose pretentiousness, intolerance, disputatiousness, misplaced self-confidence and demagoguery had been the root cause of the decline of scholarship and who had thus forfeited their right to a place in the Republic of Letters in the life hereafter. Finally, after bitter remonstrances from Poliziano, Agricola and the goddess Sophia, the theologians are also allowed to offer excuses for their actions. But it is impossible to take a vote: suddenly there is the threat of an invasion by criminals from Tartarus. Cunaeus then gets out of the impasse by saying that he had been reporting a dream from which he had just awakened.<sup>22</sup>

Cunaeus maintained that he drew his inspiration from Erasmus and other satirists. Although he hid behind the learned speakers of the underworld, it was clear where his sympathies lay. It is therefore not surprising that this publication incurred the wrath of the Counter-remonstrants; but it did not worry him unduly, assuming that freedom of speech in Holland was so sacrosanct that the theologians could hardly, if at all, get at him. In this he was to be proved right: in 1619 the Provincial Synod, convened at Leiden, asked him to revoke his views, but in spite of a warning from the next Provincial Synod, he appears to have ducked out of the obligation to put on the hair shirt in public.<sup>23</sup> *Sardi venales* was reprinted many times, often together with other satirical works such as Erasmus's *Laus stultitiae*. Eleven editions in the 17th century bear witness to the enormous popularity the work enjoyed.<sup>24</sup>

The history of the reception of Erasmus's works was influenced to an even greater extent by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645). Grotius believed that Erasmus represented a set of beliefs, popular in the Netherlands, which offered the faithful a good deal of dogmatic freedom. In his *Ordinum pietas* of 1613, a hard-hitting pamphlet written in defence of Oldenbarnevelt's religious policy, Grotius places Erasmus at the beginning of a reformatory movement devoid of the dogmatic precision of Calvinism,

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., § 94.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., § 11.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., § 121. See also § 4. The passage on the invasion of criminals from Tartarus might be explained as an allusion to the Turks; the threat they represented could not but encourage divided Christianity to restore unity.

<sup>23</sup> *Acta der provinciale en particuliere synoden* 3, 385, 422-423. Cf. *Petri Cunaei ... et doctorum virorum ad eundem epistolae. Quibus accedit oratio in obitum Bonaventurae Vulcanii*. Ed. P. Burman (Leiden 1725) 50-61, letter from Balthasar Lydius, dated 6 July 1620, on behalf of the Provincial Synod, and 61-74, reply by Cunaeus, dated Pridie Kal. Aug. (31 July) 1620. The correspondence shows that Cunaeus managed to avoid a public renunciation after the National Synod of Dordt (1618-1619): he made an agreement with the Classis of Leyden and became an official member of the Reformed Church. The edition *Petri Cunaei ... et doctorum virorum ad eundem epistolae* gives detailed information on the writing and reception of the satire. See especially *ibid.*, 120-121, Cunaeus to I. Casaubonus, 20 December 1612.

<sup>24</sup> A survey of editions in Matheussen - Heesakkers ed., *Two Neo-Latin Menippean Satires*, 19-21.

which was continued in the early seventeenth century in the form of Remonstrantism.<sup>25</sup> Although Grotius developed his ideas in order to confirm Remonstrantism's right to exist, he did not allow himself to distort the facts intentionally. Religious life in the Northern Netherlands was characterised by a variety of nuances of thought which after 1550, after the breakthrough and further spread of Calvinism, also remained in the Reformed Church until the Synod of Dordt finally closed its ranks. In the seventeenth century Grotius's view of Remonstrantism as an extension of an Erasmian tradition was, accordingly, not refuted with any convincing arguments.<sup>26</sup>

Erasmus's reputation and importance play a subordinate role in the *Ordinum pietas*, which was mainly intended to neutralise the negative effects of Vorstius's appointment. Indeed, Erasmus initially remained out of the line of fire, but this soon changed when Grotius was fiercely attacked by Matthew Slade (1569-1628), an Englishman who was headmaster of the Latin School at Amsterdam.<sup>27</sup> In general, Slade distrusted the Remonstrants for the heterodox views he felt they held on the divine inspiration of Holy Writ and on the Trinity, but he concentrated on Arminius's successor, Conradus Vorstius, in whom Slade was convinced these views culminated. In his eyes Vorstius was an outright Socinian. In his exposition he repeatedly referred to Erasmus as an author who had antitrinitarian and pelagian sympathies and who therefore could be regarded as a precursor of Vorstius and his adherents. According to Slade, Erasmus undermined the authority of the Bible by assuming that it contained errors. He quoted a letter from Erasmus to Petrus Barbirius, in which he declared that he was not prepared to accept uncritically all the assertions of Jerome, Augustine or even Paul.<sup>28</sup>

