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Pleading for diversity : the church Caspar Coolhaes wanted

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Citation

Gottschalk, L. S. (2016, April 6). *Pleading for diversity : the church Caspar Coolhaes wanted*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/38762>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

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Issue Date: 2016-04-06

Chapter 3: Middelburg trials (1581)

The Arbitral Accord of 1580 did not bring any permanent solution to substantive issues. Although amicable relations had been restored in the Leiden church, Coolhaes was still theologically suspect to many. In April 1581, questions about Coolhaes were brought up in a local Synod in Rotterdam. Later that year, he was called before the national Synod in Middelburg (1581).¹³⁴ It wanted to examine him on the basis of *Apologia* and *Breeder bericht* (both from 1580), and to discuss his ideas on church order.

Coolhaes was annoyed at the accusations which the Synod was making against his books. He felt that he had expressed himself adequately on church order in them, so he thought that the Synod had no need to meet with him to discover his views. The preachers, however, declared that Coolhaes' books had been written without church permission.¹³⁵ Hendrik van der Corput, who served as the second scribe at the Synod, also complained that Coolhaes used quotes from well-respected theologians and reformers in his books in a way which was not good. Thinkers who were respected and widely read, said Van der Corput, nevertheless had their errors or dark passages, but Coolhaes collected all these together and quoted them to prop up his heretical positions.¹³⁶

The stage is set

According to Coolhaes, the Leiden magistracy were not in favor of him appearing at the Middelburg Synod. They wanted to leave the situation of the turbulent Leiden church to its hard-fought balance, and let any accusers come to confront the preacher in Leiden, for, they said, the wound must be healed in the place it was made.¹³⁷ Coolhaes felt at this point that the schisms had been healed.¹³⁸ The magistrates also thought that the Synod had not been called

134. Letter from Arent Cornelisz to Coolhaes, June 1, 1581, in Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 66-67. See also: [Cornelisz?], *Cort eenvoudich ende waerachtich verhael*, 1582. Coolhaes critiques this document in Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 117-28.

135. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 37.

136. Letter from Van der Corput to Arent Cornelius, *WMV* III, 2, 164; as cited in Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 40.

137. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 128; also "Letter from Coolhaes to the Middelburg Synod, June 10, 1581," Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 68.

legally.¹³⁹ Therefore, in obedience to the magistrates' opinion of the Synod, and probably also to his own reluctance, Coolhaes did not go; he was not there in Middelburg on the first day of the Synod. The Synod wrote to request that he come. They wrote to the classis of Leiden to ask for their help in persuading Coolhaes to make the trip. Coolhaes complained about the cost and trouble;¹⁴⁰ but nevertheless wrote that he did not want to appear to be "hiding from the light." So, he went to the magistracy and requested their permission to go after all.¹⁴¹ One wonders how much of Coolhaes' initial non-appearance was based on the magistrates' belief in their own authority, and how much on his own qualms.

The Synod of Middelburg (1581) was important in the establishment of the Reformed religion and the building up of the Calvinist ecclesiastical system in the Netherlands for several reasons. The forty-eight Reformed representatives who met there, despite being a minority in the nation numerically, were trying to make far-reaching and comprehensive decisions – ecclesiastically, socially, and in the areas of education and the care of the poor.¹⁴² The delegates felt themselves to be the inheritors of the medieval Catholic Church in taking care of society.¹⁴³ As one of the earlier synods, it was influential in the initial formulation of some ecclesiastical policies. It would be, however, the last synod in which so many provinces of the Northern and Southern Netherlands were present, since Antwerp would fall in 1585, and from that time onwards the church in the Northern Netherlands could not meet with those from the South.¹⁴⁴ The Synod wanted to deal with questions of church law and liturgical practice, but mostly with the troublesome cases of Caspar Coolhaes and Petrus Dathenus (Pieter Datheen), the Calvinist translator of the Heidelberg Catechism and the first Dutch

138. Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 68.

139. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 37; also "Letter from Coolhaes to the Middelburg Synod, June 10, 1581." Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 68.

140. "Letter from Coolhaes to the Middelburg Synod, June 10, 1581," Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 68.

141. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 129.

142. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, x. There is also a helpful list of all delegates, with biographical details for most: 128-38. Also see Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 48-50, for more discussion on those present and their positions.

143. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 32.

144. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, x.

rhymed translation of the Psalms.¹⁴⁵ Dathenus, who had earlier been active in the Palatinate and more recently preached in Ghent, had fallen foul of William of Orange in his support of violence against Catholics. This case was not solved by the Synod, because of Dathenus' non-appearance.¹⁴⁶ The Prince had been trying with his *Unie van Utrecht* of 1579 to guarantee freedom of religion. Doctrinally, the *Formula of Concord* and the subsequent *Book of Concord* (1580) of the Lutherans, which had appeared, and questions relating to the church in England, were also topics to be addressed. So the Synod sought to continue to work toward a system of confessional doctrine as well as discipline.¹⁴⁷ The Synod lasted for three weeks. Much business was accomplished, although later Van der Corput wrote to Arent Cornelisz that he hoped the next Synod would be more edifying, shorter, and more productive.¹⁴⁸

Coolhaes traveled to the Synod, after all. He tells his perspective of events in Middelburg in his *Een cort, waerachtich verhael*.¹⁴⁹ His wife, Grietje, had come to Middelburg with him. The day after they arrived, a Sunday, they were invited to a meal and then walked with a party of preachers out to the sea fort "Rammekens," a local sight. The preachers took the opportunity to speak particularly to Coolhaes' wife, urging her to try to convince her husband to be obedient to the Synod. As they said, a wife, because of her intimacy with her husband, can influence him for good or evil.¹⁵⁰ The feisty Grietje reportedly said, according to Coolhaes, "I would rather get bread by begging for my husband and our small children, if we couldn't earn it with the labor of our hands, than have my husband act against his conscience."¹⁵¹ She said further that the disruptions in Leiden were

