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Pleading for diversity : the church Caspar Coolhaes wanted

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Chapter 9: The congregation: pleading for diversity

How should the church look? How should it be governed? We have seen that Coolhaes wanted it to be overseen by benevolent civil government and served by preachers and elders who were truly called. But what people should be in the church? Coolhaes, who built his ideas on the bipartite concept of the visible and invisible church, believed that diversity was vital in both groups.¹ Tolerance of various opinions and toleration of others² were both essential.³ This understanding was mystical in that the diversity of the invisible church is unseen but real, and that true believers are connected in the invisible church by a bond which will be eternal. It was also Spiritualist because he believed that the work of Reformation was not finished, that religious diversity and freedom, the Spirit, and love should be given a greater place than they had in the churches of his day. The invisible church – the true church through time and space – is already diverse, including people from every confession and nation.⁴ Although for him the invisible church is the more important, since it is eternal, the visible church is also important. In much of his teaching, he exhorted the visible church. The invisible church is already diverse; he pleaded with the visible church, which has not yet achieved this, to embrace diversity also. So the correct way to ask the question is: how should the visible church look, and who should be included?

The visible church, in Coolhaes' definition, is the group composed of all who call themselves Christian and includes all Christian confessions and smaller groups – what one would call, in English, “Christendom.”⁵ In other words, he does not mean only the Reformed

1. Dirck Volkertzsoon Coornhert's views of the importance of the binary model of visible and invisible church were very similar to Coolhaes'. It is not known if Coolhaes attended the debate between Coornhert, Arent Cornelisz and Reinier Donteclock in Leiden on April 14, 1578, when the question of the visible church versus the “true” church was disputed, but it is hard to believe that he would not have been present, as we discussed in the biographical sketch. For a full account of this debate, see Roobol, *Disputation by Decree*, 9, 19, 28-29, 39-42, 78-79, 99-101, 110-11, 123, 126, 138-59, 286.

2. There is a very large body of literature on tolerance and toleration; covering it all is beyond our scope. For an introduction to tolerance and its political ramifications throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, see the introduction to Ole Peter Grell and Bob Scribner, *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-12. For questions of tolerance of minority groups in the Netherlands (Mennonites, Catholics, Jews, witches, homosexuals, and slaves), see Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, ed., *Een schijn van verdraagzaamheid. Afwijking en tolerantie in Nederland van de 16e eeuw tot heden* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1989).

3. For an explanation of the differences between the concepts of “tolerance” and “toleration,” and my use of the terms, see my footnote 4 in the Introduction.

4. For a more complete discussion of the importance of the invisible church to Coolhaes, see Chapter 6.

church. In the visible church, Coolhaes advocates diversity. Although he identified as Reformed, he undervalued or devalued confessional distinctives so much that it is not wrong to call him anti-confessional. In fact, he would have been happier to see the process of Reformation continue in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries with an unraveling of confessional identities, rather than a tightening of them. Coolhaes was mocked for his seeming indifference to confessional boundaries in this heavily polarized period. In his *Vermaninge aan Jaques Mercijs*,⁶ he relates that he was called by some during this period a “Neutralist,” which was a term he never called himself, preferring at that time the term “impartial.” He defends impartiality as a characteristic of all pious Christians who had studied in the School of the Holy Spirit, rather than in the school of the devil.⁷ Wijnant Kras, his former friend turned opponent, used the term “Neutralist” for Coolhaes.⁸ He writes in the form of a little rhyme,

What are these Neutralists?
Not Beggars; nor Papists.
Not Anabaptists, not even Christians.
In the Scripture one can find no trace of them.⁹

So, Coolhaes never said that different confessions should dissolve or cease to exist. Still, ultimately he was, in a sense, anti-confessional. He would not oppose them, but did not want to encourage them. He did not condemn confessional differences, but desired religious diversity in the state, and also in freedom for diversity of views within a confession. He believed that a broad and open visible church, made up of diverse groups (including the

5. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio 11Cijr.

6. Coolhaes, *Vermaninge aan Jaques Mercijs* 1601. Note: *Vermaninge aen Jaques Mercijs* is mentioned in Coolhaes, *Een noodwendighe broederlijke vermaninghe*, folio Erf. Assumed non-extant.

7. Moes and Burger, *De Amsterdamsche boekdrukkers*, 85.

8. In context, it seems that Kras is referring to Coolhaes’ religious impartiality by this term. We also mentioned this term in the biographical sketch in relation to Coolhaes’ co-author, Rolwaghen. However, *neutralisten* were connected by Abel Eppens, farmer in Groningen, to *spannisierten* – Hispanicized people, Catholics or Catholic-sympathizers, see Wiebe Bergsma, *De wereld volgens Abel Eppens. Een Ommelander boer uit de zestiende eeuw* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff/Fryske Akademy, 1988), 114, 122. See also Pollmann, “No Man’s Land. Reinventing Netherlandish Identities, 1585-1621,” 257-58. However, Kras does not seem to mean this – he says *neutralisten* are not “Papists.” See the following note for his words.

9. “Wat is te segghen Neutralisten?
Sy en zijn noch Geusen, noch oock Papisten,
Noch Doopsgesinden, noch oock geen Christen,
Want men in der Schrift van haer noyt en wisten.”

Wijnant Kras, *Antwoort op een faem-roovende boeck*, folio Gijr.

public Reformed Church but not limited to it), would benefit the state politically and its members spiritually. He also thought that the freedom of individuals to hold differing and diverse views within a confession or local congregation was healthy and reflected the idea that absolute truth of doctrine was in many cases very hard to be sure of.

In this chapter, we will see his definition of “visible church,” how through sacraments and excommunication people were included or excluded from that church, and why Coolhaes believed that the sacraments should be free, open and accessible. We will see that he did not view the visible church through the grid of Bullinger’s covenant theology as much as through the belief in continuous “reformations” through church history. We will glance at the historical and political contexts, and then look at the political benefits Coolhaes saw for a state which encourages confessional diversity. Also, we will note the personal benefits he saw for individuals living in what he called “Christian freedom.”

Visible foundation and biblical interpretation

To Coolhaes, the diverse visible church is a house for all, a ship at sea, an army in which all soldiers should fight on the same side.¹⁰ It includes people of both greater and lesser spirituality and Christ-likeness. God has ordained its existence, however, so despite the impurities present in this *corpus Christi mixtum*, it will remain in the world. Also, the visible church is good for society. Despite not being the true church, or being fully holy, it possesses, Coolhaes said, a sort of righteousness. Its righteousness is “political righteousness” – the creation of peaceful and honest citizens.¹¹

This visible church, he specifies further, is made up of all who are baptized in Christ, and who build on the same foundation:

As far as religion and faith go, we know that faith is not from man’s thinking, but is a gift of God, and that our office is not to force everyone to it, nor those who do not know everything, for we know what we know, understand what we understand, believe what we believe (excepting the articles of faith) to be right. As long as others build a foundation with us; that is, a turning from sin and toward God, only trusting in Christ Jesus and holding him as the only redeemer, savior, mediator, way, door to eternal life, seeking salvation nowhere else – not in his worthiness or holiness, but in the mercy of God – and willing and prepared with all his heart to do the will of the

10. Coolhaes unpacks these metaphors in Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, folio Aiiiijv.

11. Coolhaes, *Basuynne*, folios Biiijr–Cijv.

Lord, as far as his weak ability allows, and so forth, we should not condemn, despise or pester them.¹²

In expanding this definition, he uses and interprets Paul's analogy of building in 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.¹³ Each preacher, each confession, is building a "house" with stronger or weaker materials, which will be tested by fire on the Last Day. Coolhaes interprets the foundation to be the Old and New Testaments (to which he refers as the "prophetic and apostolic Scriptures"), the Apostles' Creed (also known as the "Twelve Articles"),¹⁴ and the sacrament of being baptized in (or affirming) Christ. He does not engage in detailed exposition of the meaning of the Creed's articles, as Luther does in his *Catechism*. The form of baptism also does not matter to him in the context of this definition; it matters that the members have identified themselves as Christians and affirmed the faith. Thus, he is a reductionist, but his limited "foundation" is not unusual for those in any age who struggle to combat confessional exclusivity with irenicism.¹⁵ Erasmus had also emphasized the Bible and the Creed as the most fundamental base for theology, although he also looked to tradition, general councils and the Fathers.¹⁶ It should be noted that this simple foundation is similar to Coornhert's, in encompassing only the Bible and the Creed.¹⁷ The term "foundation," while certainly from the Bible as we have said, also echoes *fundamentalia* versus *adiaphora*, the famous Erasmian distinction held by irenicists.¹⁸

Confessional differences in teaching and doctrine, therefore, are the different ways of building. All who build differently, including groups which to some may seem to be on the

12. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio 18Eijv.

13. There are many places where Coolhaes discusses this. An early one is Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio 85Yv.

14. Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, folio Er.

15. One other sixteenth-century example is Wilhelm Klebitz. Klebitz' "foundation" was even smaller – just affirmation of Jesus Christ, not even the necessity to believe in the articles of the Creed, the virgin birth, or Christ's divinity. Wim Janse, "Non-conformist Eucharistic Theology: The Case of the Alleged 'Zwinglian Polemicist' Wilhelm Klebitz (c. 1533-68)," *NAKG/DRCH* 81.1 (2001), 5-25.

16. Payne, *Erasmus*, 15-27.

17. This is mentioned in Voogt, "Anyone who can read may be a preacher," 422; and Voogt, *Constraint on Trial*, 83. This reference to this foundation to which Voogt alludes is found in a chapter entitled "Ruygh Bewerp eender onpartydiger kercken onder verbeteringhe," in *III. deel van Dirck Volckertsz Coornherts wercken*, by Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert (Amsterdam: Colom, Jacob Aertsz, 1630), folios Aijv - Aijr.

