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To the Field Sermon: Popular Reformation in the Low Countries between Urban Space and Countryside

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Abstract

Among the most striking phenomena in the history of the Reformation in the Low Countries are the Protestant open-air sermons of the summer of 1566. These sermons, held in fields, woods, marshlands or other open spaces beyond the city limits, were attended by hundreds or even thousands of men and women from all social groups, eager for reform. This essay discusses the geographical proliferation, organization and characteristics of the field sermons, which can be seen as an early example of the spatial accommodation of religious division in early modern Europe. It also argues that these sermons had a profound impact on urban communities, because civic authorities were faced with the challenge of controlling the flow of people and information, especially at the city gates. Moreover, field sermons had an impact on urban space at large, as sermon-goers claimed their place in town through a range of spontaneous and ritualized acts that reinforced their goal of obtaining a site of worship within the city walls.

Keywords: Low Countries, popular religion, Reformation, urban space

The chronicler Marcus van Vaernewijck reportedly found out from his washerwoman about the details of the first Protestant open-air sermon near his hometown. In the early afternoon of Sunday 30 June 1566, a young man in plain clothes was seen preaching in a small meadow surrounded by shrubs and bushes outside one of Ghent's city gates. He sat on cloaks lent by his listeners, alternately reading from a book, presumably a Bible, and lecturing. He explained the gospel of that day, called for penance, and urged prayers for the king and the pope, that God might bring them to their senses and make them allow the peaceful preaching of the true faith. His following did not exceed thirty. Men, women, and young girls sat in three separate groups, each with their own teacher, singing psalms from small books. Psalm books were also sold to a swelling crowd of curious bystanders.[1]

The 'hedge sermons' are a well-known phenomenon in the historiography of the Low Countries. They were part of the so-called 'Wonder Year', when a simmering religious and

[1] Marcus van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden in die Nederlanden en voornamelick binnen Ghendt*, Ferdinand van der Haeghen, ed. (Ghent 1872–1881), 1: 2–3.

political crisis reached boiling point.[2] From April 1566 to April 1567, a coalition of nobles petitioned regent Margaret of Parma to suspend heresy placards, Protestants returned from exile, field sermons spread rapidly, iconoclastic violence broke out, Reformed believers won religious freedom and lost it again. No wonder, then, that field sermons have traditionally been discussed as part of this broader political narrative.[3] The Marxist historian Erich Kuttner offered an alternative interpretation by attributing their success to a deep-rooted socio-economic crisis.[4] Nevertheless, both Kuttner and his critics regarded the public preaching as essentially a prelude to the wave of iconoclasm commonly known as the *Beeldenstorm*.[5] Benjamin Kaplan shifted focus by asking what the clandestine field sermons in 1566 reveal about the sites and boundaries of Reformed worship in sixteenth-century Europe.[6] He

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[2] Going forward, I avoid the commonly used term 'hedge sermon' (*hagenpreek*, *prêche de la haie*), because it rarely features in contemporary sources and, if it does, only in a very pejorative sense; Robert Fruin, 'Over het woord haagpreek', *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal- en Letterkunde*, Vol. 15 (1886), 308–15. Chroniclers employ the more neutral terms *predicatie*, *sermoen*, *presche* (sermon) or *veltpredicatie* (field sermon).

[3] The best English-language accounts of the Wonder Year are Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY 1977), 68–84; Andrew Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt: Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism* (Oxford 1992), 109–46; Guido Marnef, 'The Dynamics of Reformed Militancy in the Low Countries: The Wonderyear', in N. Scott Amos, Andrew Pettegree and Henk van Nierop, eds, *The Education of a Christian Society: Humanism and the Reformation in Britain and the Netherlands* (Aldershot 1999), 195–210.

[4] Erich Kuttner, *Het hongerjaar 1566* (Amsterdam 1949).

[5] Marcel Backhouse, 'Beeldenstorm en bosgeuzen in het Westkwartier (1566–1568). Bijdrage tot de geschiedenis van de godsdiensttroebelen der Zuidelijke Nederlanden in de XVIe eeuw', *Handelingen van de Koninklijke Geschied- en Oudheidkundige Kring van Kortrijk*, Vol. 38 (1971), 1–174; Phyllis Mack Crew, *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm in the Netherlands, 1544–1569* (Cambridge 1978); Solange Deyon and Alain Lottin, *Les casseurs de l'été 1566: l'iconoclasme dans le Nord de la France* (Paris 1981); Peter Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts & Civic Patriots: The Political Culture of the Dutch Revolt* (Ithaca, NY 2008).

[6] Several studies on the French Wars of Religion have asked similar questions: Penny Roberts, 'The Most Crucial Battle of the Wars of Religion? The Conflict over Sites for Reformed Worship in Sixteenth-Century France', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte,* Vol. 89 (1998), 247–67; Jérémie Foa, 'Marques et contremarques: la dimension spatiale des conflits entre protestants et catholiques au début des Guerres de Religion (1560–1574)', *Travaux de l'Institut Géographique de Reims*, Vols. 31–32

suggested that they were an early example of the practice of *Auslauf*, or allowing religious minorities to attend services outside the boundaries of a community.[7] Yet our knowledge of field sermons in the Low Countries and how urban communities dealt with this phenomenon remains limited. Monographs on the Reformation in particular towns often devote a few pages to public preaching during the Wonder Year, but basic questions about where open-air sermons were typically held or how authorities tried to control the flow of people between city and hinterland have not been systematically addressed. This is remarkable given the extensive literature on urban space in the late medieval and early modern Low Countries.[8] Scholars established the fundamental role of religious ceremonies in the construction of civic space,[9] but also showed how tensions between social groups or between city and state regularly led to ritual clashes around sacred sites, religious buildings or processional routes.[10] Studies on the *Beeldenstorm* emphasized how the destruction of church space also affected the fabric of urban society.[11] In the same vein, the question of the impact of the Reformation

(2005), 103–17; Yves Krumenacker and Jules Léonard, 'La nouveauté de la prédication protestante dans les villes francophones XVI–XVIIe siècles', *Histoire Urbaine*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (2012), 21–7.

[7] Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA 2007), 161–71.

[8] For a general perspective, see Peter Arnade, Martha Howell and Walter Simons, 'Fertile Spaces: The Productivity of Urban Space in Northern Europe', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 32 (2002), 515–48; Marc Boone and Martha C. Howell, eds, *The Power of Space in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Cities of Italy, Northern France and the Low Countries* (Turnhout 2013); Bruno Blondé, Marc Boone and Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, eds, *City and Society in the Low Countries, 1100–1600* (Cambridge 2018).

[9] Bart Ramakers, *Spelen en figuren. Toneelkunst en processiecultuur in Oudenaarde tussen Middeleeuwen en Moderne Tijd* (Amsterdam 1996); Margit Thøfner, *A Common Art: Urban Ceremonial in Antwerp and Brussels during and after the Dutch Revolt* (Zwolle 2007); Andrew Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges, c. 1300–1520* (Cambridge 2011).