Slade's criticism of Erasmus is concealed in an abundance of quotations and references to sources, all of which meant to show how pernicious Vorstius's theology was. It did not occupy a particularly conspicuous place in his book. Nevertheless, both Vossius and Barlaeus took up cudgels to clear Erasmus's reputation of all stains. In a long letter to Grotius Vossius explained how he had defended Erasmus in conversations with the Dordt preacher Balthasar Lydius, the same Lydius who in 1606 had played a negative role in the consultations regarding the desirability of publishing his father's *Apologia pro Erasmo*. Vossius did not have the courage to go public about his defence of Erasmus, but he did pass on all sorts of suggestions to Grotius as to how best to get back at Slade. At the same time he indicated which

<sup>25</sup> Hugo Grotius, *Ordinum Hollandiae ac Westfrisiae pietas* (1613). Ed. E. Rabbie. Studies in the History of Christian Thought 66 (Leiden etc. 1995) 150, § 61. In other publications as well, for instance the *Verantwoordingh* (1622) and the *Annales et Historiae* (1657), Grotius expatiated on the thesis that the Dutch Reformed Church had always given shelter to a latitudinarian, moderate undercurrent. Cf. Grotius, *Ordinum pietas*, 307-308.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. B.J. Spruyt, 'Martin Bucers *Gulden Brief*. De irenische Bucer in de polemiek tussen Remonstranten en Contra-Remonstranten', *Bucer en de kerk*. Ed. F. van der Pol (Kampen 1991) 84-174, especially 99-109.

<sup>27</sup> Matthaëus Sladus, *Disceptationis cum Conrado Vorstio ... pars altera. De immutabilitate et simplicitate Dei ...* (Amsterdam 1614). The first part of the *Disceptatio cum C. Vorstio* appeared in 1612. On Matthew Slade see also *Matthew Slade 1569-1628, Letters to the English Ambassador*. Ed. W. Nijenhuis. Publications of the Sir Thomas Browne Institute, N.S. 6 (Leiden 1986).

<sup>28</sup> Sladus, *Disceptationis ... pars altera*, 8-9, 12, 39-40, 61-62. For the letter to Barbirius, see Allen Ep. 1225 (13 August 1521), 328-329 in particular.

Remonstrant intellectuals might be considered for this task.<sup>29</sup> It is therefore more than likely that he provided Caspar Barlaeus (1584-1648), the vice-regent of the States College, the Leiden School of Theology, with the ammunition for his refutation of Slade's arguments in the summer of 1615.<sup>30</sup>

In Barlaeus's book,<sup>31</sup> Erasmus is portrayed quite differently from Lydius's *Apolo-gia*. To Barlaeus, Erasmus was no man for compromises with an unpleasant propensity for sitting on the fence, he was a kindred spirit, an early reformer. Erasmus had always remained within the confines of orthodoxy; he was highly regarded by the great reformers, and the cause of the Reformation would be done no service if the man who had been the first to step into the breach were allowed to be accused of Ar-inism with impunity.<sup>32</sup> In Barlaeus's view Erasmus's exegetical work was above all suspicion: he had not rejected the Bible's divine inspiration, but he had allowed for the possibility that the apostle Paul had made one or two errors of minor importance. Barlaeus took great pains to show that the fragment of the letter to Barbirius which Slade quoted ruled out any charge of heterodoxy. Erasmus's secretary or the typesetter might have made a mistake. Furthermore, Erasmus wrote his letters in haste and frequently corrected them in subsequent editions. The same had happened in this case, for in the edition of 1538 the passage in question had been defused by the addition of the phrase "to use a hyperbole".<sup>33</sup>

