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Looking for justice: execution spectators and the Revolt in the Low Countries, ca. 1520-1585

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4. In the Shadow of the Gallows

Executions After Iconoclasm, 1566–1567

On August 24, 1566, chronicler Marcus van Vaernewijck witnessed the construction of gallows in his hometown of Ghent. The erection of gallows was not a rare sight in the sixteenth-century Low Countries. As we saw in Chapter Two, the scaffold was built before every execution day and removed again after punishment had taken place. It is remarkable, then, that Van Vaernewijck recorded with meticulous detail that

Two double gallows were constructed in the cloth hall. One of them was erected on the Friday market, on the aforesaid Saint Bartholomew's Day, being a Saturday evening around nine, under beautiful moonlight. [...] The other gallows were erected the next day on the Corn Market, even though it was a Sunday.⁶⁶⁴

Fellow Ghent chroniclers Cornelis van Campene and Jan van den Vivere similarly mentioned the construction of these gallows.⁶⁶⁵ Even outside of Ghent, this same construction work was recorded by Antwerp chronicler Godevaert van Haecht.⁶⁶⁶ Van Haecht also reported that in his own hometown, gallows had been erected on the market square on August 23.⁶⁶⁷ The author of the *Antwerpsch Chronyckje* recorded the same.⁶⁶⁸ In various other cities, too, such as Ypres, Leiden, Amsterdam, and Utrecht, chroniclers mentioned gallows' being constructed in the late summer of 1566.⁶⁶⁹ While authors usually rarely mentioned the construction of gallows, chronicles were now full of them.

⁶⁶⁴ Vaerneuyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 199–200. 'Daer worden ooc up den zelve[n] tijt twee dobbel potenten1 in de halle ghetemert, waeraf deene, up den voornoemden Sente Bartholomeus dach, zaterdach zijnde tsavonts ontrent den IX hueren, upgherecht wart up de Vrindachmaerct, schoon maenschijn wesende, Die ander potente wart tsanderdaechs gherecht up den Coorenaert, niet jeghenstaende dattet zondach was.'

⁶⁶⁵ *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 21; Vivere, *Chronijcke van Ghendt*, 214.

⁶⁶⁶ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 102.

⁶⁶⁷ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 100.

⁶⁶⁸ *Antwerpsch chronyckje*, 92.

⁶⁶⁹ "Cort verhael van 't ghone binnen de stadt van Ypre en daer ontrent ghepasseert is de religie aengaende, tzydert juny 1566 tot ontrent half ougst 1567," in *Annales de la*

This is no surprise. Public order in the cities of the Low Countries was in ruins after the Iconoclast Fury had raged through them that August. The destruction of church interiors had started in the West Flanders town of Steenvoorde on August 10. A slowly rolling wave, iconoclasm had spread throughout Flanders over the course of August, after which it continued north via the river Scheldt, reaching important cities such as Antwerp, on August 20, and Ghent, by August 22. By the end of August, the wave had reached the northern Low Countries. In many places, neither urban authorities nor local nobles were able to prevent the destruction.⁶⁷⁰ Its speed and scale were shocking to contemporaries and had not been foreseen by anyone. In the weeks after the iconoclasm, religious life came to a halt. Churches were closed, masses and processions were suspended, and the clergy were in hiding. In general, an atmosphere of chaos and lawlessness ruled over the Low Countries. The meticulous recording of the authorities' every move—such as the erection of gallows—reflected this atmosphere of anxiety. What would happen now? How would order be restored?

In the historiography of the Dutch Revolt, the *Beeldenstorm* of August 1566 is often seen as a key moment in the escalation of the conflict.⁶⁷¹ There has long been confusion, however, about who the people who ravaged the churches that summer were and why they did so. Social historian Erich Küttner drew attention to the experience of the people actually involved in iconoclasm.⁶⁷² Although he characterized the Iconoclast Fury as an eruption of social unrest caused by hunger or class struggle, historians now interpret iconoclasm rather as symbolic violence. Inspired by Natalie Zemon Davis' work on the rites of

société d'émulation pour l'histoire et les antiquités de la Flandre 2 (Brugge, 1844), 225–26; Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 55; Jan J. Orlers, “Verscheyden gheschiedenissen binnen Leyden, Getrocken uyt drie cleyne oude geschreven Chronijck Boecxkens, zedert den laere 1447 totten laere 1580,” in *Beschrijvinge der Stadt Leyden* (Tot Leyden: NN, 1641), 554; Deen, *Amsterdam 'Moorddam'*, 220; Hajo Brugmans, “Utrechtsche kroniek over 1566-1576,” *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 25 (1904): 35–36.

⁶⁷⁰ The trajectory of Iconoclasm differed from place to place. See below for a more detailed discussion of the events in different cities.

⁶⁷¹ Jozef Scheerder, *De Beeldenstorm* (Bussum: De Haan, 1974); Solange Deyon and Alain Lottin, *Les “casseurs” de l'été 1566: L'iconoclasm dans le nord de la France* (1981); Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts and Civic Patriots*; Anne-Laure van Bruaene, Koenraad Jonckheere, and Ruben Suykerbuyk, “Introduction,” *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 131, no. 1 (2016).

⁶⁷² Most notably Erich Küttner, *Het hongerjaar 1566* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1949).

violence between Protestants and Catholics in the French context, David Freedberg and Carlos Eire were amongst the first to point out that iconoclasm did not indicate *disbelief* in papist idolatry but a deep conviction of the power of such images—a power that needed to be destroyed.⁶⁷³

For the Low Countries specifically, work by Alastair Duke, Peter Arnade, and Anne-Laure van Bruaene has firmly established the cultural understanding of iconoclasm.⁶⁷⁴ These scholars have shown that the attack on church interiors, statues, and sacrament houses should be interpreted as the ritual destruction of a demonic power and a challenge to the power of the statues—would they strike back? More recently, historians have widened their scope to the Catholic experience of iconoclasm.⁶⁷⁵ Judith Pollmann has argued that although Catholics were horrified by the damaging of churches, organized resistance to iconoclasm was rare due to the inability of the clergy of the Low Countries to mobilize lay Catholics.⁶⁷⁶ Instead, efforts were directed toward internal reform, reconstruction, and reconciliation. Andrew Spicer has focused on top-down strategies for the restoration and resacralization of churches in the wake of iconoclasm, and David de Boer has analyzed bottom-up initiatives among Catholics to renegotiate religious material culture.⁶⁷⁷ Several recent well-

⁶⁷³ Zemon Davis, “The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France,” 83; Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols* (Cambridge, GBR: Cambridge University Press, 1986); David Freedberg, *The Power of Images. Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1989), 378-428, esp. 398; Andrew Spicer, “Iconoclasm,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (2017).

⁶⁷⁴ Alastair Duke, “De Calvinisten en de 'Paapse beeldendienst': De denkwereld van de beeldenstormers in 1566,” in *Mensen van de Nieuwe Tijd. Een liber amicorum voor A. Th. van Deursen*, ed. M. Bruggeman (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 1996); Alastair Duke, “Calvinists and 'Papist Idolatry': The Mentality of the Image-breakers in 1566,” in Pollmann; Spicer *Dissident Identities in the Early Modern Low Countries*; Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts and Civic Patriots*, 113–17. Anne-Laure van Bruaene, “Embodied Piety: Sacrament Houses and Iconoclasm in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries,” *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 131, no. 1 (2016).

⁶⁷⁵ See especially Bruaene, Jonckheere and Suykerbuyk, “Introduction.”

⁶⁷⁶ Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635*; Pollmann, “Countering the Reformation in France and the Netherlands: Clerical Leadership and Catholic Violence 1560 –1585*.”