18. Gary Remer, *Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 50.

fringes of “orthodoxy,” are included in Coolhaes’ visible church – not only all official Protestant confessions, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, but also Schwenckfelders, David-Jorists, Franckists and others even further away from what his Reformed colleagues would approve of. Occasionally, Coolhaes even mentions “Arians” as a part of the visible church.¹⁹ This is, in fact, illogical of him, given that the Apostles’ Creed, part of his essential foundation, is Trinitarian. However, his inclusion of them in this list shows his desire for diversity in the visible church, and he evidently wants them to be included despite a difference in theology. He is opposed to exclusion of religious minorities, not just because of a desire for their toleration, but because he wants intentional diversity as the goal and reality of the visible church in the world. The visible church is big, and broad, and heterogeneous – the great ship, the spacious house – and should be recognized for all of what it is.

The Bible and its interpretation is a vital part of Coolhaes’ foundation. His doctrine of Scripture can be summarized in three points. First, he feels it important to affirm that the writers of the Old and New Testament books were inspired in their writing. He writes, “And God has laid his holy Word in their mouth, and confirmed it with signs and wonders.”²⁰ By this he means that the miracles which the apostles were enabled by God to do in the Apostolic Age demonstrated the authority of those apostles to write the New Testament.

Second, he teaches that allegorical interpretations are often the legitimate interpretation of passages. Many passages in the Bible can be understood literally, but many must be understood not according to the letter, but according to the meaning of the Holy Spirit.²¹ Coolhaes would have agreed with Coornhert when the latter, recalling Augustine, had said that literal interpretation would not give much to the soul. To use an allegorical interpretation makes it possible to give meaning to passages that would have been difficult if taken literally. This question of methods of interpretation was fairly controversial at the time. The practice of allegorical interpretation ran counter to a more purely historical approach of hermeneutics which had replaced the medieval *quadriga*, or four-fold method of

19. Coolhaes, *Van de christelijcke discipline ende excommunicatie*, 1585 edition, folios Bijv–Bijr.

20. “Ende dat Godt selfs syn Heylighe Woordt in haren mondt gheleydt hebbende, dat selve met teychenen ende wonderwercken becrachticht heeft.” Coolhaes, *Seeckere punten*, folio Aijr. See also folio 14Dijj.

21. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio 13Dv; Coolhaes, *Seeckere punten*, folio Fij.

interpretation, which had included both literal and allegorical elements, and allowed more than one “meaning” of a text.²²

Third, Coolhaes believes that correct interpretations of the Scripture exist, although they are sometimes very difficult to be sure of. The best method is comparing hard texts to clearer texts, a practice which Luther restored.²³ His belief in an ideal, correct interpretation is seen by his statement that errors in biblical interpretation lead to many of the sects.²⁴ However, it is often difficult to find the correct interpretation, and because he is skeptical about hermeneutics, seemingly insoluble and divisive questions do not bother him. “One tries to understand the letter. Everyone has the same letter, but if they all understood it the same way there would be no differences anymore. So this is at the present time hidden in the counsel of the Spirit.”²⁵ The role of the Holy Spirit is essential in interpreting Scripture.²⁶ In addition, even though a correct interpretation must exist, the diversity of opinion which the difficulty of interpretation creates is actually better for society. To return to Coolhaes’ metaphors, different preachers are busy building differently on the foundation. They are often therefore in opposition to each other. Coolhaes goes on to use a seafaring metaphor. Because the visible church is like a ship, the preachers of various confessions can be compared to its sailors. The sea of disunity, as well as the differences of opinion of the sailors who cannot agree even on the points of the compass, threaten to sink this ship, which would surely have happened but for God’s grace. So, diversity of opinion is a safer way to sail the ship of Christendom than division, which could lead to upsetting the vessel, or falling into the hands of the enemy.²⁷

22. Roobol, *Disputation by Decree*, 38. The *quadriga* allowed passages to be interpreted literally, anagogically (in reference to future prophetic events), typologically, or tropologically (drawing a moral).

23. Coolhaes, *Naedencken*, folio D/25.

24. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio 13Dv.

25. “Men vraecht naer verstant van die letter: die letter heeftmen wel al ghelijck, maer verstont mense al ghelijck so en souder geen verschil meer zijn. So is dit dan nu inden raedt des geestes verborghen.” Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, folio Cr.

26. “So it is untrue that one cannot understand the Scripture (at least insofar as is needed for salvation) without these philosophical arts and various languages.... And when one has the Holy Spirit, one will be led into all truth, even if one knows no language but one’s mother tongue.” Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, folio Rijr.

27. Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, folio Aiiijv. See also Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 190.

In regard to this, the book *Apologie oft verantwoordinge Vanden Grave van Essex 1603*,²⁸ published in Middelburg, is attributed to Coolhaes, but expresses some views which seem unlike him. It would be odd that Coolhaes would publish something in Middelburg – a center for the stricter Reformed, and the place of the Middelburg Synod of 1581. The book is said to have been translated from English, a language that there is no other evidence for Coolhaes having known. While the language seems similar enough to that of Coolhaes, none of his usual themes are present. On the contrary, the one passage in this political book which deals with religion advocates a unified state religion as the only way of creating unity and political strength in the state.²⁹ This idea of one religion is reminiscent of Coornhert, as well as of the stricter Reformed, but as we have seen Coolhaes advocated diversity of opinion as the safest way to “steer the ship.”³⁰

To summarize, therefore, it is important to him to assert that the Bible is both inspired and at least partly allegorical, allowing of various interpretations which are partly hidden and partly revealed by the Spirit. Also, although he believes that correct interpretations of various texts exist, he also thinks that the true and final meaning of many matters is difficult to be certain of. Therefore, diversity of theology should characterize the visible church. As we will see in the next section, diversity will also be Coolhaes’ answer to the question of who should be included in the visible church.

Inclusion and exclusion

Coolhaes includes all confessions in his definition of the visible church. It is broad and no one should be excluded. To defend this inclusivity, he employs two well-known parables: the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. 13:24-30) and the parable of the five wise and five

28. Coolhaes? *Apologie oft verantwoordinge vanden grave van Essex, techen de ghene die hem jaloerselijck ende ten onrechten schelden als beletter des vredes ende ruste zijnes vaderlands, Door hemselven beschreven int Iaer 1598. ende uyt het engelsche exemplaer (Ghedruet tot London by Richard Bradocks 1603). Overgheset by C.C. Tot Middelburgh, voor Bernaert Langhenesse, wonende op den hoeck vande Gistrate inde vier winden* (Middelburg: Langhenesse, 1603).

29. Caspar Coolhaes? *Apologie oft verantwoordinge van den Grave van Essex, techen de ghene die hem jaloerselijck ende ten onrechten schelden als beletter des vredes ende ruste zijnes Vaderlands, Door hemselven beschreven int Iaer 1598 ende uyt het Engelsche exemplaer (Ghedruet tot London by Richard Bradocks 1603). Overgheset by C.C. Tot Middelburgh, voor Bernaert Langhenesse, wonende op den hoeck vande Gistrate inde vier winden, 1603* (Middelburg: Bernaert Langhenesse, 1603), 14/Ciiijb-15/D.

30. Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, folio Aiiiv. See also Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 190.

foolish virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). In the first parable, the wheat and the weeds grow up together. To pull out the weeds would destroy the good wheat, so the master lets them both grow together until the harvest. In other words, the time for judgment is not yet. It would be premature for Coolhaes, therefore, or for anyone, to judge a person's qualifications for membership in the community of Christ, since eventually that judgment will be made by the man who sowed, i.e., the Son of Man. This interpretation of the parable was already a well-known argument for toleration in the sixteenth century which had also been made by Augustine, Erasmus and others.³¹ In the second parable, ten girls with lanterns had been waiting in the dark a long time for a wedding reception. Some ran out of oil and so could not go with the procession and were ultimately shut out of the party by the bridegroom. This parable is interpreted by Coolhaes, in line with his view that it is not up to humans to judge, to mean that the bridegroom, Christ, will ultimately judge some to be included and some to be excluded. It is not the task of people in the present to make those judgments, since they cannot know yet who *will* be included. However, Coolhaes does not advocate a passive attitude which waited to see evidence in peoples' lifestyles before admitting them to the church, evidence that would prove without a doubt that they were part of the elect. No, all people should be included in the visible church as much as possible and not turned away, and then be taught and nurtured. As he states, "I have always thought, as I still think, that we must be diligent to bring as many people to Christ as possible, and to shut no one out from Christ's community prematurely, but to establish them in the truth."³²

This willingness not to judge was not in line with the stricter Calvinists. Many judged a person's inclusion by his or her conformity to a set of beliefs as well as living what was seen to be a godly lifestyle. Most confessions had strict membership criteria which excluded people by definition. For instance, Calvin had affirmed in the *Institutes* that the invisible church contains all saints alive and dead, but it is the visible church which is the "mother" of

31. "Augustine, Sermon 23 on the New Testament," New Advent, www.newadvent.org/fathers/160323.htm (accessed January 27 2016); Roland Bainton, "The Parable of the Tares as the Proof Text for Religious Liberty to the End of the Sixteenth Century," *Church History* 1 (1932): 67; Roland Bainton, "Religious Liberty and the Parable of the Tares," *Collected Papers in Church History*, vol. 1 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), 95-121.