It is also interesting to read how Barlaeus compares the opponents of Erasmus's plans for a reformation of religious life with the Counter-remonstrants who were now taking up arms against the appointment of Conradus Vorstius. Barlaeus does not identify leading figures like Grotius with Erasmus directly, but it is quite clear in which direction his arguments are going: in the same way as Erasmus had come up against a pack of intolerant monks, Grotius was having to fend off a horde of irritated theologians whose maliciousness, coarseness and ignorance would not permit an outsider

<sup>29</sup> *Briefwisseling van Hugo Grotius*. Ed. P.C. Molhuysen et al. Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, Grote serie (hereafter cited as BW) (The Hague 1928-) 1, Nr. 372: G.J. Vossius to H. Grotius, 16 September 1614. Vossius replies to a letter from Grotius, dated 8 September 1614 (*ibid.* 1, Nr. 368), in which the latter denounces Slade's book and asks how it could be refuted adequately.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Rademaker, *Life and Work of G.J. Vossius*, 96-103. Barlaeus was vice-regent of the States College from 8 May 1612. As successor to Petrus Bertius, Vossius accepted the regency of the College in April 1615; in the middle of June he moved to Leiden, where Barlaeus was putting the finishing touches to a pamphlet against Johannes Bogerman, who had criticized Grotius's *Ordinum pietas*. Barlaeus decided to incorporate his refutation of Slade into this pamphlet.

<sup>31</sup> Caspar Barlaeus, *Bogermannus ἐλεγχόμενος, sive Examen epistolae dedicatoriae, quam suis ad Pietatem Illustr. Ord. Hollandiae ac Westfrisiae notis praefixit Joh. Bogermannus ... In quo etiam crimina a Matthaeo Slado impacta Erasmo Roterodamo diluuntur* (Leiden 1615) 46-67. The dedication is dated Lugd. Batavorum, nono Calend. Augusti (24 July) anno 1615.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 65: "Belle vero se habent Reformationum res, si is qui primus negocium illud reformationis aggressus est, Arianus audiat et autoritatis S. Litterarum incertus fuisse credatur. Unicum hoc male habet Sladum, quod videat magni fieri a Remonstrantibus Erasmus, idque propter sanioris et moderatioris theologiae genium, quo totus eius vernat sermo; ideoque ut tanti viri autoritatem profligat, impietatis et haereseos notam illi inurere studet, quo scriptorum eius precium vilescat apud credulos et excel-lens hactenus de Erasmo concepta existimatio in discrimen adducatur."

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-57. As Erasmus confided to Barbirius, he refused to believe that people could be so foolish as to endorse all the writings of Luther. He then continues: "Ego sane nec Hieronymo nec Augustino sic addictus esse vellem; vix etiam ipsi Paulo, ut aliquid dicam ὑπερβολικῶς." According to Allen Ep. 1225, 328-329, the four last words were added in the *Op. Epist.* (Basel 1529) and later editions.

to move in on their territory. They believed that divinely inspired power of conviction and knowledge of the Scriptures was only present in those who, standing in their pulpits, were elevated above their congregations and were permitted to raise sacred issues by virtue of their official calling. But in practice it appeared that the preachers had no inkling of the doctrines of Arius, Pelagius or Socinus. Many of them had not even read anything about the history of the church and Arianism.<sup>34</sup> Barlaeus also quoted from Erasmus's letter to Barbirius: "I am so against discord that even a controversial truth upsets me."<sup>35</sup> Erasmus stood for truth, but had also wanted to serve harmony. Like Erasmus, Barlaeus felt that it was wrong to go to war over matters of faith that were not of the essence. Predestination was just such a non-essential matter.<sup>36</sup> Barlaeus's arguments are sharp in tone, showing how a writer brought up in the humanist tradition used his erudition, linguistic superiority and feeling for style to cast his argumentation in the form of a gripping literary product.

All in all it must be said that it was primarily scholars with Remonstrant leanings that gave expression to their appreciation for a compromise figure such as Erasmus. Their actions in the theological controversies were inspired by the great humanist's ideas in two ways: first of all, Erasmus had preached tolerance, and tolerance was what the Remonstrants wanted above all to exact from the Counter-remonstrants. In the second place, polemicists from the Remonstrant elite felt very strongly about a conviction that Erasmus had fervently cherished: theological casuistry should never be allowed to lead to schism. The way in which the Calvinists had pressed home their views revealed a mistaken self-assurance that Erasmus had already stigmatised as barbaric. In this respect what was most important was a restrained but constant scepticism which placed great emphasis on the limitations of the human spirit: the faithful were not allowed to fathom all mysteries. As Erasmus had to defend himself against suspicions of Arianism, so too the Remonstrants had to answer the charge that their views on the Holy Trinity were defiled by Socinian stains. Their defence boiled down to a categorical denial often accompanied by the observation that many theologians got bogged down in finesses that could not but lead to schism. Against the disputatiousness of the opposition party, Remonstrant scholars like Grotius invoked Erasmus and emphasised the importance of practical piety in everyday life.<sup>37</sup>