[10] Peter Arnade, *Realms of Ritual: Burgundian Ceremony and Civic Life in Late Medieval Ghent* (Ithaca, NY 1996); Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, *La ville des cérémonies. Essai sur la communication politique dans les anciens Pays-Bas bourguignons* (Turnhout 2004); Paul Trio and Marjan De Smet, eds, *The Use and Abuse of Sacred Places in Late Medieval Towns* (Leuven 2006); Liesbeth Geevers and Violet Soen, eds, *Sacrale ruimte in de vroegmoderne Nederlanden* (Leuven 2017).

[11] Andrew Spicer, 'After Iconoclasm: Reconciliation and Resacralization in the Southern Netherlands, c. 1566–1585', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (2013), 411–33; Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, Koenraad Jonckheere and Ruben Suykerbuyk, eds, *Beeldenstorm: Iconoclasm in the*

on urban space is increasingly central to the debate on religious co-existence in the Dutch Republic.[12]

This essay is devoted to Protestant open-air sermons and their effect on urban communities in the tumultuous summer of 1566. I address the practicalities of organizing, attending or controlling field sermons and examine how these practices led to growing tensions over urban space itself. While the first part of this essay discusses the sermons and how they unfolded in fields and suburban areas between May and August 1566, the second part explores how these Protestant manifestations affected urban sites, particularly gates, streets and marketplaces. My main sources are the contemporary journals of city-dwellers who reported on the troubled times in which they lived.[13] The most comprehensive and reliable accounts are those of Marcus van Vaernewijck, a Catholic history writer in Ghent, Pasquier de la Barre, a public prosecutor with Reformed sympathies in Tournai, and Godevaert van Haecht, a Lutheran panel-maker in Antwerp.[14] Their invaluable voices are supplemented by the shorter accounts of chroniclers or diarists from other towns and by a number of judicial sources. Of particular value are the *mémoires justificatifs* composed by several cities after the Wonder Year at the order of the central authorities.[15] Although highly apologetic, these accounts offer surprisingly detailed information on the practical difficulties of policing urban space.

Sixteenth-Century Low Countries, special issue of *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*, Vol. 131, No. 1 (2016).

[12] Jaap Geraerts, 'Competing Sacred Spaces in the Dutch Republic: Confessional Integration and Segregation', *European History Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (2021), 7–44; Genji Yasuhira, 'Transforming the Urban Space: Catholic Survival through Spatial Practices in Post-Reformation Utrecht', *Past & Present*, Vol. 255, No. 1 (2022), 39–86.

[13] Judith Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520–1635* (Oxford 2011), 293–06.

[14] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 2 vols.; *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht over de troebelen van 1565 tot 1574 te Antwerpen en elders*, Rob van Roosbroeck, ed., 2 vols. (Antwerp 1929–1930); *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer pour servir à l'histoire de Tournai, 1565–1570*, Alexandre Pinchart, ed., 2 vols. (Brussels 1859–1865).

[15] On these *mémoires justificatifs*, see Ruben Suykerbuyk, 'De Sacra Militia Contra Iconomachos: Civic Strategies to Counter Iconoclasm in the Low Countries (1566)', *BMGN – Low Countries Historical Review*, Vol. 131, No. 1 (2016), 21.

Preaching in the Fields

The field sermons were a feature of a new and bolder phase of the Reformation in the Low Countries.[16] On 12 July 1562, around 150 to 200 people attended what is considered the first Protestant open-air sermon, on the churchyard of Boeschepe, a village in the Westkwartier, a textile region in the southwest of Flanders.[17] Although the official backlash was merciless, public preaching continued, especially in the vicinity of Tournai and Valenciennes, where government troops intervened in 1563 to quell the rebellious mood.[18] Following the moderation of the heresy placards in April 1566, field sermons, although still clandestine, resumed. On 26 May, Sebastiaan Matte, a former hatmaker who had returned from exile in England, held a nightly sermon at a crossroads near Roesbrugge, a large village in the Westkwartier. In the following days, open-air sermons quickly proliferated in the same area.[19] Numerous public sermons were also reported in Walloon Flanders, the region around Lille.[20] Witnessing their success, in June 1566 the Calvinist leadership met in Antwerp, where it concocted a more purposeful plan to venture into the open.[21] Around the feast day of Saint John the Baptist (24 June), field sermons were held near the major centres of Antwerp, Ghent and Tournai, leading to general turmoil.[22] In the northern territories, where Calvinism was

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[16] Christine Kooi, *Reformation in the Low Countries, 1500–1620* (Cambridge 2022), 110–17.

[17] Marcel Backhouse, 'The Official Start of Armed Resistance in the Low Countries: Boeschepe 12 July 1562', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte,* Vol. 71 (1980), 198–226; Jim van der Meulen, *Woven into the Urban Fabric: Cloth Manufacture and Economic Development in the Flemish West-Quarter (1300–1600)* (Turnhout 2021), 150–2.

[18] Gérard Moreau, *Histoire du protestantisme à Tournai jusqu'à la veille de la Révolution des Pays-Bas* (Paris 1962), 206–39; Arnade, *Beggars*, 72–4.

[19] Backhouse, 'Beeldenstorm', 73–4; Marcel Backhouse, 'Hagepreken in het Vlaamse Westkwartier (mei–december 1566)', *De Franse Nederlanden* (1984), 127–43.

[20] Even before the Compromise of April 1566, Protestant meetings in homes and fields had been reported in this region; Robert S. Duplessis, *Lille and the Dutch Revolt: Urban Stability in an Era of Revolution, 1500–1582* (Cambridge 1991), 204–5.

[21] Crew, *Calvinist Preaching*, 5–10; Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*, 114; Marnef, 'The Dynamics', 196–200.

[22] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 62; Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 1; *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 55–8 (de la Barre), 2: 233 (notes by the Catholic beer porter Nicolas Soldoyer); Marnef, *Antwerp in the Age of Reformation: Underground Protestantism in a*

less embedded, preachers were initially signalled on the estates of the Protestant nobility. Reformed leaders from Amsterdam organized the first field sermon in Holland (14 July) near the more tolerant town of Hoorn. On 31 July, they finally deemed the situation safe enough to convene a meeting outside Amsterdam's walls.[23] In the rural provinces of Gelre and Friesland, the first public sermons occurred at a time when iconoclasm had already broken out in Flanders.[24]

The support from within cities varied greatly. A few centres like Tournai, Lille, Valenciennes and Antwerp had had sizeable and well-organized Reformed communities since the 1540s, while in many other places the success of open-air preaching led to the establishment of Calvinist consistories. The field preachers were a diverse bunch, including Geneva-trained intellectuals, apostate priests, and modest craftsmen. Some had returned from exile; others were recent converts. Some preached in only one place; others were itinerant. As the Low Countries had both Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities, preachers catered to both. In some places, services were offered in both languages. Most ministers and lay preachers stuck to the simple message that a true believer must follow Scripture and firmly reject the fabrications and abuses of the Catholic clergy. This resonated with a long tradition of reform-mindedness and anti-clericalism in the Low Countries. The preachers' simple appearance and clarity of speaking also made a deep impression.[25]

Notwithstanding the preachers' undeniable appeal, no one could have predicted the irresistible attraction the field sermons exerted on ordinary people in the summer of 1566. When local law enforcers sought to put an end to the sermon witnessed by Marcus van Vaernewijck's

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Commercial Metropolis, 1550–1577 (Baltimore, MD 1996), 88; Jozef Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar te Gent 1566–1567* (Ghent 2016), 47.