145. For more on Dathenus and the Psalms, see F. N. Snoek, *Samen gezien of the vergelijking van de onberijmde psalmen in de Statenvertaling en de parafrasen* (Ermelo: Boekbinderij en Uitgeverij Snoek, 2013); F. N. Snoek, ed., *Concordantie van de berijming van Petrus Datheen* (Ermelo: Snoek, 2006); F. N. Snoek, ed., *Synopsis van het boek der psalmen: de onberijmde psalmen in de statenvertaling, benevens de berijmde psalmen naar de berijming van Petrus Datheen en de berijming uit het jaar 1773, alsmede enige gezangen* (Ermelo: Snoek, 2001, 2005); G. J. M. van Oosten, ed., *Psalmen in de berijming van Datheen* (Katwijk: Het Zevende Zegel, 2000). See also the popular-level book for younger readers: Jan de Kok, *Een opgejaagde dienstknecht: uit het leven van Petrus Datheen (1531-1588)* (Goes: Uitgeverij "De Ramshoorn," 2010).

146. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 2-10, 170.

147. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 64.

148. Letter was dated August 4, 1581. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 35, 53.; *WMV*, III-2, 156.

149. Caspar Coolhaes, *Een cort, waerachtich verhael*.

150. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 130-33.

151. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 130-33.

caused not by her husband, but by preachers from Delft and Dordrecht – presumably she meant Arent Cornelisz and Van der Corput.¹⁵²

The Middelburg theses

The following day, Monday, June 12, 1581, Coolhaes appeared before the Synod. He stated from the outset that he did not consider himself to be at the mercy of their judgment, or of a majority vote which he maintained should not have authority over human opinions and conscience, but that he was willing to converse with them as brothers, and to be corrected from God's Word if necessary.¹⁵³ He brought with him a letter from the Leiden magistracy, saying that they did not regard the Synod as lawful.¹⁵⁴ Arent Cornelisz headed up the Middelburg Synod. He had corresponded with his friend Van der Corput beforehand about both key cases of the impending gathering. Van der Corput had been instrumental in requesting the Prince to call the Synod. Cornelisz was fully prepared for the task. He had been scribe at the Synods of 1574 and 1578, and was powerful and decisive.¹⁵⁵ His intensity was rewarded with the nickname “the Pope of Delft.”¹⁵⁶ However, despite his activity with the stricter Reformed and their organization, Arent Cornelisz was not as extreme theologically as one might suppose. He would later defend infralapsarianism against the more Bezan supralapsarianism.¹⁵⁷

Coolhaes already knew very well which of his views seemed suspicious to his opponents. They were the very points which he addressed in *Apologia*, and supported with quotes from Calvin and other Reformers.¹⁵⁸ Rather than a purely spoken discussion, he asked

152. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 38.

153. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 133, Coolhaes evidently quoting [Cornelisz (Crusius)?], *Cort eenvoudich ende waerachtich verhael*, 27.

154. He had already written the same to them; see “Coolhaes aan Middelburg d. d. 10 juni 1581,” Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 68.

155. “He knew how to chop with the synodal axe.” Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 15.

156. A. Ph. F. Wouters, *Nieuw en ongezien. Kerk en samenleving in the classis Delft en Delftland 1572-1621, I, De nieuwe kerk* (Delft: Eburon, 1994), 17.

157. Ironically, Arminius, during his time in Amsterdam, would be asked to defend supralapsarianism. Nijenhuis, “Varianten binnen het Nederlandse Calvinisme in de zestiende eeuw,” 358-59.

that a written charge against him and his books should be given to him, and that he would be allowed to reply in writing, since there were so many of them accusing him and he was alone.¹⁵⁹ So on Tuesday, June 13, 1580, perhaps because of this request, Coolhaes was given five theses, dealing with doctrinal points, to examine and sign.¹⁶⁰ They were statements formulated by the Synod, which the Synod felt addressed the issues which they had with Coolhaes' viewpoints. Later, he would also be given five theses dealing with church law and order.

The first group, the “doctrinal” theses, were originally written in both Latin and Dutch.¹⁶¹ The Latin is more extensive and in some cases very different from the Dutch, and also contains biblical references. The second group of theses, concerning church order, was written only in Dutch.¹⁶²

These are the “doctrinal” theses according to the Latin version:

1. Although those in the Old Testament did not have such a clear knowledge of Christ, his person and office, or the light of the Gospel as we have, they by a dim light of grace saw Christ from a distance, through the same will and faith by which we are saved. All who were saved in the Old Testament were saved inasmuch as they had a knowledge of the person and office of Christ, according to the measure granted by God. Heb. 11:53; Eph. 2:20; Titus 1:1-3; Rom. 1:2; John 17:3.

158. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 194.

159. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 134-35. He had already made the same request in writing; see “Coolhaes aan Middelburg synod, 10 juni 1581,” Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 68.

160. Rogge says that they were given to him on the 12th, but he seems to be in error – the letter in Kamphuis is dated the 12th “Middelburg aan Coolhaes, 12 juni 1581.” Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 68. Rogge more specifically says that they were given to Coolhaes first in Latin, and that when Coolhaes returned them with some notations, the Synod was not satisfied, and submitted them to him again in Dutch. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 194-95.

161. The original Latin version of the “doctrinal” theses was reproduced by Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 113-14. The manuscript version is in Synod of Middelberg theses, 1580, inventarisnr. 83, AD. Fatio says that it is hand-written by Arent Cornelisz. The original Dutch version was published by Kamphuis as “Middelburg aan Coolhaes, d. d. 12 juni 1581,” Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 69. Rogge gives a modernized Dutch version: “Verklaring over vijf geloofspunten, afgelegd tijdens de nationale synode te Middelburg, 15 Juni 1581,” Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 195.