⁶⁷⁷ Andrew Spicer, “After Iconoclasm: Reconciliation and Resacralization in the Southern Netherlands, ca. 1566–85,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 44, no. 2 (2013); David de Boer, “Picking up the Pieces: Catholic Material Culture and Iconoclasm in the Low Countries,” *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review*, 2016.

documented case studies have likewise drawn attention to the resilience of Catholic material culture through the crisis of iconoclasm: Ruben Suykerbuyk focused on the pilgrimage church of Zoutleeuw, while Michal Bauwens analyzed the Catholic restoration in the parish of Saint James in Ghent.⁶⁷⁸ In the long term, Pollmann and Erika Kuijpers have argued, Catholics managed to turn the memory of iconoclasm around and focused on remembering those images that had resisted destruction as evidence of the power of sacred materiality.⁶⁷⁹

Historians have thus focused primarily on the experience of iconoclasm and its aftermath from a religious point of view—both Reformed and Catholic. This chapter, however, shifts the focus from the religious impact toward the reception of legal responses in the immediate aftermath of iconoclasm. With regard to the juridical repercussions of iconoclasm, the punishment mission of the Duke of Alba, who arrived in the Low Countries in September 1567 to punish the “rebels” of 1566, has received the most attention.⁶⁸⁰ Certainly, Chapter Five will show that his arrival in the Low Countries and the installation of the Council of Troubles sent a shock wave through the region. Nonetheless, as we will also see in this chapter, the historiographic focus on Alba has obscured the fact that the first responses to iconoclasm took place within the legal framework of local, urban jurisdictions. Local magistrates were at a loss as to how to respond to this unprecedented wave of destruction. Iconoclasm created a meltdown of authority and a stagnation of justice. Waiting for assistance from the nobility or the central government, which began only slowly to arrive, magistrates and nobility tried desperately to keep order through ad hoc solutions, symbolic communication, and—in some cases—legally unfounded agreements with Reformed and Lutheran groups. When the central government succeeded in creating an army with the help of the nobility in the autumn of 1566, punishment still remained largely an internal, urban affair. What was the impact of iconoclasm, and the

⁶⁷⁸ Ruben Suykerbuyk, “Ancestral Monuments, Iconoclasm, and Memorial Culture in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries,” *Early Modern Low Countries* 5, no. 1 (2021); Bauwens, “Conflict, Community and Catholic Restoration.”

⁶⁷⁹ Judith Pollmann and Erika Kuijpers, “Turning Sacrilege into Victory. Catholic Memories of Calvinist Iconoclasm in the Low Countries, 1566-1700,” in *Rhythms of revolt: European traditions and memories of social conflict in oral culture*, ed. Eva Guillorel, David Hopkin and William G. Pooley, An Ashgate book (London, New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁶⁸⁰ See for an historiographical overview the next chapter. An exception is Soen, “The Beeldenstorm and the Spanish Habsburg Response (1566-1570).”

executions carried out in its wake, on local communities? How did chroniclers perceive the efforts of governments in trying to navigate the unstable period that followed? What debates over responsibility, guilt, and punishment were sparked by this unprecedented attack on the Church?

There is much source material available with which to address these questions. The violence of iconoclasm was so shocking that it moved many contemporaries to start chronicling, sometimes with careful lists of the statues, images, altars, books, and other costly items that had been lost.⁶⁸¹ In particular, the writings of the Ghent chroniclers Marcus van Vaernewijck and brothers Cornelis and Philips van Campene, the Antwerp chroniclers Godevaert van Haecht and Josse de Weert, the Ypres chronicler Augustijn van Hernighem, and the Tournai chroniclers Pasquier de le Barre and Nicolas Soldoyer prove extremely valuable for this chapter. Indeed, the increased attention and alertness of chroniclers toward government policies stands in sharp contrast to the inertia of that government. Not only were more chronicles being written in this period, but chroniclers also increasingly focused on the government's attempts to restore order—and thus on capital punishment. It would not be overestimating to say that in some cities, chroniclers recorded almost all executions taking place in these years. Many executions are, in fact, described by more than one chronicler, suggesting the impact of these events beyond the local community. Executions were recorded as if they were a kind of barometer, indicating pressure in society as a whole. At the same time, the “writing in crisis” practiced by these chroniclers might in itself be seen as an expression of the uncertainty and increased anxiety present in their cities.

As such, these chronicles show that despite the authorities' attempts to instrumentalize executions to restore order, capital punishment in the wake of iconoclasm ruptured local communities. The chapter will begin with an analysis of how contemporary chroniclers connected iconoclasm with the heresy executions of the preceding years. The failure of local authorities to preserve public order pushed the Low Countries in the direction of civil war. In the months that followed, local governments desperately tried to restore peace by

⁶⁸¹ Boer, “Picking up the Pieces”; Suykerbuyk, “Ancestral Monuments, Iconoclasm, and Memorial Culture in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries” For the chronicler Marcus van Vaernewijck see also Michal Bauwens, “Under Construction? The Catholic Community in Ghent after the Beeldenstorm,” *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 131, no. 1 (2016).

issuing placards and constructing gallows. In some cities, Protestants negotiated rights of worship and were granted permission to build temples for their services, leading to a situation of de facto religious coexistence, which was labeled “religious peace.” The executions of “breakers” of the peace in this period show how precarious this balance was. When the tables subsequently turned in the winter and spring of 1567, the temporary rights granted to Protestant worship were revoked once more. By then, the Reformed movement had developed into an organized military campaign. Following the defeat of these Reformed troops during several violent confrontations with government armies, by the spring of 1567, the punishment of the instigators of iconoclasm finally got underway. These turned out to be devastating events, leading to violent clashes between guards and spectators on multiple occasions. The accused had been important members of urban communities, and instead of acting as restorative rituals, these executions tattered the urban fabric even further.

Statues on the Scaffold: Iconoclasm and Religious Violence

Assessing the damage done in the Church of Our Lady in Ghent, Marcus van Vaernewijck reported that

All these statues, almost life-size, yes, three or four of them together cut from one stone, were overthrown. One could see the pieces on a great heap lying there for a long time, on the left-hand side, when entering the entrance from outside. Many of their heads were cut off as if the hangman had been there.⁶⁸²

Reporting how the violence had erupted, Van Vaernewijck emphasized that the “young rascals and idiots jumped up on the altars, beating and scratching the faces of the statues or decapitating them like the executioner.”⁶⁸³ Moreover, he wrote, “the children mocked and ridiculed the statues, lining them up on the street and

⁶⁸² Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 156. ‘Alle dees beelden bijcans alzoo groot als dleven, ja, drij of IIIJ beelden tsamen, die uut eenen steen ghesneden waren, waren alle van boven neder gheworpen, welcke sticken, eenen grooten hoop, men langhe heeft zien ligghen ter slijncker handt, zoo men van buten int poortael comt, ende veel hoofden afghehauwen als of daer den hanchman gheweest hadde’.

⁶⁸³ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 142. ‘want jonghe leckers ende zotten spronghen up de autaren, clopten ende cretsten die aenzichten der beelden uute ofte smeten die hoofden af, als die hanchmans’.

said ‘Shout *Vive le geus*, or we decapitate you!’ Afterward, they chopped off their heads or cut them to pieces.”⁶⁸⁴ Similar examples were reported elsewhere in the Low Countries. The nun Maria Luyten recorded in Weert that iconoclasts had “cut off heads, arms, and legs with great indignity, while screaming loudly ‘*Viva de geusen*, see how they bleed!’ And when chopping off the necks of the crucifixes or other statues, they mockingly called for Christ, like one does when a criminal is decapitated.”⁶⁸⁵ Van Vaernewijck reported hearing that in Maastricht and in many other towns and villages, “they tied nooses around [the statues’] necks, dragged them through the streets, and publicly burned them.”⁶⁸⁶ In many places, statues and other works of art were burned at the stake, drowned in rivers, or hung from gallows. Eyes and faces were scratched out; hands, noses, and ears were cut off (Figs. 4.1 and 4.2).⁶⁸⁷



Figure 4.1 Statue of Saint Catherine, Walloon Church, Breda (photo: Erfgoed Brabant).

⁶⁸⁴ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 128. ‘Voort die kinderen ghecten ende spotten met die beelden, stelden se in veel plaetsen up tstrate ende spraken: roupt vive le gues, ofte wij onthoofdenu. Daer naer sloughen zij haer hoofden af ofte clovense in sticken’.

⁶⁸⁵ Luyten, *Kronijk uit het klooster Maria-Wijngaard*, 166. ‘Item als zij die beelden de halsen, armen of beenen met groote onweerdigheijt afsloegen, dan schreeuwden sij met luijder stemme spots gewijze: Viva de geusen, siet hoe sij bloeden! Item als sij die halsen afsloegen van de cruijsefixen of ander beelden, dan riepen sij gelijcker handt in spot Jesus, gelijck men doet alsser eenen dief onthalt wordt’.

⁶⁸⁶ Marcus van Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden: in die Nederlanden en voornamelijk in Ghendt 1566-1568*, 4 vols., ed. Ferdinand Vanderhaeghen, Maatschappij der Vlaamsche Bibliophilen 2 (Ghent, 1873), I, 114. ‘ende, dat meer was, haddense met coorden an haer halsen ghebonden ende ghesleept lancxt der straten ende openbaerlic verbrant. Zulcx was ghebuert niet alleene tot Maestricht, maer ooc tot Tongren, tot Hasselt ende in meer ander steden ende durpen’.

⁶⁸⁷ See also Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts and Civic Patriots*, 113; Duke, “De Calvinisten en de ‘Paapse beeldendienst,’” 33–34.



Figure 4.2 Relief statues in the Cathedral of Saint Martin, Utrecht.