[23] Alastair Duke and D. H. A. Kolff, 'The Time of Troubles in the County of Holland, 1566–67', in Alastair Duke, ed., *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries* (London 1990), 125–31; Henk van Nierop, 'Van wonderjaar tot Alteratie, 1566–1578', in Marijke Carasso-Kok, ed., *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam. Een stad uit het niets, tot 1578* (Amsterdam 2004), 454–5; Arnade, *Beggars*, 86; Femke Deen, *Publiek debat en propaganda in Amsterdam tijdens de Nederlandse Opstand. Amsterdam 'Moorddam' (1566–1578)* (Amsterdam 2015), 53–4.

[24] Maarten Hageman, *Het kwade exempel van Gelre. De stad Nijmegen, de Beeldenstorm en de Raad van Beroerten, 1566–1568* (Nijmegen 2006), 175, 183–4; J. J. Woltjer, *Friesland in hervormingstijd* (Leiden 1962), 150–2.

[25] Crew, *Calvinist Preaching*, 140–81; Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*, 116–17; Marnef, 'The Dynamics', 196–200; Arnade, *Beggars*, 84–5.

washerwoman, a multitude of men and women poured out of the city in sheer excitement, while more cautious citizens watched from atop the ramparts. Due to the tumult, the display of authority failed miserably.[26] More importantly, this almost carnivalesque crowd quickly morphed into a committed group of men, women and children, which, often as families, frequented the preaching.[27] Van Vaernewijck at first dismissed the participants as low-lives and thoughtless youths, but he soon admitted that respectable and god-fearing citizens also attended and sometimes converted after no more than four or five sermons. On Sunday 28 July, two of Ghent's main commercial streets and the central marketplace were virtually deserted during a sermon outside one of the city gates.[28] Augustijn van Hernighem, a corn inspector from Ypres, complained that Calvinist preaching pulled so many people from towns, villages and hamlets that artisanal activity came to a standstill, which made merchants hesitant to invest.[29] Jan de Pottre, a Catholic merchant from Brussels, made a similar observation.[30]

In a few weeks' time, all over Flanders, Hainault, Brabant, Zeeland and Holland, the field sermons became socially diverse mass events. Of course, chroniclers are notoriously unreliable when citing large numbers, but there can be no doubt that attendances effectively ran into the thousands. Pasquier de la Barre estimated that on 30 June – the same day as the eventful preaching near Ghent – about nine to ten thousand people went to hear a sermon near Tournai.[31] According to Godevaert van Haecht, a sermon outside Antwerp on the same Sunday attracted about twenty thousand people.[32] The Calvinist merchant Laurens Jacobsz Reael counted about five thousand men and women at one of the first sermons in Holland, in

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[26] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 3–6.

[27] Deyon and Lottin, *Les casseurs*, 26.

[28] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 1, 9, 43, 80; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 51–2.

[29] Augustijn van Hernighem, *Eerste bouck van beschrijfvinghe van alle geschiedenesse (1562–1572)*, A. L. E. Verheyden, ed. (Brussels 1978), 17.

[30] *Dagboek van Jan de Pottre, 1549–1602*, B. de St Genois, ed. (Ghent 1861), 22.

[31] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 58–61. The highest numbers cited by van Vaernewijck and de la Barre for field sermons near Ghent and Tournai are eight to nine thousand and fourteen to fifteen thousand respectively; Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 20; *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 95–6.

[32] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 63; Marnef, *Antwerp*, 88.

the vicinity of Haarlem.[33] These figures more or less match those put forward by the authorities.[34] Estimations of crowd sizes at more distant places were more fantastical, reflecting the boastful campaigning of the Reformed. Van Haecht reported rumours that in August at least fifty thousand men and women had flocked outside Bruges for a two-day preaching marathon, while in fact – partly due to extreme weather – four to five thousand people attended.[35] Of course, the frequency of these field sermons is at least as relevant. For the period from May to August, no fewer than eighty public sermons are documented for the Westkwartier alone.[36] In Tournai, preachers offered their teachings every Sunday and on one other weekday, usually a Thursday.[37] De la Barre remarked that around mid-July, fewer peasants had been attending because they could now go to sermons closer to home.[38]

Finding suitable terrain was an important challenge. In Zeeland, the first public sermon (30 June), attended by about three hundred inhabitants from the towns of Middelburg, Vlissingen and Veere, was held in a secluded dune valley.[39] Early preaching near Antwerp was conducted in a small wood, but the preacher was alarmed when people started climbing the

[33] Joh. C. Breen, 'Uittreksel uit de Amsterdamsche Gedenkschriften van Laurens Jacobsz. Reael, 1542–1567', *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap*, Vol. 17 (1896), 19.

[34] The government cited numbers between 15,000 and 30,000 for the 30 June sermon near Antwerp; Floris Prims, *Het wonderjaar (1566–1567)* (Antwerp 1941), 107.

[35] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 95; Ludo Vandamme, 'Het Calvinisme te Brugge in beweging (1560–1566)', in *Brugge in de Geuzentijd. Bijdragen tot de geschiedenis van de hervorming te Brugge en in het Brugse Vrije tijdens de 16de eeuw*, Dirk van der Bauwhede, ed. (Bruges 1982), 111–13.

[36] Backhouse, 'Hagepreken', 128.

[37] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: passim. The patterns for Ghent and Valenciennes were similar; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 50–1; Deyon and Lottin, *Les casseurs*, 27. In Antwerp, the frequency was even higher; Rob van Roosbroeck, *Het wonderjaar te Antwerpen 1566–1567. Inleiding tot de studie der godsdienstonlusten te Antwerpen van 1566 tot 1585* (Antwerp 1943), 10.

[38] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 90–2.