32. "Soo hebbe ick ghemeynt als ick nog meyne, dat wy ons voornamelick hier in to beneerstighen hadden, om de Heer Christo so veel ons mogelick is veel volcx toe te brengen, ende niet om yemant onrijpelic buyten Christum te stellen, de welcke inden waerheyt wel daer in wesen mochte ." Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, folio Biiijr.

believers, and thus the only way to enter into eternal life.³³ The Reformed Church saw their visible church as the “true” church and led them to introduce the third mark of the true church: discipline, based on periodic examination, to keep the church pure. This purity could be sullied by allowing disreputable or sinful persons access to communion, and this in turn would affect the purity of all the members. For example, George de Montigny, Lord of Noyelles, military leader, ally of William of Orange, and defender of Leiden, was not allowed to come to communion by the new Reformed consistory of Leiden during the first siege against the Spanish. He was considered to be unfit, having the reputation for licentiousness and drunkenness.³⁴ In the Reformed model, therefore, the visible church can be called the true church because it is pure. The invisible church could also be called the true church, because it is composed of the elect.³⁵

As we have mentioned earlier, according to the Reformed Church in the Netherlands, only members could participate in the sacraments. *Liefhebbers* were those who chose to be part of the church community but did not take the step of membership. They could listen to the sermons, but not participate in the sacraments. We mention this again here, because we are highlighting the question of inclusion and exclusion. In a sense the *liefhebbers* were excluded, but generally by their own choice. But the Reformed Church restricted others from the Lord’s Supper from time to time because their lifestyle or views did not comport with the standards of their local consistory. In cases of stubborn sin or “heretical” beliefs, members could be excommunicated, as of course Coolhaes was. The Reformed Church was not alone in excluding divergent theological opinions and lifestyles – the Mennonite movement in the Northern Netherlands practiced excommunication, and divided into smaller groups in their efforts to retain purity. By 1557, there were at least six major groups of Dutch Mennonites.³⁶

33. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, section 5, 2283-84, www.ccel.org/ccel/ccel/calvin/institutes.i.html (accessed January 27 2016).

34. Kooi, *Liberty and Religion*, 53; J. van Vloten, *Nalezing, aantekeningen, en bijlagen op Leidens beleg en ontzet* (Leiden: D. Noothoven van Goor, 1867), 4-5; *NNBW*, vol. 5, 380.

35. Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 51-58; Stackhouse, *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?* 179-80, 190.

36. The eventual groups by 1625 included the Waterlanders, the High Germans, the Old Frisians, the Young Frisians, the Old Flemings, and the Young Flemings. In 1630, a unification of the Flemings, Young Frisians and High Germans produced the United Congregations. See Samme Zijlstra, “Anabaptism and Tolerance: Possibilities and Limitations,” in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 112-31.

Coolhaes, in summary, used biblical arguments for inclusivity in the visible church. The crux of his teaching is that God, not man, must judge who is ultimately included in the invisible church, and so as many as possible should be encouraged to enter the visible church in the hope that they will learn and grow in faith. Struggling to assure the purity of the visible church by excluding people is not useful, in contrast to the practice of the Reformed Church in the Netherlands.

Visible signs of inclusion: physical sacraments

Both Protestant sacraments, baptism and communion, were usually seen as the sign that someone was included in the visible church. Baptism was seen as the gateway to inclusion. For Coolhaes physical baptism was less important than what he termed “spiritual baptism,”³⁷ as we mentioned in Chapter 6. It is difficult to separate the two in his writing. For him, baptism is not righteousness itself, but a seal of righteousness.³⁸ When one buys a house, one receives a seal and a deed which testifies to the purchase. Baptism is a seal, as circumcision was a seal in the Old Testament. To use another metaphor, it is not the new birth, but a “bath of new birth” which is a witness of that new birth.³⁹ Physical baptism should be given to anyone who desires it. Coolhaes cites Gwalther that John the Baptist allowed everyone without exception to come to baptism.⁴⁰ The sacraments are visible signs of the invisible but true things.⁴¹ A sacrament contains the visible and the invisible, the physical and the spiritual, the earthly and the heavenly.⁴²

Coolhaes holds loose views on the physical act of baptism itself. As we saw in Chapter 3, he affirmed infant baptism but did not find it a problem if someone was

37. Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, article 3.

38. The use of “seal” is part of the Zwinglian view; see Sanders, “Consensus Tigurinus,” *OER*, vol. 1, 414.

39. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folios 95Aaiiia-b.

40. Coolhaes, *Van de christelijcke discipline ende excommunicatie*, 1611 edition, folio 25. Ironically, John the Baptist rebuked the hypocrites, whom he called a “generation of vipers,” for coming out to him in the desert to be baptized, judging them to be insincere (Matt. 3:7-9; Luke 3:7-9). Coolhaes and Gwalther do not follow the texts to make that point, but emphasize that “all” may come.

41. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, 95Aaiijr.

42. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, 97 BBr.

unbaptized, for example the older children of Jan Janszoon whom he mentions in *Breeder bericht*.⁴³ At the Synod of Middelburg, he was unwilling to state that unbaptized children who died were lost, although this relates more to covenant theology and Bullinger – the view that a single covenant throughout history means that the efficacy of Christ’s redemption reaches not only forward but backward in time.⁴⁴ He sympathized with the plights of the Mennonites, especially in Friesland, and advocated fair treatment of them in several of his later works. However, he disagreed with their view. Mennonites, he writes, misunderstand the Bible by insisting on the baptism of adults only, but they should not be condemned because of this conviction. Their interpretation is flawed, but they are weaker and should be born with by the stronger in faith and wisdom.⁴⁵ Adult baptizers should be accepted as “brothers,” that is, be allowed to commune together with infant baptizers, he feels. The basis of this brotherhood is not a vague feeling of kindness, justice or tolerance, but the commonality between the two types of baptizers of one Christian foundation of belief. Creating schisms over baptism is wrong.⁴⁶

The second Protestant sacrament, communion, was usually the most important continuing sign of inclusion in the visible church during this period in history. We talked about Coolhaes’ Spiritualist theological views of the Lord’s Supper in Chapter 5; here we will address the question of who, to his mind, may and should be present and receive the sacrament. Coolhaes’ view that all should be admitted to the Lord’s Table, is what is called “open communion.” Open communion had been proposed by the States of Holland in the draft church order of 1576. They recommended four communion services per year at which all would be free to commune. However, the Reformed Church never agreed to this.⁴⁷ As we saw above, the exclusion that the Reformed Church used as discipline, was in practice exclusion from the sacrament of communion. Throughout the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church had used *interdict* as a discipline (although of course for Roman Catholics

43. Coolhaes, *Breeder bericht*, folios 2v–5v.

44. Wandel, “Zwingli,” *OER*, vol. 4, 322.

45. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folios 71Sijiv-r.

46. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folios 96 Aaiijr-97 BBv.

47. Pettegree, “Coming to Terms with Victory,” 171-72. Coolhaes did not use the term “open communion,” however.

there are more sacraments than just communion and baptism from which one can be excluded).

For Coolhaes, all this exclusion is deplorable. Open communion should be practiced because one cannot know the true spiritual state and destiny of any individual, at this point in time. Communion is salutary, and should not be forbidden to anyone who desires Christ enough to desire it also. To bar the sinful and struggling from the sacraments by temporary or permanent ban or excommunication is especially harmful, for then they lose what might help them to come closer to God again. Even stubborn public sinners might still repent, even at the eleventh hour, so to speak, and become part of the true church.⁴⁸ To Coolhaes, when someone comes to church, either to the sermon or communion, he is no longer exactly in the category of “sinner” and one must hope for the best for him. If one sees no immediate improvement in his life, Coolhaes believes that it may still happen today, tomorrow, or even next year. One never knows what God will do.⁴⁹ This is reminiscent of Erasmus and, influenced by him, Castellio, who “believed that the renunciation of theological speculation and the practice of an exemplary *imitatio Christi* would eventually bring the heretics back to the evangelical truth and to religious consensus.”⁵⁰

Those of differing opinions as regards the Lord’s Supper should be held as brothers and can commune together, because of the common Gospel “foundation” which he assumed all confessions held.⁵¹ This diversity at the Lord’s Supper was not acceptable to Coolhaes’ opponents. Allowing indiscriminate, unexamined people to the Lord’s table was seen as “giving the holy to dogs and throwing pearls before swine.” It was also seen as dangerous and contaminating to the whole church. However, Coolhaes found this objection illogical for two reasons. If sacraments are holy, surely the Word of God is holier still. Also, his opponents would allow an unexamined person to come to hear a sermon, but not to take communion. Even non-Christian foreigners would be encouraged to come into church to

48. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folios 20Eiiijv-r.

49. Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, article 5. We mentioned in Chapter 5 that this idea can be found in both Franck and Bullinger.

50. Guggisberg, “Castellion,” *OER*, vol. 1, 272.

51. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folios 98 BBr-99 BBijv.

listen to a sermon, in the hope that God's Word would convince them as to the truth of the Gospel.⁵²

Coolhaes is aware that some are judged as being godless non-Christians because they are not communicant members of the public church. In fact, this is one of the main charges leveled against the Leiden magistrates. However, he argues, some people do not take communion because they have an overly strong consciousness of their sins,⁵³ others because they are reacting against a view that taking the physical elements is the source of faith.⁵⁴ If one cannot use the physical elements in actuality, the "good intention" or "spiritual use" is sufficient. As a matter of fact, if the sacraments are "done wrongly," he opines that it is better to refrain from them, rather than model that wrong use to others.⁵⁵ This is the opposite of those who would advocate a Nicodemism that would fit into the Catholic Church or any other place. Sacraments should not be made an idol. On the other hand, they should not be neglected.⁵⁶ Despite this, as we mentioned earlier, Coolhaes never suggested dispensing with the practice of physical baptism, and never taught a Schwenkfeldian *Stillstand* of abstinence from the physical bread and wine.