This view corresponded with official Remonstrant doctrine, since this aversion to scholastic niceties, combined with a tolerant attitude towards those with divergent views in matters of faith that were not central to their spiritual welfare, is to be seen not only in Vossius, Cunaeus, Grotius and Barlaeus but also in professional Remonstrant leaders like Wtenbogaert and Episcopius, who kept up the struggle after the National Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) and took great pains to preserve their flock from falling apart. The prominent Remonstrant Simon Episcopius (1583-1643) venerated Erasmus

<sup>34</sup> Barlaeus, *Bogermannus ἐλεγχόμενος*, 78-81.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 38. Cf. Allen Ep. 1225, 166-167: "Et mihi sane adeo est invisa discordia ut etiam displiceat veritas seditiosa."

<sup>36</sup> Barlaeus, *Bogermannus ἐλεγχόμενος*, 38-40.

<sup>37</sup> On the way in which Erasmian thought affected the world of learning, particularly in the seventeenth century, see G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes, 'Protestants irenisme in de 16e en eerste helft van de 17e eeuw', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift* 36 (1982) 205-222.



as a “*miraculum prudentiae ac perspicacitatis*”, a miracle of insight and shrewdness. If one leaves aside his rather excessive compliance with Rome, Episcopius felt Erasmus could be regarded as a shining example to the Remonstrants, since he had always preached simplicity in questions of dogma, and the virtues of peace, tolerance and moderation. This remarkable tribute is to be found in an apologetic work that appeared in 1631.<sup>38</sup> In spite of the fundamental recognition of Erasmus’s value to Remonstrantism, it cannot be said that Episcopius was prepared to relinquish the ideals of the Reformation for a vague, non-denominational profession of faith. He hung on to the possibility of reconciliation with his Calvinist rivals. Like Wtenbogaert he accepted the need of a confession of faith which could serve as the basis of a religious community that would one day claim official status in the Republic. It is presumably from fear of adverse repercussions on the struggle with the Counter-remonstrants that the Remonstrant leader Johannes Wtenbogaert (1557-1644) intentionally left out all mention of Erasmus in his historical expositions on the early Reformation.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand it is clear that he shared Episcopius’s ideas inspired by Erasmus. In any case, it is not difficult to quote passages in his letters in which he rejects the disputatiousness of the Counter-remonstrants and preaches tolerance.

Hope of rehabilitation and concern for the Remonstrant congregation were therefore important reasons for Episcopius and Wtenbogaert to remain within the frameworks established by the Reformation. For them, the Reformation was a change for the better, but even so they were convinced that the Reformed Church had serious flaws. Wtenbogaert pointed to the church’s mistaken inclination to impose upon the faithful interpretations of the Scriptures in the form of catechisms, confessions and synodal resolutions as if they were infallible decrees. In his opinion the Bible’s message was plain in all questions relating to salvation. Any explanation of dubious points could be based on an error, and for that reason it was of the essence to be tolerant of those who favoured deviant interpretations. By binding the faithful to rules of man’s making, the foundations of the Reformation were abandoned and the spectre of a new papacy loomed. In his flowery language, Wtenbogaert accused the pot that the