[39] C. Rooze-Stouthamer, *Hervorming in Zeeland (ca. 1520–1572)* (Goes 1996), 209.

trees to get a better view.[40] At a later sermon, one man fell from a tree and broke his leg.[41] Soon, the Antwerp Calvinists settled on the Laar, a common land near the village of Borgerhout, which could accommodate large numbers of people for simultaneous sermons in Dutch and French.[42] People referred to this open field as the *groen kercke* or 'green church'.[43] The 18 documented sermons held near Ghent from June to August 1566 were organized at nine or ten different sites. Five convened outside the Heuvelpoort, one of the city gates, on a 'small plot that seemed suitable for the purpose', and four at the Stalendries, a large farmland adjacent to the village of Wondelgem.[44] Most sermons near Tournai were held on an open field behind the abbey of Prés Porchins, conveniently situated between the city ramparts and the river Scheldt.[45] At the first occasion, some boys climbed the walls of the monastery to have a better view, but they were reprimanded by the preacher's assistants, who wished to placate the terrified nuns.[46]

The Reformed benefited from the fact that local public authority in the Low Countries was highly fragmented.[47] The organizers of the open-air sermons in Zeeland cleverly exploited the complex division of jurisdictions on the islands of Walcheren and Schouwen to frustrate law enforcers.[48] All field sermons near Oudenaarde (Flanders) were held within the territorial

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[40] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 48, 62. Pieter Bruegel the Elder evoked a wood sermon in his *The Sermon of Saint John the Baptist* (1566); Barbara A. Kaminska, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder: Religious Art for the Urban Community* (Leiden 2019), ch. 4.

[41] *Antwerpsch chronykje, in het welk zeer veele en elders te vergeefsch gezogte geschiedenissen sedert den jare 1500 tot het jaar 1574* (Leiden 1743), 71.

[42] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 63; *Antwerpsch chronykje*, 70, 73, 75, 77, 78.

[43] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 70, 72, 93, 96, 97.

[44] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 31; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 50–1.

[45] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 90–2, 107, 113–14, 117, 122, 124, 126–7, 131 (de la Barre); 2: 235–8 (Soldoyer). This abbey was destroyed by Protestant troops in December 1566; 'Abbaye des Prés Porchins', in Ursmer Berlière, *Monasticon belge. Tome I: Province de Namur et de Hainaut* (Maredsous 1890–1897), 2: 470–76.

[46] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 90–2.

[47] For Flanders, see Frederik Buylaert and Miet Adriaens, *Lordship, Capitalism, and the State in the County of Flanders (c. 1250–1570)* (forthcoming).

[48] Rooze-Stouthamer, *Hervorming in Zeeland*, 209–11. The same happened in Holland and Brabant; Duke and Kolff, 'The Time of Troubles', 130–31; Gerard van Gurp, *Reformatie in Brabant. Protestanten en katholieken in de Meijerij van 's-Hertogenbosch, 1523–1634* (Hilversum 2013), 71.

boundaries of the seigniories of Pamele and Bevere.[49] The various spots outside Ghent's city gates where the new religion was preached, belonged to no less than four jurisdictions, those of the Benedictine abbeys of Saint Peter and Saint Bavon and the rural districts of the Oudburg and the Land van Aalst.[50] Whether ordinary sermon-goers cared much about these institutional subtleties is doubtful.[51] Yet in their *mémoires justificatifs* several cities stressed that most public sermons had taken place beyond the city limits and thus outside their jurisdiction. The magistracy of Ghent claimed that it had been unable to stop the preaching because of the *Concessio Carolina* (1540), an imperial ordonnance which had abolished the city's judicial authority outside its walls and curtailed its political power in the wider region.[52] For ordinary people, it was probably more important that public sermons were held within an easy distance. A significant number of Reformed meetings took place just outside cities, often near gates. This meant that townsfolk could comfortably go on foot. Since on weekdays preaching usually occurred early in the morning or in the evening, the effect on work attendance was presumably not as dramatic as some entrepreneurs suggested.[53] However, some men and women had to travel considerably farther to hear a preacher. This was initially the case in Zeeland and Holland, where public sermons were organized in safe spots miles away from the larger towns where the intended audience lived.[54] This was also the case for peasants or small-town inhabitants, who could not count on the services of a regular preacher.

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[49] *Mémoire justificatif du magistrat d'Audenaerde sur les troubles arrivés en cette ville, en 1566*, D. J. Van der Meersch, ed. (Ghent 1842), 160–1.

[50] *Verslag van 't Magistraet van Gent nopens de godsdienstige beroerten aldaer, loopende van den 30 Juny 1566 tot den 30 April 1567*, Ph. Kervyn de Volkaersbeke, ed. (Ghent 1850), 20. Cf. Hans Van Werveke, 'La banlieue primitive des villes flamandes', in *Etudes d'histoire dédiées à la mémoire de Henri Pirenne par ses anciens élèves* (Brussels 1937), 399–401.

[51] Most chroniclers do not comment on these issues, except for a few notes in *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 55, 58–9. Cf. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith*, 166–7.

[52] Désiré Van de Casteele, 'Justification du magistrat de Gand concernant les troubles religieux arrivés en cette ville du 30 juin 1566 au 7 mai 1567', *Annales de la Société d'Emulation de la Flandre Occidentale*, Vol. 4 (1869), 16–17. Cf. Marc Boone, 'Droit de bourgeoisie et particularisme urbain dans la Flandre bourguignonne et habsbourgeoise (1384–1585)', *Revue Belge de Philologie et d'Histoire*, Vol. 74, nos. 3–4 (1996), 725.

[53] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: passim; *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: passim.

[54] Rooze-Stouthamer, *Hervorming in Zeeland*, 209; Van Nierop, 'Van wonderjaar tot Alteratie', 454.

Those living in the towns of Axel and Hulst in the north of Flanders undertook long day trips to attend sermons near Eeklo, Waarschoot, and even Ghent.[55] Some assemblies aimed at a wider regional public, including a large field sermon near Deinze (25 July) and the ill-fated gathering near Bruges (10–11 August), both in Flanders. Enthusiasts travelled by horse, wagon, or barge, sometimes spending the night in the fields.[56]

As the Reformed community became more confident, it started to long for more than preaching and psalm singing alone. Although administering sacraments was considered an unacceptable breach of heresy law, preachers regularly performed baptisms.[57] At least on one occasion, the Lord's Supper was celebrated.[58] Ministers also blessed marriages and even proclaimed wedding bans,[59] and deacons held alms collections for the poor.[60] These increasingly elaborate gatherings required considerable logistics. Simple wooden pulpits were built with sticks and branches.[61] In Bruges, almost everyone knew that a local carpenter had

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[55] Johan Decavele, 'De reformatorische beweging te Axel en Hulst (1556–1566)', *Bijdragen voor de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, Vol. 22 (1968–1969), 14.