How should we interpret such violence? Alastair Duke argued that aside from the practical need for church space and hatred for the clergy, the main motive for iconoclasm was to challenge the power Catholics ascribed to statues. Reformed violence went further than merely destroying church interiors: They were rooting out a demonic power.⁶⁸⁸ Moreover, as mentioned by both Duke and Peter Arnade, anger over heresy executions also played a distinctive role in iconoclast violence.⁶⁸⁹ As the Antwerp chronicler Van Haecht recorded, Calvinists replied to those lamenting the destruction of religious art, “May it hurt you that they spilled so much Christian blood. Should I not violate their temples and altars? They killed living temples, my sisters, brothers, and friends.”⁶⁹⁰ As a Lutheran, Van Haecht disapproved of the violent Calvinist attacks during iconoclasm. While Reformed believers strongly rejected the “idolatrous” veneration of statues, Lutherans had fewer objections to the use of images; they also condemned armed resistance to the government.⁶⁹¹

Several chroniclers mentioned that iconoclasts targeted buildings or statues with connections to religious persecution. During iconoclasm in Ghent, for example, the image-breakers attacked the convent of the Dominicans. According to the Catholic chronicler Cornelis van Campene, this religious order was treated most violently “because they had been inquisitors of the faith.”⁶⁹² Indeed, the Dominican friars had actively supported the hated inquisitor-general Peter Titelmans in his prosecution of heresy in Flanders in the previous decades.

⁶⁸⁸ Duke, “De Calvinisten en de 'Paapse beeldendienst',” 38.

⁶⁸⁹ Duke, “De Calvinisten en de 'Paapse beeldendienst',” 33–34; Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts and Civic Patriots*, 114–15.

⁶⁹⁰ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 103. ‘En ander seyden: ‘Laet u deeren, dat se so vuel cristen bloets gestort hebben’; waerom dat sommige seyden: “Sou ick haeren tempel en outharen niet scynden: sy hebben die levende tempels, myn susters, broeders oft ander maeschap gedoyt oft doen dooden”.

⁶⁹¹ On the difficult relationship between Lutherans and the Reformed community during the Wonder Year in Antwerp, see Guido Marnef, “The Building of a Lutheran Church in Antwerp (1566–1567),” in *Matthias Flacius Illyricus*, ed. Irene Dingel, Johannes Hund and Luka Ilić, *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Europäische Geschichte Mainz Beihefte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 74–78. On the Lutheran stance on obedience to the government see also Gelderen, *The Political Thought of the Dutch Revolt 1555-1590*, 62–63.

⁶⁹² *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 10. ‘uut causen dat zij inquisituers hebben gheweest van den gheloove’.

One story by the Tournai chronicler Pasquier de le Barre (which is also mentioned by Arnade) concerning the iconoclast attack on the mortal remains of a notorious heretic hunter is especially telling.⁶⁹³ De le Barre was himself Reformed, but at the time of iconoclasm, he was still active as a prosecutor in the name of the king, and as such, he was present during the iconoclasm in his hometown of Tournai. Already in 1554, De le Barre had recorded in the second book of his chronicle how the Tournai burgher Bertrand le Blas had entered the cathedral on Christmas Day, snatched the elevated Eucharist from the hands of the celebrant, thrown it on the floor, and called it an “idol.”⁶⁹⁴ For his action, one of the first instances of Reformed violence in the Low Countries, Le Blas was burned at the stake on the orders of the Hainaut seneschal, Pierre de Werchin. In his account of the Iconoclast Fury in Tournai, De le Barre repeated the story because iconoclasts had targeted the tomb of Werchin, who had, by then, passed away.⁶⁹⁵

Interestingly, Ruben Suykerbuyk has shown that Werchin’s tomb included an epitaph that described Tournai’s Reformed inhabitants as the “devil’s minions.”⁶⁹⁶ These “minions” now destroyed his sepulcher, exhuming his decaying remains and even stealing body parts. One iconoclast, the baker Jean Ruyant, took an arm of the deceased seneschal, wrapped it in a piece of paper, and brought it home, where he wanted to burn the arm in his oven while recalling the burning of Le Blas and others who had suffered such punishment for their faith. De le Barre explicitly connected this episode to the fueling influence of martyrologies: Le Blas’ execution had been described in gruesome detail in Crespin’s *Livre des Martyrs*, from which De le Barre quoted. Eventually, because his wife objected to the arm’s presence in her house, Ruyant threw the arm into the river—a fate, as we have seen, similar to that of those who were drowned for religion in the preceding years.

The direct connection between iconoclasm and heresy executions also becomes clear from another story told by De le Barre. In Oudenaarde, he reported, the execution of a Reformed weaver called Hans Tuscaens had taken

⁶⁹³ *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, I, 196–199. See also Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts and Civic Patriots*, 115.

⁶⁹⁴ Barre, *Le journal d'un bourgeois de Tournai*, 378–80.

⁶⁹⁵ *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, I, 197.

⁶⁹⁶ Suykerbuyk, “Ancestral Monuments, Iconoclasm, and Memorial Culture in the Sixteenth-Century Low Countries,” 55.

place only weeks before iconoclasm erupted. Tuscaens was convicted for openly attacking the Eucharist during the mass. During the consecration, he—just like Bertrand le Blas twelve years earlier—had snatched the host from the hand of the celebrant and thrown it on the ground while shouting, according to De le Barre, “Look; if he were flesh, he would bleed.”⁶⁹⁷ Tuscaens’ execution clearly added fuel to the fire of Reformed outrage. In his seminal work on the dawn of the Reformation in Flanders, Johan Decavele mentions that according to the Oudenaarde magistrates, it was mainly the friends and family of Tuscaens who had been responsible for iconoclasm in the city, “boasting they would revenge it.”⁶⁹⁸

Whether the iconoclasts sought to “execute” the statues to challenge their power or to take revenge for heresy persecution, the examples cited above make clear that both Catholic and Reformed chroniclers connected the symbolic violence done to those statues with judicial repertoires. The emphasis by chroniclers such as Van Vaernewijck and Luyten on the hangman and the mimicking of execution methods suggests that these writers understood the logic behind this destruction not only—or even primarily—as ritual desecralization but as revenge. As a result, rather than engaging with the religious implications of the attack on the power of statues and Catholic material culture, chroniclers focused on iconoclasts as violent troublemakers and disruptors of public order.

The pressure had been rising over the course of the summer before iconoclasm finally erupted. Phyllis Mack Crew, in particular, has pointed to the pivotal role of Reformed ministers in the mobilization of Protestants at this time.⁶⁹⁹ Rather than the consistories under the cross, individual ministers had initiated these *hagenpreken*. Because of the moderation of the central government’s anti-heresy policy, the Reformed radicals had returned to the Low Countries in the spring. In June 1566, the Antwerp Reformed synod made the

⁶⁹⁷ *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, I, 45–47. ‘Regardés, s’il estoit de chair, il sauneroit’.

⁶⁹⁸ Quoted in Decavele, *De dageraad van de reformatie in Vlaanderen (1520-1565)*, 387–88. ‘beroemende tselve noch te wreken, waer toe vele van de vrienden, maghen ende gheallierde van den zelve Hans groot debvoir deden, utroepende ten dien fine tghemeene peuple van huerlieders sorte, zoo men uut diversche dreeghementen te meer stonden ghehoord heeft; bovendien ooc in alle brekynghen ende andere foullen in stede gheschiet, hebben de zelve vrienden altyts van de eerste ende meeste gheweest, daer toe meer andere treckende ende upstokende’.

⁶⁹⁹ Crew, *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm in the Netherlands 1544-1569*, 7.

decision to come out into the open and organize armed *hagenpreken*.⁷⁰⁰ Chroniclers anxiously recorded the coming and going of Reformed ministers and the ever-growing audiences that attended *hagenpreken* in the months preceding iconoclasm—in Ghent, claimed Van Vaernewijck, the crowds in July reached up to ten thousand people.⁷⁰¹ A prison break in Armentières that same month particularly alarmed many chroniclers, with an armed Reformed group succeeding in freeing two coreligionists from prison after being incited by a *hagenpreek*. This was all the more shocking for contemporaries because it took place on the very day the bishop of Arras visited the town to give a sermon and the holy sacrament was carried through town as part of a procession.⁷⁰²

The violence raging between Huguenots and Catholics across France around the same time only frightened the inhabitants of the Low Countries further.⁷⁰³ In horror, Van Vaernewijck reported how the civil war there had pitched Huguenots against Catholics, producing shocking results—especially attacks on the clergy, some of whom had subsequently fled to the Low Countries. Interestingly, even for Catholic authors such as Van Vaernewijck, it was the harshness of heresy prosecutions in France that was to blame for the escalation into civil war. He reported how the courts in Paris had dropped all other cases, on the orders of the king, and occupied themselves solely with sentencing heretics to death, supported by the clergy. The cruelty of the penalties appalled Van Vaernewijck: He reported that “the poor patients were pulled and dragged and tortured like beasts” and “roasted alive on small fires, so one could hear the nerves and the flesh hissing.”⁷⁰⁴ Even women and children were treated in this way. According to Van Vaernewijck, the inhabitants of Paris were “tired and

⁷⁰⁰ Marnef, “The Dynamics of Reformed Religious Militancy,” 53.