<sup>38</sup> [Simon Episcopius], *Responsio Remonstrantium ad libellum cui titulus est Specimen calumniarum atque heterodoxarum opinionum ex Remonstrantium Apologia excerptarum* (= W.P.C. Knuttel, *Catalogus van de pamfletten-verzameling berustende in de Koninklijke Bibliotheek* (The Hague 1890-1920, reprint 1978) Nr. 4165a) (Harderwijk 1631) 57-65, especially 64-65. Also included in *Episcopii Operum theologicorum pars altera* (Gouda-Rotterdam 1665); the citation in *pars secunda*, 301B: “[Erasmus] eam ... animi moderationem in diiudicandis ac discernendis necessariis a non necessariis dogmatibus ubique servavit contra theologorum pontificiorum aliorumque praecipitem ac prae fractam in condemnandis quibuslibet pene errantibus ἀσθάδειαν ac licentiam, ut miraculum prudentiae ac perspicacitatis in isto caliginoso aevo hodieque videri possit adeoque non viam tantum monstrasse veritatis simul ac pacis studiosis, sed perfectum et omnibus numeris absolutum exemplar, si in hoc aevum nostrum incidisset, praebiturus fuisset. Non citabimus loca, unde id manifeste liquet. Scripta eius ad unum omnia, Apologiae, Epistolae, Praefationes in Patres, ab ima ad summam usque chordam, aliud pene nihil sonant quam pacis, tolerantiae, moderationis consilia, non minus erudita quam salutaria. Huius profecto instar (si ea separet in quibus Romanae ecclesiae nimium, licet non sine cautelis quibusdam, indulsit) secutos se potius fatentur remonstrantes quam cuiusquam alterius ...”

<sup>39</sup> G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes, ‘De doorwerking van de Moderne Devotie met name bij de Remonstranten’, P. Bange et al. ed., *De doorwerking van de Moderne Devotie. Windesheim 1387-1987. Voordrachten gehouden tijdens het Windesheim Symposium, Zwolle/Windesheim, 15-17 oktober 1987* (Hilversum 1988) 81-94, especially 87-94.

orthodox Calvinists had hanging in the fireplace of threatening to become just as black as the Roman kettle that had been replaced because it was too black.<sup>40</sup>

What is very important is that Christian humanists like Hugo Grotius and Gerardus Joannes Vossius<sup>41</sup> developed further this irenic, basically non-confessional tendency in the Remonstrant experience of faith. Thus there slowly emerged within Remonstrantism an undercurrent of humanist origin which might be described as purely non-confessional, or even anti-confessional. As philologists versed in history, Grotius and Vossius judged that the careful study of biblical and patristic sources constituted a reliable guideline when it came to deciding what faith and church implied. They wanted the sources to speak for themselves, and Erasmus, with his emphasis on the importance of returning to the sources, had set a good example. By publishing editions of early Christian writers, by studying them in their historical context and by confronting them with profane contemporary writers, they wanted to lay the foundations of an ideal religious and ecclesiastical life. Unlike Wtenbogaert, for whom Catholicism was a fundamentally corrupt religion, Grotius saw it as an acceptable basis for a devout religious life handed down by tradition,<sup>42</sup> although this was contingent on centuries-old excesses and abuses being removed or remedied along the lines of the early Christian church. This was the only way to bring about a true reformation. The teachings of Luther and Calvin did not promote reform, but got in its way: their Reformation was a turn for the worse, since it represented a break with holy tradition.<sup>43</sup> By disseminating such views a scholar like Grotius put himself outside all religious denominations and it is he rather than Remonstrant leaders like Wtenbogaert and Episcopius that must be regarded as an exponent of a non-confessional religious life.

Much has been written about the Dutch Reformation in the sixteenth century without determining once and for all the extent to which it counts as an original and specific development.<sup>44</sup> It seems to me that the combination of humanism and

<sup>40</sup> *Brieven en onuitgegeven stukken van Johannes Wtenbogaert*. Ed. H.C. Rogge. Werken uitgegeven door het Historisch Genootschap, gevestigd te Utrecht, Nieuwe reeks (Utrecht 1868-1875) 2, 2 (1621-1626) 128-131, 145-152, 171-172: Wtenbogaert to Rem Bisschop, 28 March 1624; *ibid.*, 3, 3 (1630) 122-131: Wtenbogaert to some (unnamed) lawyers, 30 March 1630; *ibid.*, 188-199: Wtenbogaert to Frederik Hendrik, undated; *ibid.*, 3, 4 (1631-1644) 240-245: Wtenbogaert to Episcopius, undated. Cf. G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes, 'Jean Hotman en het Calvinisme in Frankrijk', *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 64 (1984) 42-77, especially 60-69; here the author points out that Jean Hotman (1552-1635) accepted the Reformation in general, but adopted a critical attitude towards Calvinism in particular: in this way Hotman might be regarded as a kindred spirit of Wtenbogaert.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. BW 12, Nr. 5443: Vossius to Grotius, 28 October 1641. See also BW 13, Nr. 5752: Vossius to Grotius, 17 June 1642; this informative letter is thoroughly examined in Spruyt, 'Martin Bucers *Gulden Brief*'. For an analysis of Vossius's deepest convictions see also Rademaker, *Life and Work of G.J. Vossius*, 140-142.