162. The original in Dutch of the “church order” theses, including Coolhaes' signature in Latin (“Casparus Koelhasius haec approbo”), is in Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 115-16. The original is found in: Synod of Middelburg theses, 1580, Secretariearchief, inventarisnr. 2189, ELO. Rogge gives a modernized Dutch version: Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, I, 197-98.

2. From the Word of God it cannot be proved that non-baptized children of the Jews, Turks, and other nations, if they die, number among the elect. However, it is not for us (not knowing the deep plan and election of God) to condemn that which is already condemned by God in His Word, since all sons of Adam are infected with original sin. Eph. 2:3; Ps. 51:5; 58:4; Rom. 5:12.

3. The Word of God says that all children who have not been baptized are outside of Christ, since they are not members of the visible church, the covenant of God. That is to say, the words of the covenant do not apply to them. Gen. 17:7; 1 Cor. 7:14; Eph. 2:11.

4. God undoubtedly gave in Adam to the whole human race to be heirs of the grace given in Adam, but people are unfit through the fall of Adam to accept the gifts necessary to salvation and are completely dead and so cannot do good works, unless the grace of God receives them in the light of His Spirit and calls them back. Gen. 8:21; 2 Cor. 3:5; Phil. 2:13.

5. Although the works of the Gentiles, Jews, and Turks imitate the acts which God's law prescribes to praiseworthy men, they are honest and to be imitated, but they are not truly good in the sight of God. For whatever is done without faith is sin. Rom. 14:23; Isa. 64:6; Ps. 143:2.

I, Caspar Coolhaes, the minister of the divine Word in Leiden, testify that I understood the doctrines of these theses, condemn the contrary and will always be faithful to them, with the help of God. Middelburg, 15 June, 1581.¹⁶³

In reading over these “doctrinal” theses, it is easy to see that all of them relate to predestination, election, grace, good works, and covenant theology. In a sense, this discussion is a foretaste of the later controversies around Arminianism.¹⁶⁴ All were points upon which Coolhaes was suspect. Aside from the first thesis, all were points with which he was likely to disagree. The records of the Synod add that if Coolhaes were to give his agreement on these dogmatic points, the second part of the examination which dealt with church law could be handled more lightly.

Coolhaes met separately with three of the Synod members, then brought back a written response.¹⁶⁵ In this response, he writes that he is frustrated that the Synod members

163. My English summary translation is based not on the Dutch version, but on the original Latin version as reproduced by Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 113-14. The manuscript version is in Inventarisnr. 672, AD.

164. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 38.

do not seem to have read his books (*Apologia* and *Breeder bericht*, referred to as *Apologia Prior* and *Apologia Posterior* during the Synod) in their entirety. As to the content of the five theses, he cited page numbers from his books in refutation.¹⁶⁶ The Synod found this and his subsequent explanation, which he wrote on the next day, less than clear. Regarding the first point, he denied that he taught that believers under the old covenant had to believe that the seed of the woman would be both God and man. He stated that his views could also be found in Luther, Calvin and Bucer, and gave detailed references to some of their works. Furthermore, he maintained that he had never taught such a thing as the second thesis, and cited the works of the Reformers again in regard to the third. As for the fourth, he believed that all had in Adam lost the image of God and free will, and were unable to do any good unless they were reborn through Christ and taken up again by his grace. As for the fifth question, he again directed the brothers to look more carefully into his books for the answer.¹⁶⁷

The Synod found these answers unacceptable.¹⁶⁸ During the ensuing discussion, Coolhaes asked for a copy of the Belgic Confession, and returned it having written notes in the margins in regard to articles on election (XVI) and the church (XXVIII and XXXI).¹⁶⁹ This may have been because the Confession was in 1581 largely unknown. Later, Trigland

165. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 194-95.

166. They are typed in the margin by each point in Kamphuis' reproduction of the document: 1. *apol. post. f. 20 b. linea 9*. 2. *Ibidem f. 18a linea 20*. 3. *Ibidum f. 17a in fine 4. apol. priori f. 99a sub fine*. 5. *Ibidem f. 93a*. "Middelburg aan Coolhaes, d. d. 12 juni 1581," Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 69. Fatio also lists the same in his notes: Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 192.

167. "Coolhaes aan Middelburg, d. d. 13/14 juni 1581," Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 69-74.

168. Bremmer emphasizes that Coolhaes' writing was in half-German, half-Dutch. He says that, even accounting for the inconsistent spelling of the age, Coolhaes' letters and this statement are more "German" than his printed books. Bremmer, "De nationale synode van Middelburg (1581)," 38-39, 43. While this may be an exaggeration, it is true that his printed books are more "Dutch" than the letters reproduced in Kamphuis. For examples, see "Coolhaes aan Middelburg synod, 13/14 juni 1581," Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 69-71. It is true that his spelling is so different from his printed works that it seems to point to extensive editing by an editor of those printed works. For another example in which Coolhaes' spelling looks very German, see the letter from him in the name of the church council to the Dordrecht Synod, June 6, 1578, in Rutgers, *Acta*, 328-29.

169. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 39. As far as I know, the copy and annotations are no longer extant.

said that the Dutch version which Coolhaes was given was not clearly translated or printed.¹⁷⁰ What he meant by that is unclear.

A Seeming About-Face

After repeated pressure, Coolhaes, surprisingly, signed the Latin version of the five theses on Thursday, June 15, 1581.¹⁷¹ He was immediately given five more “church order” theses, in Dutch, to sign. This is the second group of theses, the “church order” theses:

1. At the same time as the church servants and shepherds serve the sacraments according to God’s Word, they also must pay attention who of the congregation may receive the Lord’s Supper and who may not. The examination of those who receive communion is thus partly up to the preachers, and partly up to the communion-goers themselves.