[56] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 35–6; *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene, behelzende het verhaal der merkwaardigste gebeurtenissen, voorgevallen te Gent sedert het begin der godsdienstberoerten tot den 5en april 1571*, Frans De Potter, ed. (Ghent 1870), 8; *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 94–5; Breen, 'Uittreksel', 17; Vandamme, 'Het Calvinisme te Brugge', 112–13.

[57] Many chroniclers mention baptisms and weddings. See in particular Ch. Paillard, 'Les grands prêches calvinistes de Valenciennes (juillet et août 1566)', *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français,* Vol. 26 (1877), 33–43, 73–90, 121–33.

[58] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 2: 238 (Soldoyer).

[59] For the proclamation of wedding banns, see *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 107 and 124.

[60] *Kroniek eener kloosterzuster van het voormalig Bossche klooster 'Mariënburg' over de troebelen te 's-Hertogenbosch e.e. in de jaren 1566-1575*, H. van Alfen, ed. ('s-Hertogenbosch 1931): 1–2; *Troubles religieux du XVIe siècle au quartier de Bruges (1566-1568)*, A.C. De Schrevel, ed. (Bruges 1894): 366, 385, 401; Duplessis, *Lille and the Dutch Revolt*, 204.

[61] Breen, 'Uittreksel', 19; Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 28–31, 54–5; *Troubles religieux au quartier de Bruges*, 398; *Troubles religieux au XVIe siècle dans la Flandre maritime, 1560-1570*, Edmond de Coussemaker, ed. (Bruges 1876), 2: 122; Deyon and Lottin, *Les casseurs*, 27–8.

made a wooden pulpit for a sermon on the estate of a Protestant noblewoman.[62] In other cases, two or three pulpits were built for simultaneous preaching.[63] Often, psalm books were sold.[64] Most provisions were more mundane, however. Tents were set up to protect preachers and listeners from the sun or heavy rain. While in most cases beer, bread and other foodstuffs were sold, for larger sermons, cooking equipment was provided.[65]

The most striking development was the fact that these open-air sermons quickly attracted weapons. As early as the end of May 1566, many among the four to five thousand participants at a field sermon near the village of Bondues, north of Lille, were armed.[66] Yet it does seem that the Calvinist leaders who galvanized the mass sermons in late June had initially hoped to hold unarmed rallies to win the goodwill of both local and central authorities.[67] Their optimism crumbled rapidly. On 2 July, the magistracies of both Antwerp and Tournai proclaimed that it was forbidden to attend Protestant sermons, both inside and outside the city.[68] The next day, the central authorities issued a more stringent ordinance, which threatened preachers with the death penalty and held out a range of punishments for sermon-goers.[69] These civic and state decrees were received with a mixture of horror and defiance. As a result, in early July, armed men, some on horseback, came to protect the preachers in Antwerp, Tournai and Ghent.[70] The precaution was not unwarranted, since an Antwerp

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[62] *Troubles religieux au quartier de Bruges*, 226, 231, 238, 243, 255, 268; Vandamme, 'Het Calvinisme te Brugge', 110.

[63] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 54–5; Van Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 18.

[64] *Antwerpsch chronykje*, 70; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 50.

[65] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 28–31, *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 72; Van Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 18.

[66] Duplessis, *Lille and the Dutch Revolt*, 205.

[67] Marnef, 'The Dynamics', 195–6.

[68] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 66; Ph. Génard, 'Ordonnantiën van het Antwerpsch magistraat, rakende de godsdienstige geschillen der XVIe eeuw', *Antwerpsch Archievenblad,* Vol. 2 (1865): 386–87. In the Westkwartier, similar bans were proclaimed a week earlier; *Troubles religieux dans la Flandre maritime*, 3: 188.

[69] *Verslag van 't Magistraet van Gent*, 85–9; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 53–4.

[70] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 64–5; *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 66–81; Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 8.

Catholic tried to shoot a minister during a sermon. In the days following his sensational but clumsy attempt, firearms sold like hot cakes in Antwerp.[71]

More generally, the realization that there would be no official toleration of the Reformed faith in the short term had a profound effect. By the middle of July, field sermons in the Low Countries became fully armed events.[72] The preachers were often escorted by an impressive guard.[73] On 14 July, Pasquier de la Barre counted no fewer than one hundred horsemen and 2500 footmen.[74] Yet the chroniclers were impressed at least as much by the armour of ordinary men, both townspeople and peasants. At a large field sermon in a hamlet situated between Ghent and Oudenaarde, townsmen came equipped with rapiers, daggers, swords, pikes, gaffs, pistols and harquebuses, while rural dwellers had tied their swords or pikes to sticks or brought their scythes.[75] Some Catholic observers, such as a nun from a tertiary convent in 's-Hertogenbosch and a cloth-merchant from Ghent, sneered that there was nothing evangelical about these armed gatherings: Christ had preached the Word barefoot and bareheaded and had certainly not instructed his following to carry sticks and rods.[76] Godevaert van Haecht dryly remarked that, when his Lutheran coreligionists started to have their own public sermons, they went unarmed.[77] At the same time, both advocates and opponents of Reformed preaching were relieved that, apart from a few incidents or occasional bursts of panic, the armed peace prevented the bloodshed that had afflicted France in the preceding years.[78]

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[71] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 64–5.

[72] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 25–6; Backhouse, 'Hagepreken', 134; Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*, 114–15; Marnef, 'The Dynamics', 198–99; Arnade, *Beggars*, 87.

[73] Van Roosbroeck, *Het wonderjaar*, 11.

[74] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 95–6.

[75] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 25–6. See *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 82 for a comparable listing of weaponry.

[76] *Kroniek eener kloosterzuster*, 1; *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 7.

[77] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 95.

[78] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 21–2; *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 75–6; *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 95; Crew, *Calvinist Preaching*, 8–9; Marnef, 'The Dynamics', 198–9. Cf. Judith Pollmann, 'Countering the Reformation in France and the Netherlands: Clerical Leadership and Catholic Violence 1560-1585', *Past & Present*, Vol. 190 (2006), 83–120.

Crossing Civic Boundaries

In a spatial, and often in a legal sense as well, the Protestant open-air sermons in the Low Countries took place outside cities. At the same time, the impact of field preaching on urban communities was profound. Most sermon-goers lived in cities, and the ultimate goal of Reformed believers was to obtain a place of worship within the town walls. This presented civic governments with major challenges. Simply banning inhabitants from attending sermons was futile, but representative bodies, particularly guilds, were also reluctant to use any form of force to prevent field sermons or sermon-going, or even stop Protestant preaching within the city.[79] Therefore, when civic guards were established or night watches tightened, many citizens grumbled.[80] Godevaert van Haecht observed that some of the men charged with guarding the gates liked to go to the sermons themselves.[81] Marcus van Vaernewijck, who was elected head of a small division of armed burghers in early August, complained that he had to use all his powers of persuasion to get his men to take the oath to protect the clergy.[82] In Tournai, some citizens declared that they were prepared to guard the city for the king or resist a popular uprising, but they outright refused to swear to stop sermons in the city.[83]

The difficulties in safeguarding urban space are evident in the controversies surrounding the city gates. In the imagination of urban governors, gates were thresholds to an enclosed civic territory built upon law, order and community.[84] But in the tumultuous summer of 1566, controlling the flow of people energized by Reformed preaching became simply impossible. Many cities considered closing the gates in the daytime to prevent their inhabitants from going to the field sermons or making trouble on their return, but few town councils agreed to a total lockdown.[85] It was rumoured that Bruges had closed its gates in anticipation of the

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[79] Marnef, *Antwerp*, 88–9; Van Nierop, 'Van wonderjaar tot Alteratie', 454–55; Van Gurp, *Reformatie in Brabant*, 77; Deen, *Publiek debat*, 54.