<sup>42</sup> BW 15, Nr. 6755: Grotius to Wtenbogaert, 12 March 1644, answering a letter of 21 February 1644 (*ibid.*, Nr. 6724).

<sup>43</sup> BW 15, Nr. 6939: Grotius to N. van Reigersberch, 2 July 1644.

<sup>44</sup> See D. Nauta, 'De reformatie in Nederland in de historiografie', P.A.M. Geurts - A.E.M. Janssen ed., *Geschiedschrijving in Nederland. Studies over de historiografie van de Nieuwe Tijd 2 Geschiedbeoefening* (The Hague 1981) 206-227; J.C.H. Blom - C.J. Misset, "'Een onvervalschte Nederlandsche geest". Enkele historiografische kanttekeningen bij het concept van een nationaal-gereformeerde richting', E.K. Grootes and J. den Haan ed., *Geschiedenis, godsdienst, letterkunde. Opstellen aangeboden aan dr. S.B.J. Zilverberg ter gelegenheid van zijn afscheid van de Universiteit van Amsterdam* (Roden 1989) 221-232.

Remonstrantism discernible in 17th-century scholars of the stature of Vossius, Cunaeus, Barlaeus and especially Grotius, produced a characteristic, perhaps even unique, spirituality only to be found in the Northern Netherlands. While much research remains to be done, it may be said that the mild scepticism, tolerance and philological meticulousness of these learned men are the quintessential features of a mentality which contributed a great deal to the rise of Enlightenment ideas later on in the same century. For the representatives of this persuasion Erasmus was a shining example. When his name was discredited by the orthodox Calvinists in the religious controversies surrounding Arminius, they took great care to stress his orthodoxy. Erasmus had never been guilty of Arianism but had promoted the cause of peace, tolerance and devoutness. Such, too, was his inspiring influence on the spiritual life of the seventeenth century.<sup>45</sup>

Hugo Grotius, one of the greatest scholars of his time, is proof of this assertion: he acclaimed Erasmus as an exemplary reformer and expressed his gratitude to him not only in his writings, but also by committing himself to erecting a bronze statue of Erasmus during the Truce. Despite opposition from the Counter-remonstrants the statue was hoisted into place in Rotterdam in 1622.<sup>46</sup> Grotius had by then already fled to France, but returning to Rotterdam in 1631 after years of exile, the first thing he did was to set off on a tour of the city to take a look at the statue. He commented on his pilgrimage in a letter to Wtenbogaert, concluding that the Dutch had every reason to express their gratitude to this learned man, this advocate of a legitimate reformation. He, Grotius, considered himself fortunate that he could appreciate his virtues, albeit from afar.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Among the Remonstrants the preacher Carolus Niellius also gave voice to his esteem for Erasmus. In a letter to Wtenbogaert he compared Erasmus with Calvin: "Quant a Erasme, je ne scay si Calvin eust eu si longue vie que luy, s'il ne l'eust point surmonté en grandeur d'ouvrages. Mais on pourroit bien opposer la suffisance de luy seul a celle de tous les peres du synode de Dordrecht, et dire librement, qu'il y a eu plus d'erudition et de bon sentiment de la pieté et charité chrestienne, que tous les professeurs Calvinistes n'en descouvrent en leurs escrits, qu'ils publient tous les jours:" *Brieven Wtenbogaert* 3, 2 (1628, 1629) 547-552, undated.

<sup>46</sup> 'Grotiana', R. Pintard ed., *La Mothe le Vayer – Gassendi – Guy Patin. Etudes de bibliographie et de critique, suivies de textes inédits de Guy Patin* (Paris [1943]) 77-78; N. van der Blom, *Erasmus en Rotterdam*. Roterodamum 26 (Rotterdam-The Hague 1969) 44-56.

<sup>47</sup> BW 5, Nr. 1735: Grotius to Wtenbogaert, 26 January 1632.