Not covenants but reformations

We have seen, then, that Coolhaes defines the visible church as diverse and heterogeneous. We have looked at his ideas of inclusion and exclusion as they affect individuals. On a larger level, inclusion in the church during the sixteenth century was being seen by Reformed thinkers as relating to the predestination and thus election of certain people. The idea of various covenants of God with mankind throughout history was also developing. It will be helpful here, in connection with these overarching theories of predestination and covenant theology, to take a brief look at Coolhaes' ideas of the history of the visible people of God through the ages.

52. Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, article 5.

53. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folios 18Eijv-r.

54. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folios 19Eiijv-r.

55. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folios 94Aaijr–95Aaijv.

56. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio 95Aaijv.

We said earlier that Coolhaes' view has been called "conditional predestination."⁵⁷ He affirmed that God's grace operated in a person at the beginning of the process, but that the individual was obliged to accept the offered gift. This fits in well with discussion of covenants throughout Old and New Testament history. The covenant concept emphasizes that God's grace precedes the human decision, but the role of the human is then in assenting to it. "By using the covenant idea, theologians shifted emphasis from the eternal decrees of God, central High Calvinist teachings, to God's relationships with man, without abandoning predestination."⁵⁸ It includes ideas such as the requirement of hearing the proposed covenant before agreeing to it, and a decision-making process in time. People can participate and "prepare for grace."⁵⁹ Some have gone so far as to say that this "softens the rigid structures of post-Calvinian predestination doctrine."⁶⁰ It would not be illogical for Coolhaes, as a broader Reformed thinker, to have therefore embraced more of covenant theology.⁶¹ However, as with so many other ideas, he picked and chose only a few federal concepts to add to his eclectic ecclesiology. He did not discuss the various different covenants found in the Old Testament – the Noachic, the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and so forth. He did not use the concepts of God's covenants with humankind as a connecting thread for all his ideas, as others were doing in his time.⁶² He did not write about covenants much at all, but we can surmise that his inspiration from Bullinger and other Zurich theologians for his church and state views, might extend to some acceptance of one Adamic covenant, and the view that Christ's death justifies sinners both backward and forward in time. Bullinger was very much read in the Netherlands during Coolhaes' time, and later at the National Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) he would be used by both the Remonstrants and Contra-Remonstrants to support their views. Despite his polemic against Swiss Anabaptists, for the Reformed he could be

57. This term used for Coolhaes' views by Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 44. See also Chapter 5.

58. Everett H. Emerson, "Calvin and Covenant Theology," *Church History* 25 (1956): 138.

59. Emerson, "Calvin and Covenant Theology," 140. See also David Zaret, "Calvin, Covenant Theology, and the Weber Thesis," *The British Journal of Sociology* 43 (1992): 369-91.

60. Lyle D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age. The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 24.

61. This is not to say that covenant theology was not used later by various groups, including stricter Calvinist ones – for instance, the Westminster Assembly.

62. For examples, see Bierma, *German Calvinism*, 11.

called a “conciliatory theologian”⁶³ in a period in which irenicism was hard to find. Because of the unity of this one covenant, believers in God before Christ could be justified by the cross just as believers after it could.⁶⁴ In fact, this seems to be the intent behind the first three Middelburg theses.⁶⁵ Whether or not Coolhaes believed this, he did not say in so many words. But this is the most logical explanation for the wording of these three theses, that he was believed to hold it. This, then, could be the reason that while he affirmed infant baptism, he did not seem too worried about whether it was done or not in specific cases in his congregation. Despite the general controversy about his views of baptism and the fate of unbaptized children, he did not write much about it. He does not, in fact, draw any parallel between “Old Israel” (circumcision) and “New Israel” (infant baptism), as one might expect.

He did, however, as we have seen, employ “covenant” to describe the relationship between the Old and New Testament people of God. The church was present in the Old Testament, both the visible church and the “true” church (in other words, those who are also members of the invisible church) – Cain and Abel, Noah and his family, Ishmael and Isaac, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. Each of these little groups represents the visible church of its time, and contains within it the true church, which is often pursued and persecuted.⁶⁶ However, not all of the circumcised are the true children of Abraham, that is, members of the covenant.⁶⁷ The visible church is not the same as the “true” church, and will never be.

Coolhaes’ view came to the forefront at the Synod of Middelburg, when he was asked if those in the Old Testament were saved without a knowledge of Christ.⁶⁸ His view was different than that of his opponents, and he complained that the Synod had misunderstood his response.⁶⁹ He elaborated later that all who are saved are saved through Christ, from Adam until the end of the world. However, in the Old Testament, people did not have such literal

63. Janse, “Ik wil liever blijven bij den wortel van den boom, dan hoog klimmen,” 121-22.

64. Wandel, “Zwingli,” *OER*, vol. 4, 322.

65. See summaries in Chapter 3 for all Middelburg theses.

66. Coolhaes, *Breeder bericht*, 10b. See also Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 42.

67. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 197-201.

68. For discussion, see Chapter 3.

69. Coolhaes, *Conciliatio*, Aiiijv-r.

knowledge of Christ – all they knew was that the seed of the woman would break the head of the serpent. Still, it was enough for them that they believed the promise of God and did not doubt. They saw Christ from afar as through a dark cloud. Nevertheless, all in the Old Testament who were saved were held by the same faith as Christians have now.⁷⁰ Coolhaes denied that he meant to minimize the role of Scripture in an attempt to argue for perfectibility; he just meant that one should not be condemned for not knowing everything.⁷¹

He also implied the idea of “covenant” in one other important way. As we have seen, he called the invisible, true church “the heavenly Jerusalem, the Mother of us all.”⁷² He did not elaborate about this in so many words, but it should be noted that to use that verse, Gal. 4:26, is in itself a statement about covenants. Paul was making a comparison between the child of the slave woman, Hagar, who is identified with Mount Sinai, which symbolically means with the Law, with the child of the free woman, Sarah, who is identified with Jerusalem, and thus symbolically with grace and freedom. Paul taught here that they represent, in fact, two covenants. Scholars of the time were positing all sorts of covenants based on the influential men of the Old Testament, but here Paul identified two, based on two key women.

Although Coolhaes did not connect all the dots of the ideas found in these verses, it is clear that he was saying that if Jerusalem is the Mother of the invisible church, then the invisible church and its members are born in grace and freedom, not law and slavery. By extension, one might suppose that he also meant that it is the visible church which could be compared to Hagar, and is concerned with law and is not free. Therefore, as Galatians 5:1 says, we have been set free and so should not return to slavery. The church is now in its period of freedom from law, and must not submit again to “a new papacy.” Galatians, as we have seen, was the book that we know Coolhaes lectured on in his brief time as an instructor at the University in Leiden, and his interpretations of these verses were clearly foundational to the ideas he had about what the covenants were.

Instead of covenants, he preferred the view that God sends continual “reformations,” complete with teachers and opportunities for repentance and renewal. This is why the

70. Coolhaes, *Conciliatio*, Diiijr.

71. Coolhaes, *Conciliatio*, Eij.

72. Coolhaes, *Een christelijke vermaninghe*, folio Aijb; Coolhaes, *Seeckere punten*, folios 2Aiiijv–Aiiijr.

disunity of the visible church in Coolhaes' own time saddened but did not surprise him. It was also part of the Spiritualism which we have discussed that Coolhaes was dissatisfied with the results of the Reformation and found it unfinished. The Old Testament Israelites (to which he also refers as the "church") fell away from the pious heritage of the Patriarchs, and needed a reformation through Moses and Aaron out of slavery, through the desert and back into the footsteps of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph.⁷³ In New Testament times, God sent Jesus Christ and John the Baptist to begin another "reformation," which was not about particular laws but about preaching repentance and forgiveness of sins.⁷⁴ The Apostles continued this "reformation." Coolhaes believed that the church has never been better or more Reformed than during the golden age of the Apostles.⁷⁵ But then the church was corrupted. The devil set up his kingdom after the death of the Apostles, persuading preachers and teachers to take more authority than they had received from God.⁷⁶ The Council of Nicaea had only mixed value. He speaks well of Constantine, whom he sees as the rightful ruler of the secular government, but paints the attending bishops as being hate-filled and superstitious. The Roman Church then became the powerful archenemy of the salvation of all mankind.⁷⁷ It held an unjust authority over people's faith and consciences for centuries. The Reformation was a triumph over the Roman Catholic Church: the process by which God bound Satan, who had been working through the "terrible darkness of the Papacy."⁷⁸

During the time of the Reformation, when the church was "free," it should have used this freedom of conscience.⁷⁹ However, it did not. Satan had somehow escaped his chains and changed into an angel of light so subtly as to deceive the Reformed Church to follow him into a darkness even worse than that of the earlier centuries.⁸⁰ The true preachers' "fiery love for

73. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 18-20.

74. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 20.

75. Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, folio Bij.