[80] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 2: 61–6; Suykerbuyk, 'De Sacra Militia', 31–2.

[81] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 63.

[82] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 56–9; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 58–9.

[83] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 122–4, 126, 2: 238–41.

[84] Daniel Jütte, *The Strait Gate. Thresholds and Power in Western History* (New Haven, CT 2015), 209–51.

[85] Discussions on the closing and opening of gates are reported for Tournai, Aalst and Ypres: *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 58–61; *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 95; *Documents du XVIe siècle, faisans suite à l'inventaire des chartes*, I. L. A. Diegerick, ed. (Bruges

mass meeting in August, but despite strict precautions, the deliberative body decided to leave a few gates open.[86] In Ghent, the infrastructure itself was inadequate, as a significant part of the walls had been demolished as a result of the 1540 imperial sentence.[87] In the handful of smaller towns in which local authorities tried to completely seal off urban space, this did not prove very effective either. On the day of the first public sermon near Haarlem, the city magistracy kept the gates closed and charged the local militia with guarding them. Yet when they opened a gate in the early morning to let some women go to the bleaching grounds, a man was able to slip out. More spectacularly, several city dwellers climbed over the walls or swum under the floating barriers that delimited the waterways, before being picked up by boats. When the gates were finally opened in the late morning, a large crowd rushed out of town.[88] In Nijmegen, too, inhabitants were able to leave the town by boat to attend the first sermon in the province of Gelre.[89]

Most cities took less drastic measures and simply tightened control on the coming and going of people. Prominent citizens positioned themselves at the gates to discourage citizens from attending the sermons.[90] On 30 June, Pasquier de la Barre was sent to the Porte de Valenciennes, through which sermon-goers had left Tournai, with the authorization to close this gate if trouble arose or if a mob of strangers tried to enter the city.[91] In their *mémoire justificatif*, the aldermen of Oudenaarde declared that they had personally monitored those leaving or entering and had kept the city keys on their bodies. The magistracies of several towns stated that, at critical times, they had only opened the wickets of the gates, so people had to pass one by one.[92] Yet the guarding of the gates did not always go as smoothly as these

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1874–1877), 1: 45–6. When iconoclasm broke out, more cities decided to close (part of) their gates; Suykerbuyk, 'De Sacra Militia', 22–3.

[86] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 94; Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 54–5; Vandamme, 'Het Calvinisme te Brugge', 110.

[87] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 59; *Verslag van 't Magistraet van Gent*, 5, 19, 47, 74; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 59.

[88] Breen, 'Uittreksel', 18.

[89] Hageman, *Het kwade exempel*, 183–84.

[90] Suykerbuyk, 'De Sacra Militia', 22.

[91] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 60.

[92] *Mémoire justificatif du magistrat d'Audenaerde*, 160; *Documents du XVIe siècle*, 47–8; J. Smit, 'Hagepreeken en beeldenstorm te Delft, 1566-1567', *Bijdragen en Mededelingen van het Historisch Genootschap,* Vol. 45 (1924), 212–13.

apologetic accounts suggest. Marcus van Vaernewijck relates that the officers at the Antwerp gates who were registering the names of sermon-goers were swarmed by men and women eager to attend the Reformed assembly, shouting 'write me down, write me down'. In desperation, the guards tore up their papers.[93] While van Vaernewijck may have exaggerated his second-hand account for dramatic effect, Antwerp sources confirm that gatekeepers let everyone through without asking too many questions.[94]

Urban governments were also notoriously powerless when it came to controlling news and information flows.[95] Announcements of upcoming sermons spread rapidly and unhindered through various media. Rumours of the first public sermon in Holland travelled quickly through the county. When a second sermon was planned in the vicinity of Haarlem, the news was disseminated a day in advance among the citizens and merchants of Amsterdam and Alkmaar.[96] The first sermon near Delft was announced on the morning of the same day by posting leaflets on the town gates and other public places.[97] It was almost impossible to police the spread of these rumours and handbills.[98] However, some Reformed meetings were publicly announced as if they were fairs or festive occasions. In Ghent, a town crier named Lieven went around advertising a large sermon near Deinze and informing people of a boat service on the river Lys, including the exact boarding place and timetable.[99] The boldest act took place in Valenciennes, a hotbed of Protestant defiance since the early 1560s.[100] On Sunday 7 July, a preacher assisted by four armed men walked confidently to the busy marketplace and made a sign with his hand. After that, a large group of men and women

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[93] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 17–8.

[94] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 63; *Antwerpsch chronykje*, 70.

[95] Daniel Bellingradt, 'The Early Modern City as a Resonating Box: Media, the Public Sphere and the Urban Space of the Holy Roman Empire, Cologne and Hamburg, c. 1700', *Journal of Early Modern History*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2012), 201–40; Deen, *Publiek debat*, 51–74.

[96] Breen, 'Uittreksel', 16.

[97] Smit, 'Hagepreeken', 12; Duke and Kolff, 'The Time of Troubles', 129.

[98] Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, 'Des portes qui parlent: placards, feuilles volantes et communication politique dans les villes des Pays-Bas à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Bibliothèque de l'Ecole des Chartes*, Vol. 168, No. 1 (2010), 151–72; Jelle Haemers and Valerie Vrancken, 'Libels in the City. Bill-casting in Fifteenth-Century Flanders and Brabant', *The Medieval Low Countries,* Vol. 4 (2017), 165–87.

[99] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 35–6; *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 8.