⁷⁰¹ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 5. For a recent discussion of the geographical proliferation, organization and characteristics of the field sermons see Anne-Laure van Bruaene, “To the Field Sermon: Popular Reformation in the Low Countries between Urban Space and Countryside,” *European History Quarterly*, 2024.

⁷⁰² Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 17; *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, 89; Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 16; *Antwerpsch chronykje*, 78.

⁷⁰³ Baars, *Rumours of Revolt*, 23–49.

⁷⁰⁴ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 53–54. ‘Daer werden die aerne patienten ghetrocken ende ghesleept ter tormentatie, ghelijck onredelicke dieren; zij werden up ende neder ghelaten met coorden in een vier, [...] Sontijts duerde dit up ende neder trecken een alf huere oft meer, zoo dat zij ghebraden werden al levende. Ander werden an staken ghestelt ende een cleen vier tot hare knien ghemaect, ende alzo levende ooc ghebraden: zoo dat men die zenuwen ende t’vlesch hoorde kissen’.

disgusted” by all these executions, and “they said that they no longer wanted to allow that so many people were killed for religion.”⁷⁰⁵ The Reformed chronicler De le Barre was certain that the people of the Low Countries were “more gentle and united” than those in France, where Huguenots returning home from attending *prêches* were “sadly and cruelly massacred and killed by those who were the opponents of the said *prêches*.”⁷⁰⁶ Over the course of that hot summer, people waited in anticipation of what might happen next in the Low Countries.

On August 10, one *hagenpreek* outside the West Flanders town of Steenvoorde indeed escalated. The Reformed minister Sebastian Matte conducted his audience to a chapel outside the town, where it began smashing the church interior to pieces. This was the sign for similar attacks to commence all over the Low Countries. In towns where attacks had previously occurred during executions or where other instances of Reformed violence had taken place—including Valenciennes, Tournai, Antwerp, Ghent, and Rotterdam—churches were sacked and destroyed. Whereas the attacks on executions discussed in Chapter Three had been organized and carried out by small groups of Reformed radicals, the violence of iconoclasm also engaged many bystanders and seems to have had a snowball effect. Maria Luyten recorded that in Weert, some friends of her sisters in the convent had tried to reason with the group of image-breakers to keep them from shouting “*Viva de geusen*” on the streets on their way to destroy the convent, “or the common people would collectively attack us and destroy us completely.”⁷⁰⁷ Other chroniclers, too, mention women, children, or “the common people” as participants in the violence.

⁷⁰⁵ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroelicke tijden*, II, 54. ‘Die Parisienen dit ziende ende hoorende, wordens al moede ende walghende; zij droomden daer af snachs leelicke visioenen; zij zeijden, zij en wildens niet langher ghedooghen dat men, om tgheloofs wille, zooveel meinschen zoo jammerlic om den hals brachte’.

⁷⁰⁶ *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, I, 75–76. ‘estoient malheureusement et cruellement massacrez et occis par ceulx quy estoient adversaires ausdictes presches’.

⁷⁰⁷ Luyten, *Kronijk uit het klooster Maria-Wijngaard*, 170. ‘En oock begeerden sij aen hun, als sij hier tot ons gingen, dat sij dan op de straeten niet souden roepen: Viva de geusen! anders soude ons het gemein volck te samen overvallen en geheel vernielen’.

“Justice Is Asleep”: The Meltdown of Public Order

In light of the anxious anticipation reflected in the chronicles, we can understand that it was not only the sacrilege but also the scale and speed of the violence and the complete breakdown of public order that were so shocking to contemporaries.⁷⁰⁸ Why had it been so easy for the Calvinists to cause this wave of destruction? Why had authorities not been able to prevent it? Frustration about this government inertia is clearly visible in the chronicles. Cornelis van Campene wrote that “justice, reason, and law are asleep because of this; it is notable that they do not dare to do anything against it, for the great crowd of people that they are.”⁷⁰⁹ Brussels chronicler Jan de Pottre wrote that “neither the lords of the city nor the court dared to prevent it, because of [the iconoclasts’] great numbers.”⁷¹⁰ Similarly, chronicler Marcus van Vaernewijck described how the Ghent magistrate was forced to release some prisoners when faced with Calvinist violence:

They did this to prevent trouble from the people, who now have the stick in their hands and do not ask for justice, because they think their cause is righteous and just, or so their preachers keep teaching them, so as to prevent the danger that they will come up to the prisons while singing psalms and release the prisoners, which already has happened in Armentières.⁷¹¹

The Ypres chronicler Thomas de Raeve, whose original chronicle is lost but whose account of iconoclasm was copied by many later chroniclers, put it even more strongly: “The magistrate and government of the city did not show any care, as if this unexpected attack had taken away their sense and reason; although

⁷⁰⁸ Crew, *Calvinist Preaching and Iconoclasm in the Netherlands 1544-1569*, 10–11.

⁷⁰⁹ *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 4. ‘Justitie, recht ende wedt slaept ter cause van dese, ghemerckt datse luttel ofte niet daer toe en doen, maer en durfven, mids de groote menichte van volcke, die zielieden zijn’.

⁷¹⁰ *Dagboek van Jan de Pottre*, 21. ‘ende de heeren van de stadt noch thof en dorsten niet beletten om de groote menichte wille’.

⁷¹¹ Vaernewijck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 34–35. ‘oft zoude moghen ghedaen zijn om den trouble vanden volcke te mijden, die nu den stock in dhandt hadden ende naer de justicie niet vele en vraechden, meenende dat haer zake ghoet ende recht was, zoo haer die predicanten buten eenpaerlic in bliesen, up avontuere dat zij niet met eenen psalmzanck, de vanghenesse zelve up en liepen ende zulcke ghevanghenen uut lieten, ghelijck alreede tot Aermentiers gheschiet was’.

they had been warned about everything beforehand, they stayed inside their houses.”⁷¹² The author of the *Antwerpsch Chronyckje* wrote that in Antwerp, too, “this destruction was not prevented by those of the law, because the lords stayed together at the city hall, fearing what might come of it. Nor did the *schutterij* (shooters guild), who were in armor on the market square, together with the civic militia, ward it off.”⁷¹³

Many chroniclers thus concluded that their magistrates had barely interfered in the violence taking place. Nonetheless, although the scale of the destruction certainly suggested otherwise to contemporary observers, iconoclasm was less all-encompassing than it seemed, and we should take care not to interpret the *Beeldenstorm* as an explosion of general support for Calvinism. In Ghent, for example, Van Vaernewijck mentioned around four hundred people’s taking part in the destruction of images.⁷¹⁴ From a population

⁷¹² Chronijke van Ypre van de jaeren 1567 a 1587, behelsendes een deel der vreedheden, buijten spoorigheden en godloosheden die ten tijde van de geuserije aen de kercken, en Roomschatholijke wierden aengedaen door de sectarissen van de calvijnsche leere, Huijgenooten genaemt, FM 140, KBR, 2. ‘Het magistraet ende overheijdt der Stadt en bethoonder oock geen meerder soghvuldigheid, t’sij dat hun desen onverwachten inval het verstand ende wijsheijd benam, of dat zij te vooren van alles ghewaershouwt sijnde, al willens in hun huijsen bleven’. Thomas de Raeve was a medical practitioner in Ypres during the sixteenth century. De Raeve’s original chronicle was most likely destroyed during the First World War. According to nineteenth-century historians, who still were able to consult the original manuscript, De Raeve based his chronicle on daily notes he kept during the times of the troubles. Out of fear for the Calvinists, he hid his manuscript in a hollow beam inside his house. See Renilde Moreels, “Een web van verhaaldraden: Een onderzoek van lokale leperse stadskronieken over de middeleeuwse stadsgeschiedenis: historiek, verwantschap en uitgave” (Unpublished master’s thesis, 2000), 68–69. On the manuscript in the collection Merghelynck is written ‘Getrocken uijt die aloude cronijcke van Thomas de Raeve, die den troubleen van dien jaeren selve heeft bijgewoont’. Many thanks to Paul Trio for referring me to Moreels’ thesis. See also Pollmann and Kuijpers, “Turning Sacrilege into Victory. Catholic Memories of Calvinist Iconoclasm in the Low Countries, 1566-1700,” 159. Pollmann and Kuijpers used another, heavily edited 18th century version of the chronicle, kept in the University Library in Ghent (Ms 0616, Kroniek van leper, 180-1695, ‘met talrijke legendarische of anecdotische onderdelen’).

