



Enny de Bruijn, ***Eerst de waarheid, dan de vrede. Jacob Revius 1586-1658*** (Dissertatie Utrecht 2012; Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2012, 660 pp., ISBN 978 90 239 2620 7).

Enny de Bruijn has produced a magisterial biography of Jacob Revius (1586-1658), one of the foremost Dutch poets of the Dutch Golden Age, but also a Contra-Remonstrant minister, a distinguished historian, a fierce polemicist, and many other things besides. This Ph.D. thesis (University of Utrecht, May 2012) is a labor of love, which took the author nearly a decade to complete. Unusually for Renaissance and Reformation specialists in The Netherlands in the twenty-first century, she has a clear affinity with the religious convictions of her subject. She is the editor of the Culture section of the *Reformatorsch Dagblad* [Dutch Reformed Daily], which counts many orthodox Calvinists among its subscribers. Yet her even-handed and nuanced biography of Revius deserves a much larger readership. Using poetry, correspondence, pamphlets, and consistory records (though, sadly, not Revius' sermons, which have not survived), De Bruijn paints a fascinating picture of a man utterly committed to his ideals. From an early age, Revius put all his energy and considerable talents into preparing what he believed to be 'the way of the Lord'. If we needed any reminding of the fact that religion pervaded all aspects of life in seventeenth-century Europe, we have to thank De Bruijn for making this 'alien country' accessible for a modern audience.

Apart from his religious Dutch poetry, still much admired by specialists on Dutch literature, Revius is primarily remembered for his involvement in the *Statenvertaling*, the authoritative bible translation commissioned by the States General (i.e. federal government) of the Dutch Republic in 1619. Yet there is a larger story. De Bruijn shows that Revius' contributions to the *Statenvertaling* were part and parcel of his ceaseless efforts to reshape both church and society in accordance with his Counter-Remonstrant principles. He was no Puritan, though. As De Bruijn notes, outward shows of godly living, such as a woman's hairdo and clothing, were of little concern to Revius. In his view, Biblical injunctions on this point applied to a particular place and time only – the early Christian communities, rather than seventeenth-century Dutch Protestants. To him, these were *adiaphora* – things indifferent. Implicitly, De Bruijn also challenges the Whig interpretation of religious and political conflict in the Dutch Golden Age, still promoted by eminent historians like Jonathan Israel. Her biography suggests that Revius does not fit the reductive schema of a supposed battle between the forces of 'modernity' -toleration

and secularism, commonly associated with the Remonstrants, Hugo Grotius and Spinoza – and the forces of ‘tradition’ – religious intolerance and the refashioning of society in accordance with Puritan ideals, commonly associated with ‘die-hard Calvinists’ like Gomarus, Lubbertus, and Voetius. De Bruijn argues convincingly that freedom of conscience was just as sacred for Revius as it was for his opponents. Nor could any of Revius’ contemporaries, not even ‘liberals’ like Grotius and Spinoza, conceive of the freedom of religious worship and the separation of church and state that we take for granted today. How we got here remains a fascinating question, of course. Yet if De Bruijn’s biography teaches us anything, it is that the process of secularization – if, indeed, that is the right term – must have been far more complicated than Jonathan Israel wants us to believe.

Although De Bruijn sympathizes with Revius, she is not blind to the failings of her hero. At many points, she highlights his tendency to elevate personal convictions to infallible dogmas of faith. As Master (1641-1658) of the States College in Leiden, a dormitory for theology students, Revius fought a spirited, but ultimately losing battle against the New Philosophy. We have to be careful here not to jump to conclusions. In analyzing the reception of Copernicanism in seventeenth-century Europe, it does not make much sense to label participants in the debate as either ‘traditionalists’ or ‘modernists’. In many ways, the difference between Revius and, for example, Copernicus’ staunchest supporter, Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), was one of degree, not of kind. Indeed, De Bruijn reveals that Revius became acquainted with the doyen of the New Philosophy, René Descartes (1596-1650), during the latter’s visit to Deventer in the early 1630s. Yet Revius’ appreciation of Descartes changed dramatically following his appointment as Master of the States College, right at the time that *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) was all the rage among Leiden students. As Master of the States College, Revius considered it his duty to publish one pamphlet after another denouncing what he believed to be the anti-biblical and anti-Christian nature of the New Philosophy. He did so in blatant contravention of University policy.

On various occasions, the Board of Overseers (*College van Curatoren*) sought to ban any mention of Descartes and Copernicus from academic debate – to no avail, of course. Why was Revius so hostile to the New Philosophy? De Bruijn points out that Revius’ intellectual make-up consisted of a combination of a) the scholastic philosophy of the Spanish Jesuits Luis de Molina (1535-1600) and Francisco de Suarez (1548-1617), and b) the philological methods of Joseph Justus Scaliger (1540-1609), both of which he had made his own during his student days in Leiden in the early 1600s. As a theologian, Revius was well aware of the principle of accommodation (i.e. God speaking in ways that human beings can understand and respond to), which Church Fathers like St. Augustine had used so effectively in reconciling Christianity with Greek philosophy. However, Revius lived in an age in which both Protestant and Catholic Churches privileged literal over allegorical interpretations of the Bible. Revius’ philological approach to the Holy Scriptures taught him that the Creation story in Genesis was first and foremost a historical fact. The

principle of accommodation was all good and well, but God could not be made a liar. In Revius' view, this was exactly what Descartes and Galileo had done in their support of Copernicanism. Moreover, he objected to the systematic doubt and subjective understanding of the world that was at the heart of the New Philosophy. Like so many of his contemporaries, he believed in the existence of one Objective Truth, which could only be known by reference to the Authorities (i.e. the Bible, the Classics, scholastic philosophy, et cetera, et cetera).

Descartes never reacted to Revius' pamphlets in public, nor did he take his attacks very seriously. Yet Revius was hardly alone in his criticism of the New Philosophy. As we know, it is the Catholic Church which has had to live down Galileo's trial (1633) ever since. De Bruijn's biography serves as a salutary warning against equating 'enlightenment' and 'scientific progress' with the Dutch Golden Age, or with Protestantism more generally. The picture is far more complicated than that. As he grew older, Revius became painfully aware of the fact that he lived in a society and served a church highly divided along all kinds of lines. Considering the ideals that he had entertained as a young minister, this must have been a great disappointment to him.

De Bruijn has written an excellent and long overdue biography of a major figure in seventeenth-century Dutch history. It deserves a large audience, both inside and outside The Netherlands. It would be good if it could be made available in English translation, just like Henk Nellen's biography of Grotius. The two works are really companion-pieces to each other.

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