[100] Arnade, *Beggars*, 66–74.

followed him through the Porte de Tournai and headed to a marsh field beyond the city limits to hear the sermon.[101]

Almost inevitably, field sermons spilled over into the civic sphere. Sometimes small groups of elated sermon-goers sang psalms on their return to the city.[102] In Oudenaarde, the city magistracy was unable to disperse two bands of several hundred psalm-singing devotees.[103] When the gathering near Bruges ended with chants outside the town walls, sympathizers from within the city reportedly climbed the ramparts and joined in.[104] In some cities, the public singing of psalms became a regular feature. Around mid-August, psalms sounded every evening in the streets and alleys, on the bridges, in houses and guild shops and even in front of the city hall of Ghent.[105] This practice was seriously tainted by the memory of the *chanteries* in Valenciennes and Tournai, large manifestations of hundreds of psalm-singing men and women that greatly alarmed the central authorities in the early 1560s.[106] To make things worse, observers described the singers as people of low social status, mainly young women, adolescents and children, who often went arm in arm, showing little respect for the rules of propriety.[107]

In the southwest of the Low Countries, where the Reformation had found fertile ground among workers in the textile industries, the *actes de présence* within urban space were more deliberately provocative.[108] Protestant believers defied the local religious and political order in a quasi-ritualized manner.[109] In the pilgrimage town of Ronse, armed sermon-goers, mainly from the surrounding villages, made an orderly tour around town while singing psalms, no

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[101] Paillard, 'Les grands prêches', 73–5; Deyon and Lottin, *Les casseurs*, 27.

[102] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 31, 66–8; *Documents du XVIe siècle*, 177.

[103] *Mémoire justificatif du magistrat d'Audenaerde*, 12–13.

[104] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 95.

[105] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 66–8; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 59.

[106] Moreau, *Histoire du protestantisme*, 168–91; Arnade, *Beggars*, 66–74. For France, see Barbara B. Diefendorf, 'Religious Conflict and Civic Identity: Battles over the Sacred Landscape of Montpellier', *Past and Present*, Vol. 237, No. 1 (2017), 61–4.

[107] *Mémoire justificatif du magistrat d'Audenaerde*, 12–13; Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 66–8; *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 93.

[108] Arnade, *Beggars*, 95–104.

[109] On the forms of political violence, see Marc Boone, 'Armes, coursses, assemblees et commocions. Les gens de métiers et l'usage de la violence dans la société urbaine flamande à la fin du Moyen Âge', *Revue du Nord,* Vol. 359, No. 1 (2005), 7–33.

doubt a parody of the annual circumambulation with the relics of Saint Hermes.[110] Several manifestations took place in Ypres over the span of a few days. One evening in late July, when a large crowd returned from a sermon in the area, a few dozen armed men headed to the central market square. There, they halted and started chanting loudly in front of the house of the first alderman, who together with his colleagues, looked on in astonishment. The city officials lost control completely on the accustomed day of the Tuindag procession (4 August), which had been cancelled because a mass sermon just outside Ypres was planned on the same day. After much deliberation, only three gates were left open, but the guards were unable to restrain audacious sermon-goers. In the morning, about one hundred and fifty armed men from the neighbouring town of Poperinge insisted on passing through Ypres to attend the sermon in an open field at the other side of the city. Around noon, a much larger crowd of about two thousand paraded the minister through the centre, singing psalms exultantly on the marketplace and in front of the cloth hall. Finally, a second preacher with a smaller following repeated this show of defiance.[111]

In Tournai and Valenciennes, the Reformed even went one step further by carrying out military exercises to show off their strength.[112] On the feast day of Saint James (25 July), an armed troupe escorting the preacher entered Tournai in battle order, with seven men marching in front. On the central market square, they performed the *limachon* or 'snail', a military choreography that involved moving slowly in a spiral formation.[113] Intentionally or not, this coincided with the procession of the confraternity of Saint James. The ritual clash was easily won by the Reformed, as many brethren abandoned the statue of their patron saint and joined the agitated crowd. The next day, the city magistracy called the Protestant foremen to account, but they argued that their only objective was to defend the city against external enemies or a popular uprising.[114] One week later, Protestants from Valenciennes also performed a

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[110] *Mémoire justificatif du magistrat de Renaix, 1566-1567*, Henry Raepsaet, ed. (Ghent 1853), 28; R. Willemyns, 'De Sint-Hermescultus en de Fiertelommegang te Ronse', *Annalen Geschied- en Oudheidkundige Kring van Ronse* (1974), 20–26.

[111] Van Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 17–9; *Documents du XVIe siècle*, 29–30, 43–55, 169–71; Backhouse, 'Beeldenstorm', 75; Arnade, *Beggars*, 98, 129.

[112] Marnef, 'The Dynamics', 199; Arnade, *Beggars*, 87.

[113] Arnaud Guinier, 'De guerre et de grâce: le pas cadencé dans l'armée française de la seconde moitié du XVIII[e] siècle (1750-1791)', *e-Phaïstos*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2015), 16.

[114] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 107–9, 2: 236–38.

limachon, although they did so before entering the city.[115] In fact, until iconoclasm broke out, instances of collective violence were extremely rare.[116] On 7 July, a crowd of armed sermon-goers stormed the prison in the textile town of Armentières to free a Calvinist minister.[117] This sensational event was widely (but not always very accurately) reported, which underlines its exceptional nature.[118]

Although there were some isolated incidents, in the other regions of the Low Countries, field preaching usually did not lead to similar displays of power within cities.[119] Still, Protestants everywhere cherished their desire to acquire their own places of worship. Throughout the summer, Reformed leaders pleaded with both local and central authorities for full toleration and the allocation of church buildings, outside or – preferably – within the town walls.[120] Local requests were made in Antwerp, Ghent and Tournai.[121] While impatience grew in August, in some cases the tempestuous weather acted as a catalyst. On 9 August, a rainstorm caused devotees on their way from Ghent to Bruges to take shelter in the parish church of the borough of Eeklo, where to the dismay of the priest they tried to stage a sermon.[122] Two days later, a merchant put his warehouse in the centre of Middelburg at the disposal of a large group of rained-out sermon-goers. There, the preacher resumed his teachings on top of a wine barrel. Local officials immediately tried to put an end to this serious breach of law, but around

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[115] Paillard, 'Les grands prêches', 87; Deyon and Lottin, *Les casseurs*, 28.

[116] Crew, *Calvinist Preaching*, 9–10.

[117] J.-M. Regnault and P. Vermander, 'La crise iconoclaste de 1566 dans la région d'Armentières. Essai de description et d'interprétation', *Revue du Nord*, Vol. 59 (1977), 223; Backhouse, 'Beeldenstorm', 75; Duplessis, *Lille and the Dutch Revolt*, 208.

[118] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 16–7; *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 8; *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 69; Van Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 17.

[119] An exception is 's-Hertogenbosch in the north of Brabant, where on 11 August an armed guard escorted the preacher into the city; *Kroniek eener kloosterzuster*, 2; Van Gurp, *Reformatie in Brabant*, 76–7.

[120] Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*, 115; Marnef, 'The Dynamics', 200.

[121] *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 70; Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 44; *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 121.