76. Coolhaes, *Een christelijcke vermaninghe*, folio Aiiij.

77. Coolhaes, *Een christelijcke vermaninghe*, folio Aiiijr.

78. Coolhaes, *Een christelijcke vermaninghe*, folio Bij.

79. Coolhaes, *Een christelijcke vermaninghe*, folio BB.

80. Coolhaes, *Een christelijcke vermaninghe*, folio Aij–Aijr.

God and for their neighbor” was suppressed.⁸¹ In churches and in universities, where disputation became the norm, the visible church “died out and nothing is left but its bare and powerless name.”⁸² Meanwhile, repentance and the Spirit are responsible for reformations recorded in the Bible, not arguing and disputing.⁸³ Luther, Zwingli and Calvin disputed about the Lord’s Supper before God had raised up a church worthy of receiving it. They disputed about baptism before people had heard enough preaching of the Law to mourn their sins. Therefore, this “hard food” of difficult questions (the nature of God, the nature of Christ, the incarnation, predestination) sticks in the throats of simple believers and makes them doubt, err, and even die.⁸⁴ The “free church” (the post-Reformation Protestant churches) had loaded the New Testament with more rules than the Jews had in the Old.⁸⁵ This created a party-spiritedness with a deceptive appearance of godliness – the work of the same devil, who has “merely put on another cap and coat to avoid detection.”⁸⁶

Toward the end of his life, Coolhaes felt that perhaps confessional division had lessened. He wrote, “It appears that the time described by John in the Revelation - the healing time – is close at hand. The Beast and the false prophet will be caught and thrown into the lake of fire. This is what is promised to believers in Christ Jesus.”⁸⁷ He does not mention a tribulation; he predicts positive developments – a defeat of evil and a time of healing. The party-spiritedness was not as great as it was twenty or thirty years ago, he found.⁸⁸ Despite ever-increasing confessionalization, he hoped that the ill-feeling of the various groups toward each other was lessening. It is hard to see if this was merely wishful thinking on his part, or if he did not understand his time. As history shows, Coolhaes could not have been more wrong. His prediction of the lessening of party-spiritedness in the Netherlands did not come to pass. Confessional strife would erupt into full-blown political and ecclesiastical turmoil in the

81. Coolhaes, *Summa*, folios B-B2.

82. Coolhaes, *Naedencken*, folio Aij/3.

83. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 55-59.

84. Coolhaes, *Naedencken*, folio BB/10.

85. Coolhaes, *Een christelijcke vermaninghe*, folios B-BB.

86. Coolhaes, *Een christelijcke vermaninghe*, folios Aiiijr–Aiiijv.

87. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 192-93.

88. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 194.

young Republic in less than five years between the two groups of the Reformed Calvinists, which would become the Remonstrants and the Contra-Remonstrants. In the period immediately following Coolhaes' death, the Republic attempted to create a society based on religious uniformity according to the National Synod of Dordt of 1618-1619. The stricter Calvinists saw it as a triumph. Diversity was not valued; many were excluded. Coolhaes would have found it a dark time indeed.

From violence to toleration

Coolhaes was preaching the value of diversity and freedom in religion, while the Dutch Revolt was a fight for individual liberty and for freedom of conscience as well as for political freedom.⁸⁹ Thus, the terms “freedom,” “liberty,” “tolerance,” “toleration,” all feature prominently. A complete discussion of all these terms and factors is beyond the reach of this dissertation. Still, it will be useful at this point to provide some historical and political context for the questions of religious freedom and toleration. Of course, political context is also relevant to other aspects of Coolhaes' ecclesiology, such as his church and state views. But here, we will focus on the aspects of the context that will help clarify his views of diversity and freedom.

89. Originally: “Wij strijden voor de vrijheyt van onse consientien, van onse vrouwen en kinderen, van onse goet ende bloet.” Statement from the States of Holland in 1572, *Sendbrief in forme van supplicatie aen de Conincklijke Maiesteyt van Spaengien* (Delft, 1573), folio A3, as quoted in Martin van Gelderen, *De Vrijheid van Consciëntie: Het vrijheidsideaal van de Nederlandse opstand 1555-1610* (Gouda~Stichting Fonds Goudse Glazen, 1996), 9. Also see: Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 228. See also other recent sources for various aspects of study of the Revolt: Maria Francisca Davina Eekhout, “Material Memories of the Dutch Revolt: The Urban Memory Landscape in the Low Countries, 1566–1700” (Leiden: Leiden University unpublished dissertation, 2014); Marjolein 't Hart, *The Dutch Wars of Independence: Warfare and Commerce in the Netherlands 1570-1680* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2014); Anton van der Lem, *De opstand in de Nederlanden 1568-1648: de tachtigjarige oorlog in woord en beeld* (Nijmegen: Uitgeverij Vantilt, 2014); Johannes Martin Müller, “Exile Memories and the Dutch Revolt: The Narrated Diaspora, 1550–1750” (Leiden: Leiden University unpublished dissertation, 2014); Geert H. Janssen, *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Petra Groen, ed., *De tachtigjarige oorlog: van opstand naar geregelde oorlog, 1568-1648* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2013); Simon Groenveld, *De tachtigjarige oorlog: opstand en consolidatie in de Nederlanden (ca. 1560-1650)* (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 2012); Raingard Esser, *The Politics of Memory: The Writing of Partition in the Seventeenth-Century Low Countries* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Jasper van der Steen, “Goed en fout in de Nederlandse opstand,” *Holland: Regional-Historisch Tijdschrift* 43 (2011): 82-97; Yolanda Rodríguez Pérez, *The Dutch Revolt through Spanish Eyes: Self and Other in Historical and Literary Texts of Golden Age Spain (c. 1548-1673)* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008); Judith Pollmann, “‘De gemeente stond malkander bij’: katholieken en de Nederlandse Opstand,” *Leidschrift: Historisch Tijdschrift* 24 (2009): 33-49; Judith Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Judith Pollmann, “Internationalisering en de Nederlandse opstand,” *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffend de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 124 (2009): 515-35.

Many in the regions where the Spanish had been routed had “tasted how sweet and lovely religious freedom is.”⁹⁰ They were free now *not* to be Catholic, but to be Protestant. To many of the Reformed, freedom meant exactly that. To others, a greater freedom and more independence was desired. Toleration of diversity was assisted by the independence of the Dutch cities and the high regard in which their established, medieval, constitutional “privileges” and earned charters were held.⁹¹ The States as a constitutional body was composed of lords and princes who had sworn to preserve these privileges.⁹² This gave the different cities and regions the ability to make slightly different choices regarding toleration of various religions.⁹³

Also, being tolerant has been, since the sixteenth century, part of Dutch self-definition.⁹⁴ “Erasmianism” is almost a synonym for “tolerance” in the Dutch context, signaling a hate for persecution and love of tolerance toward peaceful dissidents.⁹⁵ In the earlier decades of the sixteenth century, heretics were punished by death. In Rotterdam in 1558, executioner and mayors had to flee when a mob freed four Anabaptists sentenced to death. In Antwerp the burning of Calvinist preacher Christophorus Fabricius, in 1564, led to unrest. In 1562 forty executions were carried out in Flanders and Tournai with inquisitor Pieter Titelmans. However, after 1553 there were no more executions in Amsterdam, and after 1559 none in Friesland.⁹⁶ Although opposed enough in many cases to other confessions

90. This phrase is quoted from Coolhaes?, *Verantwoordinghe van Sebastiaen Franck*, folio A2. For discussion of the authorship of this work, see Chapter 5.

91. However, the “privileges” of cities did not always have “a firm basis in law or fact, and what they entailed was not always crystal clear.” See Kaplan, “‘Dutch’ Religious Tolerance: Celebration and Revision,” 10.

92. Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 263.

93. This recalls Luther’s opinion: “Now tell me: How much wit must there be in the head of a person who imposes commands in an area where he has no authority whatsoever? Would you not judge the person insane who commanded the moon to shine whenever he wanted to? How well would it go if Leipzigers were to impose laws on us Wittenbergers, or if, conversely, we in Wittenberg were to legislate for the people of Leipzig! They would certainly send the lawmakers a thank-offering of hellebore to purge their brains and cure their sniffles.” Martin Luther, *To What Extent it Should Be Obeyed*, 1523, <http://pages.uoregon.edu> (accessed 22 November, 2014).

94. Benjamin Kaplan, “‘Dutch’ Religious Tolerance: Celebration and Revision,” in Hsia and Van Nierop, *Calvinism and Religious Toleration*, 9.

95. Mout, Smolinsky and Trapman, *Erasmianism*, 2.

96. Woltjer and Mout, “Settlements: The Netherlands,” 396; Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 261.

to curtail their privileges, Reformed opposition did not go as far as physical persecution. They felt their kinship with persecuted Calvinists “under the cross,” although ironically in the new Republic they were the favored religious group and could in theory persecute others. Although they followed Calvin in teaching that the civic government was to foster the “true religion” and discourage the others, they also (perhaps grudgingly) accepted that according to the Union of Utrecht (1579) in article 13, an individual’s conscience should not be tampered with by means of physical violence.⁹⁷ This was not a guarantee of freedom of choice; in practice the provinces managed the religious life of their citizens as they saw fit, sometimes resulting in the repression of non-Calvinists. Thus, although some (including Coolhaes) accused the Reformed Church of being as rigid as the Roman Catholic Church, the truth is that the Dutch Reformed were already showing more tolerance than their Catholic forebears by refraining from violent punishment, inquisition or coercion.

Despite religious disagreement and accusations of heresy from the various sides, William of Orange had said, in the 1560’s, that persecution was not a good solution for religious dissent, quoting Sebastian Castellio to this end.⁹⁸ He opposed the bloody tactics of Philip II. Heretics were no longer facing execution in France and Germany, and he and his noble allies questioned it on Dutch soil. The religious views of William of Orange had become more inclusive.⁹⁹ He opposed persecution of and the death penalty for heretics, and in 1578 he had proposed freedom of religion for minority groups of one hundred or more households.¹⁰⁰ William was pragmatic, rather than idealistic, in his growing openness to toleration of religious diversity, including Roman Catholics, and in 1566 attempted to win back support of the Catholic Church if Margaret of Parma would allow hedge preaching.¹⁰¹

97. Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 268.

98. Mout, *Kerk en staat in een turbulente samenleving*, 15; Jonathan I. Israel, “The Intellectual Debate about Toleration in the Dutch Republic,” in Berkvens-Stevelinck, Israel, and Posthumus Meyjes, *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*, 4.