⁷¹³ *Antwerpsch chronyckje*, 90. ‘Dese destructie en heeft niemant van de wets weggen belet, want de Heeren hielden haer altsamen op het Nieu Stadthuys, vresende datter noch iet anders quaders affcomen mochte. Noch ooc de Schutters die al in ‘t harnasch op de Merct stonden, met de Borghers Wacht in de straten staenden, en hebbent oock niet beschut’.

⁷¹⁴ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 106.

of fifty thousand, this was far from a general uprising. Indeed, later historical research has greatly nuanced this contemporary perception. The course of events, the involvement of the local population, and the nature of the destruction differed considerably from place to place, as is shown by the abundance of local case studies and the difficulty of achieving a coherent synthesis on the topic. In many places, especially in Flanders and Brabant, iconoclasm started when armed groups entered the cities. Sometimes, chroniclers recorded how the instigators surrounded their actions with an air of legitimacy, claiming they had orders from the government to cleanse the churches.⁷¹⁵ Elsewhere, as, for example, in Middelburg, Reformed leaders hired others to perform the destruction for them.⁷¹⁶ In some cases, the nobility or government officials took part in the image-breaking themselves, as was the case, for example, in Culemborg.⁷¹⁷ In several towns, magistrates removed images themselves for fear of disorder and violence, as was the case in Amsterdam.⁷¹⁸

In many cities, moreover, there was no *Beeldenstorm*—as was demonstrated for Lille, for example, by Robert duPlessis or for Nijmegen by Maarten Hageman.⁷¹⁹ In these cases, emphasized Ruben Suykerbuyk, magistrates

⁷¹⁵ Such as in Ypres and Roeselare: Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 21; Alb. den van Abeele, “Omstandig verhael der religieberoerten en kerkschendingen binnen en omtrent de stad Rousselare (1566),” *Oud en nieuw. Historische, letterkundige en wetenschappelijke uitgaaf* 3 (1867): 31. See also Arnade, *Beggars, Iconoclasts and Civic Patriots*, 121.

⁷¹⁶ Clasina Martina Rooze-Stouthamer, *De opmaat tot de Opstand. Zeeland en het centraal gezag (1566-1572)* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009), 37. In Middelburg, iconoclasm was a well-organized and planned event, instigated by the leaders of the Calvinist congregation, who even read out aloud an ordinance that no one was allowed to steal or use violence against the clergy. In Vlissingen, iconoclasm followed the same pattern; other towns in Zeeland remained unharmed.

⁷¹⁷ Here, the Count of Culemborg himself took part in the (orderly) removal of statues. See Otto J. de Jong, *De reformatie in Culemborg*, Van Gorcum’s historische bibliotheek 55 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1958), 129–34.

⁷¹⁸ Henk van Nierop, *Beeldenstorm en burgerlijk verzet in Amsterdam 1566-1567*, *Sunschrift* 121 (Nijmegen: Socialistische Uitgeverij Nijmegen, 1978). See for Groningen Wiebe Bergsma and E. H. Waterbolk, *Geschiedverhaal van een Ommelander notabele (ca. 1550-ca. 1570)* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff; E. Forsten, 1991), 37. In Alkmaar, the images had been largely removed, too: see G. N. M. Vis, *Jan Arentsz. De mandenmaker van Alkmaar, voorman van de Hollandse reformatie* (Alkmaar, Hilversum: Christelijke Scholengemeenschap Jan Arentsz; Verloren, 1992), 71–73.

⁷¹⁹ Robert S. DuPlessis, *Lille and the Dutch Revolt: Urban Stability in an Era of Revolution, 1500-1582*, *Cambridge Studies in Early Modern History* (Cambridge [England], New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Hageman, *Het kwade exempel*

and inhabitants successfully used civic strategies to prevent the wave of destruction.⁷²⁰ In places where iconoclasm did occur, the magistrates or inhabitants might have wished to prevent it but found themselves unable to do so. Much depended on the willingness of the civic militias to interfere.⁷²¹ In many places, both during the armed *hagenpreken* and the Iconoclast Fury, these militias refused to take action. For some, this may have been because they harbored Reformed sympathies; in many other cases, it is likely that they were reluctant to use violence against fellow citizens and family members. In Amsterdam, for example, chronicler Hendrik van Biesten was angry when the civic militia allowed a Reformed minister to enter the city: "I, the writer of this book, have seen so myself, which caused me and many with me much pain because we had to see this and did not and could not avenge it, because much had to be tolerated around this time for the sake of peace."⁷²² In yet other places, such as Antwerp, magistrates were too afraid to act. We have seen already in the previous chapter how dangerous it could be for magistrates to interfere. They

van Gelre, Deyon and Lottin, *Les "casseurs" de l'été 1566: L'iconoclasme dans le nord de la France*, 200; Alain Lottin, *Lille, citadelle de la Contre-Réforme ? (1598-1668)* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 1984), 62–63.

⁷²⁰ Ruben Suykerbuyk, "De sacra militia contra iconomachos: Civic Strategies to Counter Iconoclasm in the Low Countries (1566)," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 131, no. 1 (2016).

⁷²¹ For Amsterdam see van Nierop, *Beeldenstorm en burgerlijk verzet in Amsterdam 1566-1567*. For the role of the militia in Holland see J. C. Grayson, "The Civic Militia in the County of Holland, 1560-81: Politics and Public Order in the Dutch Revolt," *BMGN - Low Countries Historical Review* 95, no. 1 (1980); Paul. Knevel, *Burgers in het geweer: de schutterijen in Holland, 1550-1700*, Hollandse studiën 32 (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994), 62–91; Maarten Prak, "Citizens, Soldiers and Civic Militias in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe," *Past & Present* 228, no. 1 (2015). For the French-speaking provinces see Yves Junot, "Les milices bourgeoises au temps des guerres civiles: Force de déstabilisation ou instrument de pacification de la société urbaine ? (Valenciennes, anciens Pays-Bas espagnols, 1560-1600)," in *Les milices dans la première modernité*, ed. Serge Brunet and José J. Ruiz Ibáñez, Collection "Histoire" (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2015), 35–46.

⁷²² "Antekeningen, gedaen van Broer Hendrik van Biesten: Orateur van de Minnebroeders binnen Amsterdam, op de nijeuwe mare en geschiedenis, dat geschiet is binnen en omtrent Amsterdam, sedert den jaere 1534 tot den jaere 1567; getrouwelijc gecomponeert," *Dietsche Warande* 7 (1866-1868): 535. 'dat hebbe ick scriver van desen boecke self gesien, het welcke myn leedt genoch was, ende veel met mijn, dat wy 't sien mosten, ende niet en conden ofte mosten wreken; op die tydt verdroechmen veel om vreedts wille'.

were dealing, in this instance, with people who did not shy away from using violence and were willing to sacrifice their lives. Godevaert van Haecht recorded that the Antwerp magistrates, fearing violent clashes, had sent a deputy to Brussels during the summer with the message that they refused to publish a placard imposing the death penalty for attending *hagenpreken*.⁷²³

Gallows as a Response to Iconoclasm

Although we can see, with hindsight, that the chaos was less all-encompassing than it seemed, to contemporaries, it seemed as if public order had utterly broken down. Whatever the exact course of events and scale of destruction had been, chroniclers experienced those first days and weeks after iconoclasm as a time of disorder, chaos, and lawlessness. People looked to local governments to restore order. Would the instigators be punished? For Van Vaernewijck, and other chroniclers along with him, there was no doubt that this should happen,

because if someone comes into another's house and breaks everything into pieces and robs the money he could get, how would that be taken? I truly believe that he would pay for it with his life. How much more so in the temple of God, with the things that are sacred and offered to God.⁷²⁴

It is little wonder, in this light, that chroniclers paid so much attention to the erection of gallows. Rather than being simply practical wooden structures that only derived meaning from the fact that people were executed with them, gallows themselves were perceived as having a kind of material power. We can see this, for example, in the taboo that was associated with them. Van Vaernewijck, who went so far as to speak to the carpenter constructing the gallows—and recorded this conversation in his chronicle—reported that the latter “complained that no one standing around wanted to help him and give him a hand but instead ridiculed him, which is why he said to me that Lord and law must be served, even

⁷²³ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 74.