2. The sacraments are instituted by God and the Lord’s Supper is a witness of our communion with Christ. Therefore, those who take communion, are more rightly regarded as members of the church, than those who abstain from it.

3. Concerning the order and discipline in the whole church: that which will be adopted by its representatives must be maintained until it is found advisable to propose new rules. Also the magistracy is to be counted as one of the foremost members of the church.

4. The duty of the government is to sanction the church order and help to carry it out. Everyone must be subject to this, until a following synod brings changes in it.

5. The acceptance of the Bible and the articles of faith is shown not only in word, but in the intention and teaching. Everyone who appears to keep the words of the articles, but repudiates the teaching, may not be allowed to receive the Lord’s Supper. Some can be tolerated due to their weakness, but not those who oppose deliberately.¹⁷²

170. F. S. Knipscheer, *De invoering en de waardeering der gereformeerde belijdenisschriften in Nederland vóór 1618* (Leiden: Adriani, 1907), 63, 76-78.

171. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 40, 54.

172. My English summary translation of the “church order” theses is based on the Dutch original as given in Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 115-16.

Coolhaes signed the second group of five theses on Friday, June 15, 1581.¹⁷³ They reflected a Calvinist, disciplinarian model. There is little doubt that Coolhaes disagreed with all of them entirely.

Why did Coolhaes give in and sign the theses? The story is unclear. Coolhaes had not decided to sign until two individuals came to the Synod to negotiate. Their identities are unknown; perhaps they were people already belonging to the Synod. One might have been Trabius, who later refused to sign the act against Coolhaes.¹⁷⁴ Or, Coolhaes may have been convinced by a friend to sign the second group as he had done the others, in a hope that the Synod would soon conclude his case. Although not convinced, he may have been more conciliatory than truthful.¹⁷⁵ Did he think it would blow over, or was he feeling pressured? Perhaps he did not take it seriously. In reading Coolhaes' writings, one notices, as R. H. Bremmer observes, that despite being a Reformed preacher, he is "inwardly foreign" to Reformed structure and law, does not quote Calvin, and is not strict about rules and laws. His latitudinarianism flies in the face of the attitudes of the preachers of the Synod. Coolhaes, objecting to the authority of the Synod, did not see Reformed Church order as a finished edifice, but as a structure which was still in the process of being built. He does not say this in so many words in his descriptions of the Synod, but it is clear from both of his 1580 books. He did not feel bound by Reformed Church order in any way.¹⁷⁶

The Synod went on; Coolhaes remained present. However, the next day, Saturday, June 17, 1581, he protested in writing to the Synod, restating that he did not consider the members of the Synod to be his judges, and that they had not reasoned with him according to

173. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 41/54.

174. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 44.

175. Moes and Burger, *De Amsterdamsche boekdrukkers*, 39.

176. The words and thoughts above are based on this whole paragraph from Bremmer, and so it seems good to reproduce it in full: "Waarom tekende Coolhaes? Hoopte hij door toegeeflijkheid er af te komen? Door te tekenen verloochende hij veel van wat hij tot nu toe staande had gehouden. Dacht hij misschien dat de zaak met een sisser af zou lopen? Tekende hij omdat hij geen verweer had en onder zware druk was gezet? Hij was er de man niet naar om gemakkelijk te capituleren. Voorzag hij niet in wat voor situatie hij zichzelf nu had gebracht na alles wat zich in Leiden had afgespeeld? Het is moeilijk op deze vragen een antwoord te vinden. Wie zijn geschriften leest krijgt wel de indruk dat hij innerlijk vreemd was aan de confessionele en kerkrechtelijke opbouw van de Gereformeerde Kerk die hij diende. In zijn eerste Apologie had hij zich min of meer laatdunkend over Calvin en de calvinisten uitgelaten [footnote to Coolhaes, *Apologia*, 100, 100a]. Hij was er innerlijk vreemd aan en hij was doordrenkt van kerkrechtelijke overwegingen waarin de overheid een beslissende rol speelde. Dat bracht als vanzelf een latitudinarisme mee waarvan de Gereformeerde Kerk wars was." Bremmer, "De nationale synode van Middelburg (1581)," 41-42.

God's Word. He declared that neither his conscience nor God's Word accused him. He believed himself in the right. Perhaps to try to prove their case further, the Synod members promised to compile a collection of incriminating passages from his books. Their *Memorie* was put together over the weekend by Cornelisz and Van der Corput.¹⁷⁷ Coolhaes had, after all, claimed that his books had not been read sufficiently to judge them or him, so this step seems to have had the potential to be constructive.

Coolhaes was given a day to look at this *Memorie*, presumably to come to agree with their assessment. However, on Tuesday, June 20, 1581, he came back with a written statement of his own.¹⁷⁸ He complained about their desire to condemn his books, and then went on to maintain that his books did not disagree with the theses he had signed, nor with God's Word. He appeared to take a different tack now that he had signed the ten theses – he maintained that he agreed with them as he interpreted them – that he did not contradict himself. He demanded to be reheard at the next legal synod, or, he said, he would bring his case before the Prince and the States.¹⁷⁹

The Synod, out of patience, decided that they had taken long enough.¹⁸⁰ However, there seems to have been some panic at Coolhaes' threat. A letter was sent quickly to the classis of Brabant to ask for reinforcements who would sign an act of excommunication against Coolhaes.¹⁸¹ The threat of excommunication had not been uttered in so many words in the earlier stages of the proceedings, at least according to the written records, but the speed with which events progressed at this point makes one conclude that it had always been there. Coolhaes was allowed to think about the matter till the following day, Wednesday, June 21, which was the final meeting day. However, on Wednesday, he did not appear. Instead, he sent a request to five of the Synod members to meet him at a notary (Van der Varendt of Middelburg) to make a statement which would record the events of the Synod. The five

177. Reproduced in the *verweerschrift* of the Synod of Haarlem, 1582. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 43.