99. Van Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt*, 262.

100. Mout, “Kerk en staat in de zestiende eeuw,” 9-19.

101. Mout, *Kerk en staat in een turbulente samenleving*, 13. See also Gustaaf Janssens, “Margaret of Parma,” *OER*, vol. 3, 6, and Charlie R. Steen, *Margaret of Parma: A Life* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). The question of William of Orange’s own religious affiliations and beliefs, and the changes in those beliefs over time, is a much-discussed topic and outside the scope of this study. For more information on Willem’s life in this period and beyond, see R. H. Bremmer, *Reformatie en rebellie: Willem van Oranje, de calvinisten en het recht van opstand – tien onstuimige jaren: 1572-1581*. Franeker: Uitgeverij T. Wever, 1984; A. Th. van Deursen, *Willem van Oranje: een biografisch portret* (Amsterdam: Bakker, 1995); Philip Heylen, et al., *Willem van Oranje, Philips*

Still, many Calvinists fought for freedom – the freedom not to be Catholic. As the freedom-fighting Beggars are said to have shouted, “Rather Turkish [i.e., Muslim] than Catholic!”¹⁰²

The struggle also included various groups other than the Reformed. Toleration was desired by every group for itself and its distinctives. The Reformed Church, nevertheless, dominated in this heterogeneous situation; “Only the Calvinists knew exactly what they wanted, and that gave them an advantage.”¹⁰³ But the paradox of “the ambivalent face of Calvinism in the Netherlands” is that the Reformed Church played a public role, despite limiting its membership. The church thereby made itself from the first day a minority church.¹⁰⁴ It is thus no wonder that questions of ecclesiology were pondered and debated. Even those stricter Calvinists¹⁰⁵ such as Arent Cornelisz and Saravia were wrestling with how open a public church should be. Arent Cornelisz may not have preferred a narrow church, but may have found that being a minority was the most realistic. He and other preachers may have suspected that a “minority strategy” while striving to make the Reformed Church into a national church (*landskerk*) was what would lead to enduring victory.¹⁰⁶

Confessional diversity

Against this background Coolhaes pleaded for political and religious diversity in the visible church. To him, this is certainly not *cuius regio, eius religio*. He taught that various religious groups should live, worship and interact in the same cities, in the same nation. He believed that diversity was logical and was good for society. This openness to diversity is what is commonly called Coolhaes’ “confessional indifference.” However, Coolhaes was not actually indifferent, but had his own dogmatic beliefs, as we have seen. Confessional diversity is a

van Marnix van Sint-Aldegonde en hun strijd voor de vrijheid & verdraagzaamheid (Antwerp: Stad Antwerpen, 2012); and Olaf Mörke, *Willem van Oranje (1533-1584): vorst en “vader” van de Republiek*, trans. Jan Gielkens, ed. Luc Panhuysen (Amsterdam: Atlas, 2010).

102. “Liever Turks dan Paaps!” Quoted in H. A. Enno van Gelder, *Vrijheid en onvrijheid in de Republiek: geschiedenis der vrijheid van drukpers en godsdienst van 1572 tot 1798*, vol. 1 (Haarlem : Tjeenk Willink, 1947), 48.

103. J. J. Woltjer, “Revolt of the Netherlands,” *OER*, vol. 3, 428.

104. Roobol, *Disputation by Decree*, 29; Alastair Duke, “The ambivalent face of Calvinism in the Netherlands,” in Prestwick, *International Calvinism 1541-1715*, 113-16, 128.

105. Kooi, *Liberty and Religion*, 6.

106. Roobol, *Disputation by Decree*, 30.

better term. Confessional diversity means toleration by the state for different religious groups. This is the freedom of different confessions to worship and live among each other in the same geographical space.¹⁰⁷ This freedom means that both legal toleration is necessary, as well as an attitude of tolerance which characterizes the general public.

This toleration (legal) and tolerance (personal) – or better, confessional diversity – which Coolhaes advocates, is not the same as religious concord. Scholars have drawn a distinction between the ideas of tolerance and concord. In the view of some, Erasmus was more of an advocate of concord than of tolerance.¹⁰⁸ Attempts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to create or restore concord meant to create a unified faith, doctrine and practice, which harken back to the kind of unity enjoyed by the medieval Roman Catholic Church. In Reformation times, various thinkers – Roman Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran - advocated various ways in which concord could be achieved, either within one confession or between confessions. Tolerance, on the other hand, means “an attitude of indulgence, the readiness to admit that others may act and think in a manner different from ours,” “the permission or recognition of something which is forbidden.” Castellio, who has already been seen to have been a probable inspiration to Coolhaes, is noted for this, in that he maintained the desirability of two religions in France in the face of the Huguenot-Catholic struggles, rather than just one.¹⁰⁹ In other words, concord wants to encourage unity or at least uniformity, whereas tolerance means that what some disapprove nevertheless exists and will continue to exist. A plea for concord is not necessarily a bridge to tolerance; on the contrary, it may discourage it.¹¹⁰ Using these definitions, it is clear that unity is the last thing Coolhaes would look for in religious life. It is diversity in religious matters which he advocates.

Diversity of confessions is good for society, Coolhaes maintains. Here again he shows his allegiance to the ideals of *libertatis causa*. The conflicting claims of the churches lead to separation and hatred of those who are different.¹¹¹ But Coolhaes, living during a time of war,

107. Tracy, “Erasmus, Coornhert and the Acceptance of Religious Disunity in the Body Politic: A Low Countries Tradition?,” 50.

108. Nathan Ron, “The Christian Peace of Erasmus,” *The European Legacy* 19 (2014): 32,

109. Turchetti, “Religious Concord and Political Tolerance,” 16, 18, 20.

110. Winfried Schulze, “Concordia, Disordia, Tolerantia. Deutsche Politik im konfessionellen Zeitalter,” *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 3 (1987): 77-78.

111. Coolhaes, *Een christelijcke vermaninghe*, folio Bij.

believed that toleration of differences in a state is healthy and will actually protect it politically, rather than harming it, whereas a Roman Catholic-like Calvinist legalism would be divisive, not only religiously, but also politically (as it in fact turned out to be during the future Remonstrant/Contra-Remonstrant conflict). Any church could and has given in to the temptation to be violent when it is given political power, he maintains, adducing many historical examples. It would be better if all confessions would unite and resist the Spanish, the common enemy of the Fatherland. The freedom which would result would not produce atheism or Epicurianism (which latter is the term Coolhaes uses for a “godless” libertinism), but would create godliness and all the fruits of true religion.¹¹² But the “fire of religious disunity burns ever more strongly, until the whole land is destroyed by it and the ground is tainted.”¹¹³ Coolhaes meant that in 1574, at the Synod of Dordrecht, disunity began, and increased in 1579 with the Union of Utrecht, which allowed only the Reformed Church in Holland and Zeeland. He restated this sentiment again in his old age: “The strong Lion, who has long guarded the garden of Holland with his sword against enemies, has been attacked in his sleep and struck dead, and the whole garden destroyed, dug up, and tainted.”¹¹⁴

Diversity is also philosophically logical. This is because, according to Coolhaes, logic proves that there is no one “true church.” Others were already arguing that the “true church” could not be clearly identified. Court preacher De Villiers, for instance, had written in article 11 of his theses about the catholicity of the church that no church, Roman Catholic or Reformed, can identify itself as the true Catholic Church.¹¹⁵ Coolhaes here showed some affinity with De Villiers, and extended this idea to argue that all churches together have the right to be part of the visible church in society. He used philosophical arguments to make a case for this. Trying to recognize the true church by looking to right preaching, correct sacraments and Christian discipline is self-defeating, since each church thinks that the *notae*

112. Coolhaes, *Seeckere punten*, folios Dr–Dijv.

113. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, title page, 3-5; Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio Ddijr; Coolhaes, *Breeder bericht*, 3r.

114. “... ende de stercke Leeu dus langhe met sijnen sweerd den Hollantschen Thuyn also bewaert hebbende, datter niemant vanden vyanden, totten dach van heden toe en heeft connen in comen: nu als slapende, van den genen die daer heymelick ingecropen zijn, overvallen, doot geslagen, den geheelen thuyne verwoest, ende inden gront soude moghen omgewoelt, ende bedorven worden.” Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 5-6.

115. These theses were probably written at the end of 1576 or first half of 1577, after the Pacification of Ghent. See Nijenhuis, “Varianten binnen het Nederlandse Calvinisme in de zestiende eeuw,” 364. The Staten-Generaal may well have hoped that they would be able to protect the rights of the Catholics. See J. J. Woltjer, *Op weg naar tachtig jaar oorlog* (Amsterdam: Balans, 2011), 423.

ecclesiae are only rightly present in itself. The Roman Catholics consider themselves to have inherited the Apostolic Church, the Lutherans are the evangelicals, the Calvinists consider themselves to be Reformed, and the Mennonites pride themselves on a pure church. However, none of these churches succeed even in fulfilling their own self-chosen distinctive.¹¹⁶ Pitting each church against the others, he found them to contradict each other, and declared that they therefore invalidate each others' claims.¹¹⁷ Either none of them is the church, or all of them together are the (visible) church.