⁷²⁴ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 119. ‘Want oft ijemant quame in eens anders huus, ende sloucht daer al in sticken, ende roofde tghelt daer hijt krijghen conde, hoe meende dat hem zoude afghenomen wesen? Ic meene voor waer dat hijt metten lijve betalen zoude. Hoe veel te meer in de tempelen Godts, in die dijngghen, die Ghode gheoffert ende ghesacreert zijn; want den Heere up de weerelt wesende en toochde noijnt zijn gramschap zoo groot, als over de ghene die zijns vaders huus onteerden’.

if it's a scandalous job."⁷²⁵ As we have seen, gallows within city walls were usually temporary structures, erected before each justice day: Their construction temporarily converted the urban environment into a space of punishment. In the wake of iconoclasm, however, the gallows that were built were left standing on squares, turning cities into permanent spaces of punishment and creating "great fear among the people."⁷²⁶ Whereas in previous years, local magistrates had sought to hide capital punishment from view, now, executions formed a part of the urban infrastructure.

Hanging from the gallows was a highly shameful form of execution reserved for thieves and people of low social status. When we look at the placards issued in the wake of iconoclasm, which these gallows were meant to enforce, we see that they indeed frame iconoclasm as a form of theft or vandalism. On August 23, the city magistrate of Antwerp published a placard forbidding the destroying of church interiors and commanding those who had stolen goods from churches or other religious buildings to return those objects immediately, on pain of death.⁷²⁷ In Ghent, a similar ordinance was published on August 24.⁷²⁸ In Ypres, gallows had already been erected on August 16, while iconoclasm was still raging through the city, to enforce a placard forbidding the "entering of private houses without permission of the owners and causing troubles."⁷²⁹ The central government followed a similar approach. The first official response to

⁷²⁵ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 199–200. 'ende was ghestelt bij Claeijs Hertschaep, temmerman, een audt man zijnde, die hem beclaechde datter niemant vanden vilcke, daer ontrent staende, hem helpen en wilde ofte een handt daeran steken, maer hilden som haren spot ende gheck met hem; waerom hij jeghen mij zejide, dat heere ende wet ghedient zijn moeste al wast een schandalues weerck'.

⁷²⁶ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 209. 'Dander zesse voornoemt waren gheleet ghevanghen int nieu casteel, daer tevoren IJ pijnbancken inghevoert waren. Dit maecte een groote vreesse onder tvolck. Zoo deden ooc die voornoemde ghalghen, die up twee maercten der stadt ghestelt waren'.

⁷²⁷ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 100.

⁷²⁸ Jozef Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar te Gent 1566-1567*, ed. Johan Decavele and Gustaaf Janssens, *Verhandelingen der Maatschappij voor Geschiedenis en Oudheidkunde te Gent* nr. 36 (Gent: Academia Press, 2016), 121–22.

⁷²⁹ "Cort verhael van 't ghone binnen de stadt van Ypre en daer ontrent ghepasseert is de religie aengaende, tzydert juny 1566 tot ontrent half ougust 1567," 224–25. 'verbiedende te ghaene in eenige particuliere huusen zonder den danck van de bewonders, ofte an de zelve eenich overlant te doene op peyne van de galghe by sommieren berechte.'

iconoclasm from the central authorities was a placard published on August 25 by Governor Margaret of Parma, which stated that iconoclasm was forbidden. Violet Soen has shown that in this placard, too, iconoclasm was explained in secular terms, with iconoclasts presented as robbers or thieves.⁷³⁰

The framing in purely secular terms of a crime that was obviously religious in nature shows how reluctant the magistrates and nobility were to punish the instigators of iconoclasm. Afraid of a violent response from Reformed agitators should they execute Reformed ministers, magistrates chose to focus on a less controversial crime instead. We might interpret this strategy as another reflection of the inertia and stagnation signaled above. Indeed, in Antwerp, two chroniclers emphasized how the magistrate waited to actually use the gallows until the governor of the city, William of Orange, had arrived.⁷³¹ In Ghent, the high bailiff captured some iconoclasts but then wrote rather desperately to the governor of Flanders, the Count of Egmont: "I'm begging you to order me what I am to do with the said prisoners and others whom I may still catch, if I must proceed against them by way of death in all haste and transparency and by what form and manner."⁷³² Eventually, at the end of August and beginning of September, hangings took place in several cities. While recording the executions in Antwerp, the Lutheran Van Haecht emphasized how only people already known as thieves before iconoclasm were hanged "without mercy," while the punishment for first-time image-breakers was less severe, with several being banished on September 10.⁷³³

Based on chroniclers' descriptions of these first executions, however, the punishments imposed do not seem to have met the chroniclers' expectations. As we have seen, chroniclers wanted the culprits to be punished, and the executions were highly anticipated. Describing the executions taking place in Ypres on September 7, Van Hernighem reported that "there were so many people

⁷³⁰ Soen, "The Beeldenstorm and the Spanish Habsburg Response (1566-1570)," 104.

⁷³¹ *Antwerpsch chronykje*, 92; Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 100.

⁷³² K. de Volkaersbeke, *Verslag van 't Magistraet van Gent, nopens de godsdienstige beroerten aldaer, loopende van den 30 juny 1566 tot den 30 april 1567; gevolgd door talryke bewysstukken*, Maetschappy der Vlaemsche Bibliophilen. 2e serie (Annoot-Braeckman, 1850), 144. 'suppliant partant me volloir ordonner ce que m'est a faire alencontre desdicts prisonniers et autres que polray encoires attraper, si je dois allencontre deulx proceder par voye de mort en toute haste et celerite et par quelle forme et espece'.

⁷³³ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 107.

as had never been seen before for any execution.⁷³⁴ The punishments, however, did not supply the restitution that was hoped for. Despite his belligerent remarks on the punishing of iconoclasm, when he described the actual executions of three men for image-breaking in Ghent on September 7, Van Vaernewijck's tone was completely different. Recording the execution of a man named Jan Cooman, Van Vaernewijck wrote,

They brought out the gardener, who compassionately begged God for forgiveness for his sins and lay on his knees in prayer on the market square underneath the double gallows. Standing up, he said that he died innocently and that he took less than the worth of only a game. He lamented his children and prayed they would not blame him; in short, he cried to God so strongly that it brought me and many others to tears because I had known him from childhood. He had been my brother's apprentice in his young days, when I lived there too, and I never saw him as anything other than a good man.⁷³⁵

This event was emotionally charged for Van Vaernewijck and held personal significance. Not only did he know Cooman very well, but he also spoke highly of him and seemed to doubt his guilt. Instead, he emphasized his "good death." Chronicler Cornelis van Campene similarly emphasized the fact that those executed were locals by mentioning where exactly in the city they lived. He also described how after each execution, people debated whether or not the patient was guilty.⁷³⁶ Both Van Vaernewijck and Van Campene mentioned the presence of numerous guards during the carrying out of the sentences out of fear of riots.

⁷³⁴ Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 25.

⁷³⁵ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 225–229. 'wart uitbrocht den lochtijnman, die compasselic Godt om ghenade badt voor zijn zonden, ende lach langhe up zijn knien in zijn ghebedt, up de maerct neffens de dobbel potente, ende upstaende, zejde dat hij onnooselic starf, ende dat hij niet alzooveel ghenomen en hadde als een spelle weert zoude moghen zijn, beclaechde zijn kinderen, badt dat ment haer niet verwijten en zoude, in somma riep Godt zoo hertelic an, dattet mij ende menich meinsche tranen coste, want ic hadde hem van joncx ghekendt. Hij hadde mijn broeders cnape gheweest in zijnen jonghen tijt, daer ic mede woonde, ende en zach hem noijnt anders an dan voor een ghoet ghezelle.' See this execution also in *Kroniek van Gent, 1301-1568*, 310.

⁷³⁶ *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 24.

The Antwerp magistrates, probably to prevent unrest among the spectators, only sentenced people from outside the local community.⁷³⁷

The fact that these executions missed the mark also becomes clear when we look at who was *not* punished immediately after iconoclasm. In Ypres, one chronicler noted, a man named Hans Tavernier was captured while pulling down the statue of the Virgin Mary that stood on the façade of the Belfort, where the magistrates sat.⁷³⁸ Nonetheless, one day later, after the Iconoclast Fury was over, the magistrates hanged someone else—according to the chronicler—“without the sentence’s mentioning church destruction but only the violence done by them in a house.”⁷³⁹ According to Augustijn van Hernighem, this man was hanged for “a certain *theft* he had done in the house of the churchwarden, which was written on a note nailed to the gallows.”⁷⁴⁰ As in Antwerp, the Ypres magistrates seems to have chosen only to punish those from outside the community—Van Hernighem mentioned that the dead man was from Armentières. The iconoclast Hans Tavernier was released from prison shortly afterward.⁷⁴¹

In Ghent, Van Vaernewijck expressed his surprise when he learned that the civic guards had paid a visit to some of the principal instigators of iconoclasm but had not arrested them: “That they did not capture the ministers (who were the root of it all and stirred unrest among the people and pulled them from the

⁷³⁷ The sentences in Genard, “Personen te Antwerpen in de XVIIe eeuw voor het feit van religie vervolgt,” 327. The patients were Guillaume Connestable (Englishman), Jacques du Boys (origin unknown), and Jan Goyersone (from Bergeijk).