178. This statement is "Coolhaes aan Middelburg synode, 20 juni 1581," Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 71-74.

179. Van Dooren reproduces letters from the synod during its session to the Prince and to Marnix, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 50-60.

180. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 43.

181. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 44-45, citing Rutgers, *Acta*, 372.

refused and reported the incident to the Synod which was still in session.¹⁸² It appears that Coolhaes thought that those five might support him in circumventing the whole Synod, and escape in possession of some document that he might use in the future against the Synod. But whatever sympathy those individuals might have had for him evidently did not go so far. The Synod went ahead with the excommunication process, which would be continued by the classes of Delft, The Hague, Haarlem and Leiden, and which would be proclaimed in the church of Leiden if possible or in the surrounding churches.

The Synod had not covered all of the business they had hoped to resolve, since the business with Coolhaes had taken so long. For instance, they did not get to the case of the Jacobskerk in Utrecht, which they had also intended to address. Herman Duifhuis had been another libertine preacher who charted his own course in Utrecht in the Jacobskerk. Duifhuis and Coolhaes agreed on several key ideas. First, that the Spirit was essential, because the importance of the written Gospel would never be superseded, but the Holy Spirit must illuminate.¹⁸³ Thus, in the church there were those who were saved and those who were unsaved - the visible church was not the same as the invisible.¹⁸⁴ Also, both taught open communion, favored magistrates, opposed consistories, elders, catechisms, and strong confessionalism.¹⁸⁵

But in the meantime, Duifhuis had died, and the situation with the Jacobskerk may well have seemed less urgent.¹⁸⁶ Arent Cornelisz was not pleased; he had been sorely tried. The church order proposed in Middelburg would not be sanctioned by the States, and the Coolhaes case would drag on still longer.¹⁸⁷ At least the Synod had concluded that Coolhaes

182. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 44/55; citing the notary's record included in Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 76-77.

183. Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*, 86-92. A note about page 89: Kaplan says Duifhuis was "simply inconsistent" for distinguishing between justification and sanctification and saying that justification could be reversible. The passage he quotes looks, instead, as if Duifhuis did not hold to a belief in eternal security. In other words, Duifhuis may have believed that one could be justified by one's decision for God, but then fall away and not proceed further in being sanctified. It is not mysterious or inconsistent. Sin could cause the loss of salvation i.e., "the garment of justification." Coolhaes would likely have agreed.

184. Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*, 80.

185. For a comparison and a list of literature about Duifhuis, see Benjamin Kaplan, "Duifhuis, Hubert," *OER*, vol. 2, 10.

186. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 44.

187. Van Dooren, *De nationale synode te Middelburg*, 44-45.

was forbidden to preach or to write and publish books. His books were declared to be dangerous and a great nuisance to the church. The Synod resolved that the classes of South Holland would move toward his excommunication.¹⁸⁸ The decision was important, because there was a lot at stake even beyond Leiden. Although Duifhuis was dead, the situation in Utrecht was still uncertain. Other places also experienced church/state conflicts. But the Reformed Church was clear about its theocratic vision.

More trials: The Hague (1581) and Haarlem (1582)

Judged by the Middelburg Synod of 1581, which had decided to proceed towards his excommunication, Coolhaes appealed to the next legal national synod, wanting to take his case to the highest authority. He wrote an emotional appeal to the Leiden magistracy on July 27, 1581, asking them to write to the Prince and the States.¹⁸⁹ In the meantime, the classes of Leiden and other cities were deputed to continue to work with him; if he would not submit, excommunication by the classes would follow. When the classis of Delft received this request, it wrote to its sister classes in Haarlem, Leiden, and The Hague, to set up a meeting to this end in The Hague on August 12, 1581. This came to nothing, since The Hague did not send its delegation and thought that the Synod should take action for itself. Another meeting was attempted for October 18, 1581, in Leiden, but the Leiden classis replied that Coolhaes wished to meet with Arent Cornelisz from Delft again, and they thought it would be better for this to happen behind closed doors. They had, however, arranged that the Leiden consistory and magistrates would watch and act as observers, and a notary to record the proceedings would be also be present, to record Coolhaes' words for what would become a public confession. The Delft classis found this unacceptable and demeaning to the authority of the Synod. It was decided that another local synod, comprising North and South Holland, would be called.¹⁹⁰

In the meantime, the church in Leiden was losing patience with the situation. Coolhaes in fact remained, but the other preachers resigned. It is likely that the magistracy

188. Rutgers, *Acta*, 363.

189. "Coolhaes aan de Leidse magistraat d.d. 27 juli 1581," Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid*, 78-81.

190. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 204-205.

protected him, knowing that if he laid down his office, he would not be hired anywhere else.¹⁹¹ Students at Leiden University, influenced by Lambert Daneau, also began to protest over the fact that Coolhaes remained in the pulpit. Some students also wrote to the consistory on February 7, 1582, supported by professors, to protest about Cornelis van Braeckel, the new city preacher whom they regarded as a “new Coolhaes.” Van Braeckel was asked to answer five of the Middelburg theses.¹⁹² Daneau, who succeeded Feugeray as professor of theology, had arrived in 1581. Feugeray had left in 1579; Hubertus Sturm had been carrying the teaching load.¹⁹³ Daneau would also write concerning the case of Duifhuis in the summer of 1582, to “defend the visible church.”¹⁹⁴ He was a close friend of Beza and had been called out of Geneva. Daneau had set out to prove Coolhaes’ unorthodoxy by examining his writings. Because he did not know Dutch, they had to be translated into French or Latin for this task.¹⁹⁵

Coolhaes was also suspected because of some of the guests he invited into his home. Daneau and Sturm wrote to the consistory on October 1, 1581, regarding an incident involving Coolhaes and a certain Henri Westhoeve,¹⁹⁶ who was staying with Coolhaes, was said to be called to be preacher in Katwijk, and was thought to be a “heretical Pelagian.” A follow-up letter to the consistory and Daneau, presumably from Coolhaes, accused the council and Daneau of lack of Christian love in this, and criticized their surveillance of doctrine and morals.¹⁹⁷

The magistracy in response complained to the rector and university senate, comparing Daneau’s “Genevan inquisition” to the Spanish one. This was the last straw for the Calvinist

191. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 206.

192. Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 83.

193. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 206. Sturm was thought to have been born in Cologne, died in the Palatinate; studied in Heidelberg, worked in Ghent. Sturm was called to replace Feugeray in Leiden November 30, 1579. Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 193, note 35.

194. Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 71.

195. Bongers, *Leven en werk*, 102; Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 104. I have not found any record of these suspected translations. For more about Daneau, see also Olivier Fatio, *Méthode et théologie: Lambert Daneau et les débuts de la scolastique réformée*, Genève: Droz, 1976.

196. Also called Henricus Westphalus. See Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 50-51.

197. Fatio, *Nihil pulchrius ordine*, 51, 121, 125-26. In this letter, Coolhaes is spoken of in the third person, but Fatio thinks that Coolhaes is the author. If this is true, it is the one example we have of Coolhaes writing in Latin.

Daneau, who left the city. After scarcely one year in Leiden, he submitted his resignation in the spring of 1582, announcing publicly on May 30, 1582, that he could not continue in the face of such disunity among the preachers. However, it is also given as a reason for his departure, that Daneau left Leiden when his organizing of a consistory for the French-speaking Walloon church, where he had been preaching, was opposed by magistrates.¹⁹⁸ The organization of such an additional church council in the city was in opposition to the *Arbitral Accord*.¹⁹⁹ In any event, despite his short tenure in Leiden, Daneau was extremely influential in bringing a strict teaching of predestination to the university, paving the way for the later Gomarus. Daneau was replaced by Johannes Holmannus, the predecessor of Arminius.²⁰⁰

Revisiting the theses

The classes of Amsterdam and Rotterdam petitioned the States that a provincial synod would be held that year to revisit the matters which had been addressed in the Middelburg Synod, including Coolhaes. The States approved this. A synod in The Hague was called for the end of November, 1581. Coolhaes and some of the magistrates had unsuccessfully requested the States that the Synod be held in their city, and complained that Coolhaes had not been dealt with in a Christian or legal manner. Five of the Leiden magistrates attended the Synod, along with representatives of the consistory and Coolhaes himself.²⁰¹ The Middelburg records were read aloud and debate about Coolhaes' writings followed. Each thesis that Coolhaes had signed was revisited. It became clear to the preachers that his views were "not only in his books but in his heart."²⁰² He was unwilling to say that unbaptized children were condemned, and unwilling, as he saw it, to make God through predestination the source of sin. This latter statement caused even more heated debate. This view is consistent with the single-covenant

198. Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines*, 50.

199. J. J. Woltjer, *Een nieuw ende onghesien dingh. Verkenningen naar de positie van de kerkeraad in twee Hollandse steden in de zestiende eeuw* (Leiden: Rijksuniversiteit, 1985), 6.

200. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 207.

201. The Leiden magistrates were Van der Werff, Van Hout, Van Reyersz, Pieter Pietersz Oom and Dirk Gerritsz Smalling. For a discussion about Jan van Hout in particular, and how Coolhaes may have influenced the humanistic city secretary to accept the idea that God's grace is available to all, see Koppenol, *Leids heelal*, 363.

202. Says Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 212-13.

idea, espoused by Zurich theologians, in which Christ's death is seen to be effective for forgiveness of sins both forward and backward in time – thus, for all.²⁰³

His writings were judged to be in clear disagreement with the second group of theses also. Since Coolhaes had earlier signed them in an attempt to bring the matter to a close, this caused him to be accused of inconsistency and self-contradiction, which he then countered by downplaying the importance of the act of signing. On the third day of the Synod in The Hague, Coolhaes brought forth a new document in which he quoted Bucer, Bullinger and others, but the preachers responded that the issue was not the thoughts of other theologians, but his own. In the discussion that followed, Coolhaes is reported by the preachers to have given a clear statement that all people were given the ability to accept the grace offered by Christ. He was rebuked severely for his views and his behavior while at this and the earlier Synod. He offered to step down from his office as preacher, and even to leave the country, but would not sign a statement of guilt. It was decided that he must not be allowed to resign, but must be relieved of his office to show the justice of the synodal operation, and that if he continued to be uncorrected by God's Word must be excommunicated. The Leiden magistrates were forced to concur, and sent a report to the States the following day, who then issued a formal decision to “defrock” him: in other words, to relieve him of his office as preacher.²⁰⁴ This had however already been done informally, when the Middelburg Synod forbade him to teach.

It was also decided that Coolhaes would be subject to three “solemn warnings” officially exhorting him to repentance, according to the procedure described in Matthew 18. The warnings would be delivered in person, every fourteen days. Insofar as he was not repentant, public prayers would be said for him after each warning, in churches in Delft, Haarlem and The Hague. After the first warning, he would be prayed for anonymously; after the second, anonymously but with an explanation of his offense; after the third, with his name and offense clearly stated.