This way of reasoning resembles a skepticist strategy: when all disprove each other; arguments of equal weight and reasonableness mean one must be skeptical of all. This is the reasoning particularly of Sextus Empiricus. Pyrrhonian Skepticism was revived in the sixteenth century with the reprinting of Sextus Empiricus in 1569. Skeptical arguments were seen by some to be "the perfect answer to Calvinism" because they questioned dogmatic conclusions and left one free to focus on revelation or to build one's faith fideistically.¹¹⁸

Perhaps Coolhaes was inspired by this. On the other hand, he attributes this reasoning to Sebastian Franck,¹¹⁹ who drew on "late medieval nominalism, a popular distrust of the learned, the *via negativa* of the mystical tradition, Cusa's *docta ignorantia*, Agrippa's *De incertitudine et vanitate* of knowing, Luther's *Deus absconditus*, and Erasmus' classical Skepticism" to say that knowing was impossible.¹²⁰ All of these ideas, including the Skepticism of Sextus, lead in some way to a reluctance to assert dogma without doubt. Coolhaes may have thus been indebted to Franck for this way of reasoning. He may also have been inspired by Coornhert in this, who maintained that there were no signs by which the true church could be tested, because the *notae ecclesiae* were the very things under debate, and the authority vacuum at that moment meant that every religious question reverted to truth premises.¹²¹

116. For a short description of different disputational styles and their development from the Middle Ages into the sixteenth century, see Roobol, *Disputation by Degree*, 63-64.

117. Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, Jijr–Jijiv.

118. Richard H. Popkin, "Skepticism," *OER*, vol. 4, 66-68.

119. Coolhaes, *Seeckere punten*, folio 7Bijj.

120. McLaughlin, "Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenckfeld: Two Spiritualist *Viae*," 74.

121. Roobol, *Disputation by Decree*, 34-35.

Christian freedom

In the state, therefore, confessional diversity is both wise and logical. On the personal level, for Coolhaes, Christian freedom is the corollary to confessional diversity. Christian freedom means that individuals (both teachers and laypeople) may hold divergent views on theological questions and lifestyle issues, without fear of judgment or persecution – either as part of a minority religious group, or as a dissenting voice within a confession. Some might see this as merely “libertinism,” or an excuse for license or selfishness. Coolhaes, however, wants individuals to contemplate the essentials and disengage from confessional distinctives, rather than build upon them. Confessional diversity is what a nation should have; Christian freedom is what individuals should have. This plays out practically in freedom from ceremonies and love of one’s neighbor.

He may well have been reflecting Luther’s use of “Christian freedom,” and also Schwenckfeld’s,¹²² and/or Coornhert’s.¹²³ Luther’s *On Christian Freedom* of 1520 emphasized the freedom Christians have to love others, especially clergy, who should serve rather than rule. In the inner man, the Christian should have liberty. Luther meant especially to discuss the Christian’s freedom from the law in relationship to his justification, while at the same time eschewing antinomianism, while Coolhaes takes the idea further in the direction of freedom for diversity. Schwenckfeld, in his *Discourse on Freedom of Religion, Christian Doctrine, Judgement, and Faith* (c. 1561), taught that Christians must not squander the freedom which they have obtained in Christ, but examine everything no matter who the teacher is. Schwenckfeld took the term “freedom” from Luther and reinterpreted it to mean that the Spirit was free to blow where it would, and humans could do nothing to help or hinder it.¹²⁴ Coolhaes’ view is very similar to this idea that the Spirit is free. Coornhert, with

122. McLaughlin, *The Freedom of Spirit, Social Privilege, and Religious Dissent* 59.

123. Coornhert, “Ruygh Bewerp,” folios Aijv - Aijr; Voogt, ““Anyone who can read may be a preacher,”” 422.

124. McLaughlin, “Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenckfeld: two Spiritualist *Viae*,” 77. For another view of Christian freedom, see William R. Stevenson, Jr., *Sovereign Grace: The Place and Significance of Christian Freedom in John Calvin's Political Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

this term, taught freedom in participation or non-participation in the Sacraments,¹²⁵ which Coolhaes of course also reflected.

To Coolhaes, Christian freedom should also have been a reason for peace among the Reformers. Here again we see that he believed that the Reformation was not yet complete. The Reformers were brothers and should not not have been obligated to accept each others' interpretations. None was master over the others.¹²⁶ Luther should not have commanded over Zwingli or Karlstadt; Calvin should not have commanded over Castellio or Servetus. Menno should not command over others; no one should command over Catholics.¹²⁷ Satan sowed the seed of discord - especially between Luther, Zwingli and Karlstadt. If this had not happened, they would have been as united as the Apostles and people would have been freed from the Roman Church and its pomp.¹²⁸ When the Reformers had disagreements, their followers separated, and their writings spread these disagreements far and wide. So it is not ultimately the fault of the Reformers, but of their followers. If the people had been more focused on God, truth, and God's kingdom, God would not have allowed Satan to create this division.¹²⁹

As we saw earlier in regard to confessional diversity, Coolhaes' conviction was that sanctification and spiritual insight will flourish in a free atmosphere. Assuming the Bible and the Apostles' Creed are held as the foundation, Christian freedom means freedom from ceremonies – in other words, specific customs and habits, both liturgically in the church service and in general – and love of one's neighbor, rather than hate or judgment.¹³⁰ Compulsory ceremonies, as they were being laid down by the synods, were “externals,” rather than “essentials.” Coolhaes had maintained that the Leiden church was “obliged to consider as brothers, those who agreed with us as to fundamentals and who also wished to live with us peacefully.”¹³¹ This flew in the face of the attitude of many in the Reformed camp who saw their distinctives as indispensable for true religion. In his early Leiden years,

125 Coornhert, “Ruygh Bewerp,” folios Aijv-Aijr; Voogt, ““Anyone who can read may be a preacher,”” 422.

126. Coolhaes, *Naedencken*, folio Db/27.

127. Coolhaes, *Naedencken*, folio Dijb/28.

128. Coolhaes, *Naedencken*, folio Bij/11; Coolhaes, *Summa*, folio C3b.

129. Coolhaes, *Naedencken*, folios Biiij-13–Biiij-15.

130. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio 84 Xiiijv. See also folios Biiijv–r.

131. Coolhaes, *Breeder bericht*, folio 3v.

we have seen that he showed tolerance of certain ceremonies but not others. Many issues which seemed essential to his opponents were really not that important to him. Also, freedom frees one to love one's neighbor. Coolhaes asks:

Why do we not we all humble ourselves and repent more, together and individually, leave off from evil and do good, in order to serve the one, true God and his Son Christ Jesus with a good and pure conscience. To love him with all our soul, with all our power and strength, to call upon him in spirit and in truth, to thank him, and so forth, and to love our neighbor (who is an individual, whether he is our friend or our enemy, whether believer or unbeliever, Christian, Greek, Tartar, Turk, Jew, and so forth) as ourselves. If we about this or that have a better belief or understanding than our neighbor, let us shine our light in front of them, so that we may educate them with a spirit of gentleness.... But if it is the case that he cannot understand, let us not hate, despise, judge or condemn him, for perhaps the Lord has not given it to him.¹³²

Different churches are children of the same Father; hence, they should get along. The different monastic orders, Coolhaes claims, had many different customs, but loved one another, did not slander each other, and were all under the rule of the Pope. Christians, with one heavenly Father and one Savior Jesus Christ, should do the same, even if some believe imperfectly, are still small in understanding, or are fallen in some sin. For none of us is as perfect or unimpeachable as we should be.¹³³

Christian freedom is also necessary because all truth cannot be known certainly. Coolhaes does not believe that it is possible. Therefore, individual, subjective judgment is important in theological matters:

Who would dare to say that a theologian or preacher really understands everything from God's Word? Should a preacher really want his teaching to be held as the same as Scripture? And to give their listeners no freedom to judge this teaching? Augustine and others clearly testify that people should not hold their teaching the same as the Scripture, because they were human and could err. But foolish and rash listeners and readers do not take that seriously, and accept the teaching of supposedly pious teachers without discretion as though it were from God. And condemn those who do not agree. It is even worse than a plague, because in a plague the bodies are destroyed, but with this the souls are also destroyed.¹³⁴

However, to many, incorrect belief equaled heresy. As we have seen, Coolhaes dislikes calling anyone a heretic. A person, no matter what confession or religion, can only believe and say what is in his heart and mind – anything else would be hypocritical and

132. Coolhaes, *Van de christelijcke discipline ende excommunicatie*, 1585 edition, folio Bijr.

133. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 63-65.

134. Coolhaes, *Seeckere pointen*, folios Aiiijr, 4B, BB (i.e., consecutive folios).

wrong. He or she must say what they believe, and the listeners must decide whether to accept or reject it.¹³⁵ What many call “heresy,” he sees as allowable and even, as we have seen, as desirable diversity. “For who is a heretic,” he wonders, “other than someone who has been declared to be one? And what are sects, but people who stand on their own opinion and despise others?”¹³⁶ Just having assurance does not mean one is always right. There are people in every confession who are absolutely sure that their doctrines are correct. However, here again is entanglement in a logical circle. Each group regarded their own teachers as pious, and those of other groups as heretics. No useful decision could be made that way.¹³⁷

Correct knowledge cannot be the requirement to be saved or to please God, he asserted, since there are many examples of how Jesus’ own disciples misunderstood his words.¹³⁸ If the “historical knowledge” of these things had been necessary for salvation, the disciples would not have been saved – they did not have “the faith” in the sense of correct knowledge, and thus would not have pleased God.¹³⁹ But they received the Spirit – they were with Christ and, aside from Judas the traitor, pleased him. How then can people dare to drive someone away from the community of the Holy Spirit if that one does not have “the wisdom of the external signs”? How can they be denied membership?¹⁴⁰ Coolhaes denigrated the outward signs, the conformity to rules and regulations. “But in themselves the signs have no capability, power or life to lead to the path of life, being only signposts and marks of the grace which bring us to and keep us in life.”¹⁴¹ When someone has misunderstood God’s Word, he should be reasoned with: “one should have patience, suffer, and bear with [others], and with the spirit of gentleness and kindness seek to win our neighbors.”¹⁴²

135. Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, folio Liiijr.

136. Coolhaes, *Seeckere punten*, folio Dr.

137. Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, article 4.

138. Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, folio Cijr.

139. Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, Cijr.

140. Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, folio Cijr.

141. “Maer dat in haer selfs die teeckenen niet en vermogen, ende gheen cracht noch leven tot den wech des levens hebben, wesende alleen aenwijzers ende meercken der ghenaden, die ons totten leven brengende ende behoudende is.” Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, folio Ciiijv.

142. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio 72Siiijv.

Predestination and “TULIP”

To many of the stricter Reformed, a divergent lifestyle or views meant that the person in question was not elect. Denigrating the outward signs was tantamount to rebellion against God. But Coolhaes’ view of Christian freedom contradicts that. One’s election or lack of election cannot be seen reliably by outward signs. However, Coolhaes still hopes that a person will use his or her freedom to repent and live a godly life.

Although Coolhaes complained about the Leiden professors’ obsession with “hard” teachings, it is no surprise that he nevertheless did hold views about predestination and free will which were closer to Arminius and the Remonstrants than they were to Bezan Calvinists and the Contra-Remonstrants. As we have pointed out, Coolhaes never denied predestination.¹⁴³ However, his “conditional predestination”¹⁴⁴ can be described as God’s grace operating in a person at the beginning of the process, and then the individual responding as the process continues. This ties in with the freedom upon which he insists.

We have seen, in the biographical sketch, that in 1571 in Essen he was accused of holding Melancthonian synergism, a belief that salvation was a synergistic process between God and the believer. We have seen how this unwillingness to name God as the author of sin or the one who condemns is reflected in Coolhaes’ problems with original sin.

As we have also seen,¹⁴⁵ at the Synod of Middelburg Coolhaes claimed to believe in original sin. However, he denied in his writings that unbaptized children would be condemned. Perhaps he believed that original sin was real but would be wiped away by the sacrifice of Christ in “single sphere” of the past and the present. On the other hand, his reply at the Middelburg Synod may not have come down to us accurately, or perhaps he was more positive about original sin to the preachers there than he might otherwise have been, owing to the pressure of the situation. Or, his view may have developed over time, but this cannot be seen in his written works. If he truly did not hold to original sin, this would be yet another

143. See the Introduction. See also: Wtenbogaert, *Kerkelicke historie*, 214b; J. Kamphuis, *Kerkelijke besluitvaardigheid* (Groningen: Uitgeverij De Vuurbaak, 1970), 12.

144. This term used for Coolhaes’ views by Stanglin and McCall, *Jacob Arminius*, 44.

145. We mention this in Chapters 3 and 6.

similarity between his views and those of Coornhert. So, his views on original sin are hard to pin down. It remains an intriguing question in relation to his views.

In any event, Coolhaes' views on predestination and free will hang on his definition of the invisible church, rather than the visible. For Coolhaes, the invisible church is the true church. Like Zwingli, the invisible church potentially counts as members individuals whom Christians would classify as "heathen,"¹⁴⁶ although Coolhaes seems to believe that they will come to faith in Christ at some point, as we see from his use of the parable of the workers in the field. We have seen that Bullinger also "hopes for the best" for those who are seemingly condemned, who do not believe.¹⁴⁷ The following quote about Zwingli is very similar to Coolhaes' view:

The true church comprised all who believed in the life and death of Christ as Zwingli had explicated them from Scripture. He would not allow that the faithful might be discerned from the unfaithful by word or act: rituals did not delimit its membership, nor did professions of faith or works.¹⁴⁸

If we briefly evaluate Coolhaes on the basis of the simplified popular summary of the Contra-Remonstrant position codified at the National Synod of Dordt, 1618-1619, known widely by its English acronym "TULIP,"¹⁴⁹ even though he did not know these terms and did not use them, we will be able to see how much he differed from them. The "T" is the clearest of the five for us to see. Coolhaes' conviction that a human aspect in the salvation process, in the form of response to or acceptance of the gift – in other words, to do "the good" of responding to God – means that he cannot be said to have held human "total depravity." Whether he would have held "unconditional election" is difficult to say from his writings, but he certainly always maintained that only God knew which individuals were "elect" and members of the invisible, true church. If, at the end of the day, God had elected certain individuals unconditionally, Coolhaes did not know about it. Further, he did not address anything that could be called "limited atonement." "Irresistible grace" and "perseverance of the saints" seem problematic, since Coolhaes warned believers not to fall away. A doctrine of

146. See Locher, *Zwingli's Thought*, 179; George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 128-29.

147. Janse, "'Ik wil liever blijven bij den wortel van den boom, dan hoog klimmen,'" 121.

148. Wandel, "Zwingli," *OER*, vol. 4, 322.

149. "TULIP" stands for: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. This is a popular-level, modern formulation in the English-speaking world of basic Calvinist doctrine. It can be criticized for inaccurately representing the subtleties of the Canons of Dordt, but is used here simply for the purpose of making a quick comparison between the Synod's major ideas and those of Coolhaes.

assurance can be seen in Coolhaes' writings only in the sense that he taught that membership in the invisible church is sure, if one did not fall away. In other words, God would not exclude one who wanted to be included. The intention of seeking God is more important than doctrine: "all who adhere to false religion and idolatry are not condemned, since [those] seeking God single-heartedly, will in time be saved out of them."¹⁵⁰ But one could, by one's own will, exclude oneself. So we see that Coolhaes' views are almost completely different from the "TULIP" summary. His insistence on Christian freedom thus relates to both the beliefs and lifestyle as well as the eternal destiny of individuals, who by responding to God's grace cooperate in including themselves in the invisible church.

Personal consequences of freedom

Coolhaes emphasizes that the Holy Spirit will bring the weak – in other words, those who err – to understanding, driving them always forward towards the good and the knowledge of God and his Word.¹⁵¹ But this Christian freedom also puts a lot of responsibility on the individual for his or her own decision-making, as we mentioned above. If one hears a teaching, one believes and is convinced oneself. But if after considered thought one cannot accept a teaching, one should let it go, even if it comes from a favorite teacher or preacher, otherwise one is believing lies and delusions.¹⁵² And if, even after prayer and thought, one cannot come to a decision, one must continue to believe and hold to the Scriptures despite uncertainty as to specifics. Better that than to commit to a view with which one cannot come to peace.¹⁵³ There is no guarantee that yielding oneself to Christ in repentance will give perfect knowledge. A spiritual person and true child of God cannot know everything, but can know what is necessary for salvation. He will understand the Scripture as far as God opens his understanding, and not farther.¹⁵⁴

150. "... dat 'alle menschen wt onverstant stekende in soodanighen valschen Religie ende Afgodendienst' niet verdoemd zijn: 'want van herten Godt soeckende, sullen tot haerder tijt daer wt verlost worden.'" Moes and Burger, *De Amsterdamsche boekdrukkers*, 64. This is a quote from Coolhaes, *Grondleijcke waerheit*, 109.

151. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio 79 Uijv.

152. Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, folios Mr-Mijr; article 4.

153. Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, article 4.

So Coolhaes wanted all to bear patiently with those who are fellow believers but of different theological views.¹⁵⁵ He wanted to remain with the church of God: the “catholic,” i.e. universal, not particular, Christian church; the communion of saints.¹⁵⁶ Far better, he resolved, to have a possibly “messy,” broad, open visible church, which includes the weak, the childish, even the “dirty,” and where the older help the younger and parents teach and help their children, than a homogenous church built on strict rules and run by hypocrites.¹⁵⁷

This, then, is the sort of diverse congregation he pleads for in the visible church. As various people have different gifts from the same Spirit, so various people have different degrees of spiritual maturity. Not all of the children of one father are the same age, or of the same size or strength. Inevitably some are older, stronger, and bigger. It is the same with Christians, Coolhaes reasons. Christians should not argue and split from each other when they all have the same God and call the same Christ their Savior. Maturity takes time to reach. Coolhaes continues the analogy by saying that a person just born from his mother’s body is nevertheless a complete person, with all his parts, both internal and external. But he is not in any way an adult. Oh no, he says ironically - that requires much more time, trouble, cost and work.¹⁵⁸ Just so, the attainment of spiritual maturity, made possible through Christian freedom, is anything but a simple or quick process.

In summary, then, Coolhaes has numerous desires for the visible church. He defines the visible church not as the true church, but as all bodies which have the same foundation of the Scripture and the Apostles’ Creed. Since it is inevitable that confessions exist, they each build differently on this foundation. Confessions should be inclusive, since it is impossible to be sure of hermeneutical rightness in every case. People should not be excluded from the congregation; exclusion makes their restitution to the body all the harder. God works with the visible church in each age not so much by covenants but by sending reformations to revitalize the people of God and challenge them. Society and the visible church should therefore be confessionally diverse, while individuals should have the Christian freedom to

154. Coolhaes, *Toutzsteen*, article 1.

155. Coolhaes, *Sendtbrief*, folio Biiijr.

156. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio 86 Yijv.

157. Coolhaes, *Apologia*, folio 86 Yijv.

158. Coolhaes, *Cort, waerachtich verhael*, 60.

think and choose for themselves. This freedom includes responding to the grace extended by God in Christ. It also comes with responsibility for others.

Finally, it should be noted that Coolhaes believed in the necessity for the visible church. Some might, because of this, question my assignment of him to the ranks of the Spiritualists, seeing that he thought that the visible church was inevitable and even useful. However, in his thought the visible church always remained second in importance to the invisible one. No matter what the visible Church may choose to do, he would say, the invisible church remains spread through the world and time as a sure shelter for all true believers. The ultimate reason why Coolhaes pleaded for diversity in the visible church was so that more people would enter its physical doors. Once inside, they would be exhorted to repent, grow, and mature. Perhaps eventually, even if not until “evening,” they will enter and become true members of the invisible church also.