⁷³⁸ “Cort verhael van 't ghone binnen de stadt van Ypre en daer ontrent ghepasseert is de religie aengaende, tzydert juny 1566 tot ontrent half ougst 1567,” 224–25.

⁷³⁹ “Cort verhael van 't ghone binnen de stadt van Ypre en daer ontrent ghepasseert is de religie aengaende, tzydert juny 1566 tot ontrent half ougst 1567,” 225–26. ‘zonder in de sententie mentie te maecken van kerckbraecke, nemaer alleene van ghewelde by hemlieden ghedaen in 't voorzeyde huus’.

⁷⁴⁰ Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 21. ‘ende van stonden an ghehanghen an een cricke, denwelcken t' 's dachts te vooren ghestelt was om zeker *diverie* die hy in 't huus van den Celewaerder ghenoomen hadde, twelcke stont in een byllet an de potente ghenaghelt (emphasis by the chronicler). Pladijs also mentions theft, see Jacobus Pladijs, “Chronike van Elverdinghe,” *Annales de la société d'émulation pour l'étude de l'histoire et des Antiquités de la Flandre* XII, no. 2 (1863): 271.

⁷⁴¹ “Cort verhael van 't ghone binnen de stadt van Ypre en daer ontrent ghepasseert is de religie aengaende, tzydert juny 1566 tot ontrent half ougst 1567,” 225–26.

faith) was bewildering for many.⁷⁴² In several other cities, too, those whom the chroniclers considered to be the main instigators of the destruction—the Reformed ministers—stayed out of reach of punishment. Some had been careful to avoid actual participation in iconoclasm. Sebastian Matte himself, for example, had incited his audience to start destroying the church interior but did not participate. In Amsterdam, the Reformed Laurens Jacobsz Reael, writing his chronicle retrospectively, mentioned how “some of the new religion removed themselves, as soon as the images were touched, from the church and positioned themselves on the market square so they would not be accused of image-breaking.”⁷⁴³ Augustijn van Hernighem recorded that in Ypres, one of the main initiators of iconoclasm, the Reformed preacher Pieter Hazaert, even came to watch the executions carried out for image-breaking on September 7 and was granted free access to the city.⁷⁴⁴

Gallows as a Guarantee for Religious Peace?

Although it seems highly unlikely that Reformed consistories intended the Iconoclast Fury to unfold as it did, they did succeed in making use of the temporary paralysis of the government to renegotiate their position. Indeed, the first objective of the urban magistrates, the nobility, and the governor, Margaret of Parma, was to restore peace and order as quickly as possible.⁷⁴⁵ In the midst of iconoclasm, the highest nobility—the Prince of Orange and the Counts of Egmont and Horne, who were the governors of the major cities where iconoclasm had taken place: Antwerp, Ghent, and Tournai—had already met with the governor to discuss how to achieve peace. In return for their help, the nobles pressured the governor to negotiate with the Reformed leaders instead of using violence. Moreover, they negotiated an agreement that the nobles who had

⁷⁴² Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 215–216. ‘dat men de predicanten (die de wurtel van al waren, ende tvolc beroerde ende vanden gheloove trocken) niet en vijnck, ghaf menich groot wondere’.

⁷⁴³ Joh. C. Breen, “Uittreksel uit de Amsterdamsche Gedenkschriften van Laurens Jacobsz. Reael, 1542-1567,” *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 17 (1896): 26. ‘Sommige burgers, en die van de Religie, hebben haer, eer dat noch de beelden aengeræckt worden, sich uut de kerck op de marckt geschickt, opdat men haer het beelden stormen niet en souden opleggen’.

⁷⁴⁴ Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 25.

⁷⁴⁵ Soen, “The Beeldenstorm and the Spanish Habsburg Response (1566-1570),” 108.

formed the Compromise of the Nobility, discussed in the previous chapter, would be absolved from suspicions of having caused iconoclasm on the condition that they disbanded their league and helped restore order.⁷⁴⁶ Reluctantly, Parma conceded to the Reformed community the right to continue organizing *hagenpreken* in those areas where they had been taking place thus far.

The nobility played an important role in the first punishments after iconoclasm. Several chroniclers emphasized that the first executions taking place for iconoclasm in Antwerp were carried out on the orders of William of Orange, who was then governor of that city. In Ghent, both Van Campene and Van Vaernewijk mentioned how troops of the Count of Egmont, led by Jan van Casembroot, the Lord of Backerzeele, tracked down twenty-one iconoclasts on their way to sack a convent and hung them from trees. Afterward, their bodies were unceremoniously buried in a pit. Van Campene recorded that there were so many “that three hangmen were summoned there, and they did summary justice over them; they were executed only two days after committing the facts.”⁷⁴⁷ Van Vaernewijck mentioned that all kinds of rumors had started to circulate about this episode. It was said that three brothers were about to be hanged when their father arrived, begging for one of their lives, after which he was forced to choose which should be spared.⁷⁴⁸

At the same time, however, in many places, the nobility reached agreements with the Reformed congregations that the latter would support them in finding those responsible for the iconoclasm and punishing them accordingly in return for the granting of their new places of worship. For Reformed leaders, the gallows now became a means of distancing themselves from the chaotic violence of iconoclasm and presenting themselves as rational negotiators. The framing of these executions as being for theft rather than for sacrilege was similarly in their interest, as they could thus distinguish themselves from the “thieves” responsible. Van Haecht, himself a Lutheran, remarked that the Calvinists themselves wanted to place the gallows on the market square “because the Calvinists, although it had been their work and wish, did not want the thieves

⁷⁴⁶ Soen, *Vredehandel*, 71–72.

⁷⁴⁷ *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 22. ‘zoo dat drie hanckmans daer ontboden waren, ende men deede heurlieder curt recht: naer datse tfaict ghedaen hadden, binnen eenen daghe ofte twee daernaer gherecht’.

⁷⁴⁸ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 221–222.

unpunished but strongly argued for hanging them as they deserved.⁷⁴⁹ In Utrecht, too, one chronicler described how the gallows were placed on the market square on the request of the leaders of the Reformed movement.⁷⁵⁰

Orange, Horne, and Egmont, moreover, made more far-reaching concessions to the Reformed communities in their provinces than they had agreed with the governor.⁷⁵¹ Although agreements were vague, in various cities, among them Antwerp, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Ghent, Oudenaarde, and Tournai, the Reformed community was allowed to organize services within the city walls. In Antwerp, this compromise even extended to Lutherans—Anabaptists were not granted similar rights anywhere.⁷⁵² The communities were granted buildings in which they could organize their services, or the permission to construct these. Indeed, the cleansing of the churches during iconoclasm had also had a practical component: With the outdoor *hagenpreken* attracting ever larger audiences, Reformed congregations wanted spaces in which to organize their services. Several requests to use churches had already been made over the course of the summer. With the fall approaching, the need for indoor spaces in which to preach was becoming ever more urgent. By stripping away all “papist idolatry,” the Reformed community aimed to ritually cleanse the Catholic churches so that they could use them for their own services.⁷⁵³ The result was that for the first time, religions would legally coexist in the major cities of the Low Countries.

In the months that followed, the gallows erected in response to iconoclasm came to be used as a guarantee for this form of “religious peace.” Anyone verbally or physically attacking a person of another religion would be punished by hanging. Many chroniclers were astonished by the Reformed rites that they were now able to observe for the first time. In Amsterdam, chronicler Hendrik van Biesten elaborately described the Reformed celebration of the Lord’s Supper, which he cynically called their *galgenmaal*, referring to the last meal

⁷⁴⁹ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 102. ‘want de calvinisten, al was 't haer werck en wille, en begeerden niet dat de dieverye ongestraft sou syn, maer spraecken seer om die te hangen na haer verdienste’.

⁷⁵⁰ Brugmans, “Utrechtsche kroniek over 1566-1576,” 35–36.

⁷⁵¹ Soen, *Vredehandel*, 71. See also Marnef, *Antwerpen in de tijd van de Reformatie*, 129–31; Woltjer, “De Vrede-makers,” 66–67.

⁷⁵² Marnef, “The Building of a Lutheran Church in Antwerp (1566–1567),” 70–71.