With this advance notice, Coolhaes had time to invite the Leiden magistrates to be at his house when Arent Cornelisz and one of his elders would arrive for the first “warning.” Pieter Adriaansz van der Werff, Jan Jansz van Baersdorp and Jan van Hout were among those

203. Lee Palmer Wandel, “Zwingli, Huldreich,” *OER*, vol. 4, 322.

204. [Cornelisz?], *Cort eenvoudich ende waerachtich verhael*. Whether the magistrates were convinced of his guilt, or forced to concur, is addressed by Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 215, note 15.

who gathered, along with fellow Leiden preacher Pieter Hackius and some of his elders and deacons - in all, twenty-seven men. Hackius was a friend of Coolhaes and a similar broad-minded preacher. He was called to Leiden in 1581, preached against Christian discipline in the mid-eighties and got into conflict with colleague Ysbrand Trabius, in a way very reminiscent of Coolhaes and Pieter Cornelisz.²⁰⁵ When Arent Cornelisz arrived, he wanted to speak with Coolhaes and rebuke him privately outside, but Coolhaes insisted that his supporters be present. Cornelisz and his elder came in and rebuked him. After the warning was over, however, the visitors were called to the City Hall and forbidden to give any more public warnings. In consequence, only the remaining public prayers were said, on February 4, February 17, and March 4, 1582, in Delft and Haarlem. The Hague refused to participate, which may have been a sign of solidarity with Coolhaes.

As the date for Coolhaes' excommunication grew closer, some of the preachers involved, among whom presumably and chiefly Arent Cornelisz, published the *Cort eenvoudich ende waerachtich verhael*.²⁰⁶ It is the story of all of the disagreements involving Coolhaes, including copies of many related documents, including a letter from the Prince which they believed validated the legality of their synods.²⁰⁷ In it the preachers talked about their good intentions. They emphasized that although they had censured Coolhaes, it had been done in a spirit of love and not in the harsh way that the Catholic Church had ruled in earlier ages. They wrote that freedom does not mean that anyone should believe only what they think good, as if that belief could save him. If that belief does not have its foundation in God's Word, then it is unbelief.²⁰⁸ The preachers hoped for repentance from Coolhaes.

Rushing to the defense

The Leiden magistrates put their views in print again: a *Remonstrance* appeared in February, 1582, and was sent to the States.²⁰⁹ It was signed by Jan van Hout of the Leiden magistracy,

205. For more information about this conflict, see Christine Kooi, "Pharisees and Hypocrites: A Public Debate over Church Discipline in Leiden, 1586," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 88 (1997): 258-78.

206. [Cornelisz?] *Cort eenvoudich ende waerachtich verhael*,. See Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 242-48.

207. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 240-48.

208. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 247.

but was written by Coornhert at the request of the Leiden magistracy as the *Justificatie* had been.²¹⁰

Cornelisz and the preachers responded to this *Remonstrance* with an *Antwoord der dienaaren des woordts ... op de remonstrantie by de overicheydt van Leyden*.²¹¹ They affirmed that they could not be servants of the government or of one man, but of Christ. They also defended the necessity of councils and synods, such as Nicaea, to combat heresy.²¹² They denied that they wanted to assert political power, and warned the secular governors not to confuse spiritual and secular governance, because God had made them separate, as the body was separate from the soul. They asserted that preachers and elders were the most suited to choose their own colleagues, since they understood best what the issues were. They also declared that liberty was not to do whatever one liked, because this would lead to licentiousness.²¹³

Coolhaes also spent the time between the Synods writing. He hastily finished the short book *Sendtbrief*²¹⁴ on March 10, 1582. It is a document addressed not to the public but to his peers; a plea for understanding from his preacher-colleagues in South and North Holland, a plea that the decision given by Middelburg would not proceed “prematurely.”²¹⁵ The vocabulary and style are strikingly different from the earlier *Apologia* and *Breeder*

209. Coornhert, *Remonstrance*.

210. As *Justificatie* also addresses issues of church and state, we will discuss it in Chapter 7.

211. Arent Cornelisz (Crusius), *Antwoorde der dienaaren des woordts ende ouderlinghen der kercken van Hollandt, wt den naem derselven onlancx vergadert gheweest zijnde tot Haerlem: aen mijn e. e. heeren de Staten desselven lands: op de remonstrantie by de ouericheyt van Leyden, aen de voorsz heeren Staten gedaen, ende wtgheven [sic], aengaende t'verhandelde der dienaaren des woordts end' ouderlinghen der Nederlandsche kercken in het synodus tot Middelburgh, etc. Waerinne de clachten teghen tvoorsz synodus ende synodale acten voortghebracht, cortelick ende claerlick tot noodighe ontschuldighe der kercken beandtwoordt werden.* (Delft: Cornelis Iantsz, 1582).

212. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 253.

213. As summarized in Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 238.

214. Caspar Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief Caspars Coolhaes, dienaer des godlicken woorts, residerende tot Leyden. Aan de dienaaren des goddelicken woordts in Suyt- ende Noort-Hollant, te samen ende eenen yghelicken besonder. Om niet ontijdelick voort te gaen, int oordeel ghegheuen by de versamelinghe binnen Middelburch in iunio anno 81. ghehouden, die buyten recht voor een nationael synodus wt gaet. Waer wt oock yederman sal verstaen mogen, met wat onrecht de selue Coolhaes verleden sondach, wesende den 4. nu loopende martij, tot Delft (een weet niet of aen ander plaatsen meer) der gemeynte opentlick van den predictoel, als onboetueerdiche erghenis met zijn schrijven aenghericht te hebben, met name voorghedraghen is, om met der scherphelyd van af-snijdighe teghens hem te proceduren. Waer van de summa breeder te vinden is int volghende blat* (N.p., 1582), Giiir. Rogge deals more extensively with *Sendtbrief* than with many of Coolhaes' other works. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 233-42.

215. Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, title page.

bericht. In his *Sendtbrief* he used just as many biblical references but more theological terminology, just as many metaphors, if not more, but a more direct, linear style of argumentation. Coolhaes shows himself as a theologian in this work, in which he lays out the principles behind his ecclesiology, defends inclusivity, and condemns the actions of the synods and preachers in Holland.

Coolhaes thought that he had not been treated “evangelically” at the Synod. He should have been reasoned with and convinced from God’s Word, but claimed that not a single verse of Scripture was quoted against him.²¹⁶ He wanted to have been, so to speak, “dialogued with” – something which his opponents either would not or could not do. Arent Cornelisz had earlier debated Coornhert in Leiden. Coolhaes desired something similar; something more dialogical than the assembled preachers gave him. Instead, he was rebuked. He asked, “Now I ask everyone – is it right to treat an erring lover of truth in the same way as a willful hater? This was punishment, where there should have been tolerance.”²¹⁷ He points to the shamelessness of Arent Cornelisz in having him, Coolhaes, declared to be a troublesome, unrepentant person, and in using his classis of Delft to overbalance the classes of Rijnland/Leiden, Haarlem and The Hague. Coolhaes is unsure of the classis of Haarlem, but is sure that Rijnland and The Hague should have been on his side.²¹⁸

Making an end

The final Synod was held in Haarlem, beginning on March 15, 1582. It was clear beforehand that the preachers would go ahead with excommunication, assuming that Coolhaes continued to “despise the warnings.”²¹⁹ All of the classes of Holland were represented, except for Gouda (whose delegates pleaded illness) and Leiden. However, Leiden sent elder Symon Jacobs on March 17, 1582 with apologies, and also with a printed copy of the *Sendtbrief* for the representatives of each classis.

216. All three points are introduced in Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, D; Fijr.

217. Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, Fijv.

218. Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, Gijv.

219. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 224.

The *Sendtbrief* was examined by the Synod along with all earlier material, but was seen as further evidence of disobedience and intractability. The decision was made for excommunication. The Hague classis did not vote for this action, since they had misgivings, and because their credential letter did not allow it. Eventually they left the meeting in protest.²²⁰ Coolhaes, who did not attend, was informed of the intention of the Synod by letter on March 23, 1582. As he was not home, the letter was received by his wife. It was recorded that she received it scornfully.²²¹ He did not respond himself, but his friend and colleague Hackius wrote back in his name, asking for an extension of eight days. However, the Synod decided against this, and proclaimed his excommunication on March 25, 1582.²²² The excommunication was announced in Haarlem and Delft, but not in Leiden or The Hague. Those cities refused to participate in the announcement.

Jean Taffin and Pierre Loyseleur de Villiers, the court preachers of William of Orange, had also been involved with the events which led to the excommunication of Coolhaes, although not many facts about this involvement remain. Taffin was loyal to the side of the Reformed Church in the theological conflicts involving Coolhaes, Herbertsz, Duifhuis and Arminius, and prioritized the independence of the church. However, he distanced himself from the more radical Calvinists and supported the government. De Villiers, for his part, wrote about the importance of personal spirituality and free will.²²³ After the provincial Synod in Haarlem in March 1582, Taffin wrote to Cornelisz in Delft. Apparently there was a feeling in some quarters that Coolhaes should after all be allowed to take the Lord's Supper, and that the decision of the Synods was shaky and not generally recognized. This does not mean that the two court preachers were not on the side of the synods in their desire for the church's authority, but seems to indicate that reconciliation was wanted. Hendrik van der Corput, however, was insistent that Coolhaes should not be

220. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 225-26.

221. Rogge, *Caspar Janszoon Coolhaes*, vol. 1, 226.

222. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 153-57.

223. Boer, *Hofpredikers*, 174. De Villiers' theses about the church and free will are found in: Boer, *Hofpredikers*, 190-94 (in Latin). For more about De Villiers and his influence in emphasizing personal spirituality in the seventeenth century Dutch *Nadere reformatie* ("Second" or "Further" Reformation), see Joel R. Beeke, "Taffin, Jean," *OER*, vol. 4, 143; S. van der Linde, *Jean Taffin: hofprediker en raadsheer van Willem van Oranje* (Amsterdam: Bolland 1982).

reinstated until he was legitimately reconciled – in other words, until he would repent and change his views.²²⁴

Coolhaes' excommunication and defrocking from ministry as a preacher in the Reformed Church ended an important phase of his life. He was no longer a young man; he was in his late forties with a wife and family to support. He had been thrown out of his ministerial office. He had been disgraced in the eyes of many of his former colleagues in the clergy.

However, even though his opportunities to preach had ended, he had evidently made an important impact in Leiden during his preaching years. Although the magistrates were already advocates of fewer Calvinist strictures, Coolhaes is the only Leiden preacher during the period 1574-1582 who was consistently preaching in the city for a broader, latitudinarian Reformed Church. In "plastic" situations of rapid change, an inspiring preacher is often enough to develop events in one direction versus another.²²⁵ In those pivotal days of early freedom, his voice must have reached those who would carry on the desire for a less narrow public church in Leiden through the rest of the century and into the larger confessional conflicts of the early 1600's. Looked at another way, one can say that the stricter Calvinist preachers' evaluation was in a sense true – he was a "disturber of the church" – someone whose influence worked against some of the things that those preachers were trying to establish. Whether one judges this disturbance to have been good or bad depends upon one's point of view about whether the Reformed Church which was being established was a positive or a negative development for society. Coolhaes' influence in Leiden catalyzed those elements which would eventually result in the turbulent events of 1618-1619.

224. Boer, *Hofpredikers*, 88-89.

225. Woltjer, *Kleine oorzaken, grote gevolgen*, 14.