[122] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 55; *De kroniek van Godevaert van Haecht*, 1: 94; Crew, *Calvinist Preaching*, 9.

the same time urban authorities in nearby Veere and Vlissingen tacitly allowed the Reformed to use hospice buildings outside the town walls for their services.[123]

Meanwhile, fears of a violent outburst were rising. Rumours circulated that the Reformed were plotting attacks on abbeys or clergy.[124] Grain riots in Tournai and Ghent put social discontent on edge.[125] On 10 August, Sebastiaan Matte delivered a seditious sermon at a convent outside Steenvoorde, after which part of the audience went inside and destroyed religious statues and paintings.[126] This act highlighted one of the most burning issues in popular Protestant theology, namely the biblical prohibition on the veneration of 'graven images'. But what could have remained an isolated event in a troubled region quickly grew into a wave of Calvinist iconoclasm, unprecedented across Europe. Within a fortnight, major centres in the Low Countries were heavily affected, including Ypres (16 August), Antwerp (20 August), Ghent (22 August), Tournai (23 August), Amsterdam (23 August) and Valenciennes (24 August), as well as many smaller towns.[127]

It is easy to understand why Catholic observers saw a direct link between the field sermons and the attacks on churches. For the nun from 's-Hertogenbosch, it was all part of 'the abomination that was done against the holy faith of the Roman church, the commandments of God and the seven sacraments'.[128] Nonetheless, it remains ambiguous whether open-air preaching was directly at the root of iconoclasm. Indeed, during the first days of violence in the Westkwartier, iconoclasts acted on the orders of radical preachers such as Matte. However, the picture becomes murkier as the scope of iconoclasm widened. In large cities such as Antwerp and Ghent, prominent lay members of the consistories orchestrated the

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[123] Rooze-Stouthamer, *Hervorming in Zeeland*, 218–21.

[124] Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, 74–7; Deyon and Lottin, *Les casseurs*, 147–53; Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*, 115.

[125] *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 114–17; Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 93–7; Kuttner, *Het hongerjaar 1566*, 300–8; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 62–4.

[126] Backhouse, 'Beeldenstorm', 78; Arnade, *Beggars*, 98–9.

[127] Anne-Laure Van Bruaene, Koenraad Jonckheere and Ruben Suykerbuyk, 'Introduction. Beeldenstorm: Iconoclasm in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries', *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, Vol. 131, No. 1 (2016), 3–14.

[128] *Kroniek eener kloosterzuster*, 1; Erika Kuijpers, ''O Lord, save us from shame': Narratives of Emotion in Convent Chronicles by Female Authors during the Dutch Revolt, 1566-1635', in Susan Broomhall, ed., *Gender and Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Destroying Order, Structuring Disorder* (London 2015), 127–47.

attacks on churches, sometimes hiring men of lower social status to do the job. Of course, many of those had also attended the public sermons, but some of the theologically trained ministers were vehemently opposed to iconoclastic violence. Finally, in the relatively quiet northern provinces of the Low Countries, iconoclasm often took on the pragmatic character of an orderly cleansing organized by local authorities. In Leeuwarden (Friesland), for example, Reformed ministers preached for the first time in early September, after the statues of saints had already been removed from the church.[129]

The chaos of the first fortnight of iconoclasm sealed the fate of the Protestant Reformation as a mass movement in the Low Countries. On the face of it, the Reformed party triumphed, as it realized its ambition of more permanent sites of worship. On 23 August, a weary regent allowed Protestant preaching in those places outside the city walls where it had happened before that date. In the following weeks, Reformed leaders struck local agreements with provincial governors that sometimes went considerably further.[130] In Ghent and Tournai, permission was granted to build places for worship outside the city walls.[131] In Amsterdam, the Franciscan church was given to the Calvinists.[132] In Antwerp, three vacant plots in the city were allocated to the Dutch- and French-speaking Reformed community and to the Lutherans.[133] But despite these successes, broad popular support rapidly dwindled. Many turned away due to the shock of iconoclasm, or they backed off when Calvinist leaders

[129] Backhouse, 'Beeldenstorm', 78–9; Crew, *Calvinist Preaching*, 185–96; Duke and Kolff, 'The Time of Troubles', 132–4; Woltjer, *Friesland in hervormingstijd*, 152; Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*, 119–27; Marnef, 'The Dynamics', 200–1; Arnade, *Beggars*, 90–165; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 75–93.

[130] Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*, 132–3; Marnef, 'The Dynamics', 202; Soen, 'The Beeldenstorm and the Spanish-Habsburg Response (1566-1570)', *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, Vol. 131, No. 1 (2016), 108–9.

[131] Van Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, 1: 306, 2: 14–5; *Mémoires de Pasquier de la Barre*, 1: 165–7, 177–8; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 176–9.

[132] Van Nierop, 'Van wonderjaar tot Alteratie', 460.

[133] Guido Marnef, 'Multiconfessionalism in a Commercial Metropolis: the Case of 16th-Century Antwerp', in Thomas Max Safley, ed., *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World* (Leiden 2012), 76–8.

pushed for open civil war. From October 1566 to April 1567, central and local authorities stepped up pressure on the Reformed, until they finally forced them to close their temples.[134]

Conclusion

In the summer of 1566, thousands of men and women expressed their dissatisfaction with the traditional church by gathering in fields and other open spaces outside the cities. There they listened to charismatic preachers, sang psalms and had their children baptized. Recent studies on religious co-existence in the Dutch Republic have challenged ideas of strict boundaries between official public worship and the private worship of minorities.[135] In a similar way, the history of field sermons on the eve of the Dutch Revolt tells us as much about urban public space as it does about the suburban or rural sites, where these sermons took place semi-clandestinely. Urban authorities formally banned sermon-going, but in practice were unable or – especially in cities with strong guilds – unwilling to curb the fervour of a significant part of their population. These tensions between control, toleration and disorder played out most visibly at the city gates. On the face of it, Protestant sermons in woods, fields and meadows, although worrisome, had the advantage of placing heterodoxy both physically and legally outside the civic community. But rather than foreshadowing the practice of *Auslauf*, the success of these gatherings boosted the push for a place for Reformed worship within the city walls. Often the transgression of civic boundaries was unpremeditated, as was the case with youths singing psalms in the streets or sermon-goers seeking shelter from extreme weather conditions. But especially in those regions of the Low Countries where the Reformation was fuelled by wider socio-economic grievances, Protestants deliberately targeted public places – and soon church buildings – in rituals of defiance that shattered any illusion that religious dissidence could be easily removed from the urban community.

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Figure 1. In a famous newsprint Frans Hogenberg depicts crowds at a Lutheran and a Calvinist (armed) field sermon, with the bastioned city of Antwerp in the background. Etching, c. 1566–70, Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, RP-P-OB-78.752.

[134] Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt*, 142–6; Marnef, 'The Dynamics', 205–08; Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar*, 193–214.

[135] Geraerts, 'Competing Sacred Spaces'; Yasuhira, 'Transforming the Urban Space'.