

be taken anywhere, which enhanced the spread of lute music throughout Europe. 'I don't get why today's conservatories elevate it into something so special, because the lute used to be everywhere: at the court, in pubs, people's homes,' Van Wissem states. 'I want to fetch it from the museums and give it back to the people.'

That explains why Jozef van Wissem also ventures among the audience while playing. In one respect, he wants the lute to be regarded as an instrument that can hold its own with a concert grand piano, while at the same being one on which he can experiment.

'The pieces I play sound different every night, because lutes resound differently in different spaces', he says. 'You can't just buy an instrument like this anywhere. All my lutes have been especially designed and built for me by Michael Schreiner, a perfectionist who spent a great deal of time considering how they ought to sound and which guarantees an exceptional acoustic experience. You'd best not spoil it with any electronic gadgetry.'

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Religion

Lutherans in the Low Countries

Self-Imposed Thresholds and Calvinist Clout

In 2017, it is 500 years since Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg. The movement for reform that Luther set in motion got off to a rapid and forceful start in the Netherlands. It was above all in the cosmopolitan trading metropolis of Antwerp that the influence of this church reformer made itself felt. German merchants brought not only goods with them, but also new religious ideas. Luther also found an important foothold in the Augustine monastery that had just been established in Antwerp. Several of the monks had studied with their fellow monk in Wittenberg and started propounding his views from the pulpit. However, the emperor Charles V and his central government reacted with a series of increasingly stricter edicts denouncing this as heresy. In 1522, the monks of the Augustine monastery were imprisoned. Two obstinate monks who refused to retract their erroneous views were burnt at the stake on the Grand Place in Brussels in 1523.

The vigorous repression by the central government and the dismantling of the Augustine monastery in Antwerp were serious blows to the young Lutheran reform movement. A small Lutheran community remained in Antwerp, which maintained contacts with Wittenberg. Small groups of believers met in private homes. However, some Antwerp Lutherans wanted to take it a step further and set up a real underground church organisation, but this clearly met with resistance from Martin Luther. He informed the Antwerp Lutherans that secret preaching and secret baptisms and marriages were absolutely not allowed. According to him, such activities were reminiscent of the work of rebellious sects, and in his view they were the work of the devil. Believers were however allowed to gather together in the privacy of their homes and quietly celebrate their faith. Those who were not able to resign themselves to this had to move to another place where it was possible to practise

openly. Luther's rigid approach was related to his views on the secular government, which he considered had to be strictly obeyed. In his opinion, an underground community life with preachers who were not officially tolerated was going too far. In the Dutch context, however, this sort of attitude put up serious barriers to the growth and power of the Lutheran movement.

By contrast, the Calvinism that began to grow more strongly in the Netherlands from the mid-sixteenth century onward was well equipped to enter into the fray with a hostile government. From the mid-1550s, the Calvinists began to set up well-organised underground congregations in a number of Walloon, Flemish and Brabant towns and cities. In the 1560s, when opposition to Spanish policy in the Netherlands was on the increase, the leaders of the Calvinist Church did not hesitate to let their voice be heard. During the Wonderyear – the year of the Petition and the Iconoclasm (1566-67)¹ – they even took the lead in the armed resistance. By contrast, the Lutherans adopted a far more cautious position. When an army of Protestants was crushed by royal troops in March 1567, the Calvinists tried to take power in the city. They were however defeated by a coalition of Catholics *and* Lutherans. The Calvinists saw this as a betrayal of the Protestant cause. Together with their doctrinal differences, this carved a deep rift between the two Protestant groups.

After the Wonderyear, the Calvinists resolutely allied themselves with the Revolt launched by William of Orange. When, from 1572 onward, he achieved his first successes in Holland and Zeeland, and after 1577 was also able to win several towns and cities in Flanders and Brabant over to his policy of rebellion, the Calvinists had the wind in their sails. They had after all shown themselves to be unconditional supporters of the Revolt. In the meantime, the influence of Lutheranism remained mostly confined to Antwerp. In that city they were able to build up a well-organised church between 1578 and 1585, but even then, the political distrust shown by the Calvinists worked against them.

Alexander Farnese's conquest of the rebellious towns and cities of Flanders and Brabant in the 1580s was accompanied by a mass migration of Protestants to the rebellious north. In the Republic of the Netherlands, the Calvinist Church did



Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Portrait of Martin Luther*, 1528, Lutherhaus, Wittenberg

not gain a religious monopoly, but it did become the privileged public church. It picked the fruits of its good organisation and strong commitment to the Revolt, assets the Lutheran Church could not lay claim to. For that matter, in the Republic Lutheranism initially remained mainly associated with migrants from Antwerp, who in the seventeenth century were joined by German and Danish immigrants. The rich congregation of Amsterdam built up a prominent position in Dutch Lutheranism, but in this case too, the Lutheran Church, which in religious terms was very much oriented towards Germany, also had to play second fiddle to the public Calvinist Church.

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Translated by Gregory Ball

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1 See *The Low Countries*, XXIV, 2016, pp. 287-288.