⁷⁵³ Duke, “De Calvinisten en de 'Paapse beeldendienst',” 32–33.

condemned criminals received before execution.⁷⁵⁴ In Ypres, Van Hernighem wrote that during a Reformed funeral taking place on September 2, “many people gathered because it was something new.”⁷⁵⁵ Curiosity probably played an important part in people’s interest in these novel funeral rites, but chroniclers also seem to have been genuinely concerned. As in the detailed descriptions of how people died on the scaffold, we see here the same preoccupation with salvation and the importance of dying a good death. Cornelis van Campene, for example, was clearly shocked when he wrote about his fellow citizen Pieter Van Pollaere, who,

being of the *Geuzen* new religion, has died like a beast, not having any priests to say good things to him. He was buried the same way he died, in unholy ground, in the graveyard of Saint Jacob, without having any ceremonies, but he has with him many people, up to one thousand, who were of the same mind as he had been during his life.⁷⁵⁶

It is not surprising that chroniclers focused so intensely on funeral practices. For Catholics, the presence of Reformed and Lutheran burial practices was perceived as a form of pollution within the city. For both France and the Low Countries, several historians have drawn attention to the fact that burials could quickly become an epicenter of religious tensions in multi-confessional cities. In particular, the recent work of Louise Deschryver has highlighted the importance of death rituals in the formation of confessional identity during the Dutch Revolt.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵⁴ “Antekeningen, gedaen van Broer Hendrik van Biesten,” 539. Vaernewijck uses the term *ghalghespjise* (‘gallows food’) too: Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 116.

⁷⁵⁵ Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 23–24. ‘aldaer veele volckx vergaerde om de nieuwicheit wille’.

⁷⁵⁶ *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 32. ‘Pieter van Pollaere, huudevettere, huusheere zijnde over de zyede vande Guuds ende nieu religie, es ghestorven ghelijck een beeste, niet bij hem hebbende eeneghe priesters om hem wadt goeds te segghene. Desen es begraven ghelijck hij ghestorven es, up donghewiede, up tkerckhof van sent Jacobs, zonder eeneghe ceremonien te bedrievene, maer hadde ontrendt hem veel persoonen, wel een duust, die ghesijndt waeren ghelijck hij binnen zijnen leven ghesijndt was.’ Also mentioned by Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 270.

⁷⁵⁷ See Deschryver, “Revolting Bodies,” 167–209. For the importance of burial rituals see Tiffany Bousard, “Aan de rand van het graf. De transformatie van het funeraire leven en landschap in Antwerpen en Brugge tijdens de calvinistische republieken (1577/1578 –

Dissident burials were perceived not only as religious impurity but also as a threat to peace and order in society. For many chroniclers, religious coexistence equaled lawlessness. In Ghent, Van Campene strongly disagreed with the rights that Egmont granted the Protestants, fearing that “all the Anabaptists and Sacramentarians” would now flock together and turn the city “into a robber’s nest.”⁷⁵⁸ Time and again, chroniclers emphasized how dangerous public spaces had become for the Catholic clergy. Priests were forced into hiding, did not dare to hold services, or had to don worldly clothing to cross the street.⁷⁵⁹ Although in the fall of 1566, Calvinists had not (yet) actually attacked Catholic clergy, it is clear that the latter feared for their lives. In terror, chroniclers all over the Low Countries looked at what was happening in the city of Valenciennes. We already saw in the previous chapter that the Valenciennes congregation was especially militant in freeing Faveau and Mallart from the stake in 1562. Now, after the *Beeldenstorm*, the Reformed community in Valenciennes had taken over the government and even expelled the Catholic clergy from the city. The city was declared rebellious on September 17. Chroniclers paid special attention to the material consequences of this takeover. Several emphasized that the rebels had melted down the church bells and made firearms from them. This was probably no coincidence: The sound of bells was not only an important signifier of urban authority and unity but also a key aspect of Catholic funerary rites. Their destruction by the Calvinists was thus as much symbolic as practical. Brussels

1584/1585),” in *Sacrale ruimte in de vroegmoderne Nederlanden*, ed. Violet Soen and Liesbeth Geevers (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2017); Judith Pollmann, “Burying the Dead; Reliving the Past: Ritual, Resentment and Sacred Space in the Dutch Republic,” in *Catholic Communities in Protestant States: Britain and the Netherlands c. 1570-1720*, ed. Benjamin Kaplan et al. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); K. P. Luria, “Separated by Death? Burials, Cemeteries, and Confessional Boundaries in Seventeenth-Century France,” *French historical studies* 24, no. 2 (2001).

⁷⁵⁸ *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 39. ‘Deur dit mandemendt commen ende sullen commen dieversche Herdoopers ende Sacramentarissen diere huuter stede gheseydt waeren, zoodat al herwaers sacken zal, dat binnen XX jaeren binnen Ghendt niet gheweest en heeft, zoodat wel mochte wesen eenen roofnest, ten zij dat God voorsiedt’.

⁷⁵⁹ *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 21; Vivere, *Chronijcke van Ghendt*, 213; *Kroniek eener kloosterzuster. van het voormalig bossche klooster Mariënborg over de troebelen te 's-Hertogenbosch E.E. in de jaren 1566-1575*, ed. H. Alfen (Uitgave van het Provinciaal Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen in Noord-Brabant, 1931), 6; Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 100.

chronicler Jan de Pottre was so outraged by this act that he thought “that they all should burn on the nooses of the gallows!”⁷⁶⁰ For Antwerp, similarly, Louise Deschryver has recently highlighted the prominence of the struggle between Protestants and Catholics over the urban soundscape during the “Wonder Year” of 1566.⁷⁶¹ When in Antwerp on October 3, the first mass was again held in the Church of Our Lady, the author of the *Antwerpsch Chronyckje* stressed that a new organ was being used, too—as the old one had been destroyed during iconoclasm.⁷⁶²

The feeling that justice had come to a halt did not come out of nowhere. In Antwerp, for example, the bailiff accounts show that the hangman was paid to carry out only five executions between May 1566 and May 1567, a figure that sharply contrasts with the yearly average of no fewer than 22.4 executions in the period between 1550 and 1575 (see Chapter One). After iconoclasm, the administration of justice had ceased completely, and both Van Haecht and the author of the *Antwerpsch Chronyckje* recorded that on October 1, the aldermen’s bench resumed to try civil cases—“to do right or wrong unto everyone,” Van Haecht cynically remarked.⁷⁶³ In Ghent, too, Van Vaernewijck commented at the end of September that “the law has now reemerged after it was perished completely.”⁷⁶⁴

Peace-Breakers

The executions that *did* take place in this period were scrutinized by chroniclers, who constantly assessed not only what happened during such punishments but also the effect that they had on the public in general. In October 1566, many

⁷⁶⁰ *Dagboek van Jan de Pottre*, 25; *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 45. See also Andrew Spicer, “Bells, Confessional Conflict and the Dutch Revolt, c.1566-1585,” in *Theatres of Belief: Music and Conversion in the Early Modern City*, ed. Marie-Alexis Colin, Iain Fenlon and Matthew Laube, Epitome musical (Brepols, 2021).

⁷⁶¹ Deschryver, “Revolted Bodies,” 167–209.

⁷⁶² *Antwerpsch chronyckje*, 98.

⁷⁶³ *Antwerpsch chronyckje*, 98; Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 112. ‘om elck recht en crom te doen’.

⁷⁶⁴ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 245–246. ‘want de wet was nu te boven ghecommen, die gheheel tonder hadden gheweest’.

chroniclers were alarmed by the hanging of a Reformed minister in Aelst.⁷⁶⁵ According to the placards in force in Aelst, Reformed services were only permitted at least one mile from the city limits. When they came too close to the city, one minister was captured and hanged on the gallows some days later. Van Haecht reported that the Reformed community in Antwerp was angry and sad at hearing this news and swore revenge.⁷⁶⁶ Interestingly, the Catholic Van Vaernewijck also seems to have thought this punishment too harsh. Among Catholics, he wrote, the rumor was spread that the preacher had been armed. Van Vaernewijck himself was not convinced. He had also heard that the preacher had consented to leave, urging his audience to obey the government, but was imprisoned anyway. He added, moreover, that “the rumor was that he had not received a verdict.”⁷⁶⁷

Other executions carried out under the placards of religious peace were likewise questioned and deemed unjust. Many chroniclers recorded a new instance of iconoclasm that took place on October 17 in Antwerp.⁷⁶⁸ Among the participants was a member of the lower nobility named Jehan Bergemont (or Pergamont), who, according to several chroniclers, had been drunk at the time. Although at first, the guards sent to imprison the image-breakers let Bergemont go because of his high rank—he was the bastard son of the steward of William of Orange—he was later taken from his bed and imprisoned anyway. One day later, the gallows were readied. Six iconoclasts were hanged, and Bergemont was one of them. Orange had tried to intervene, but the magistrate claimed his letter had come too late. Van Haecht wrote skeptically, “I don’t believe it; they wanted to continue with it to cause terror and fear.”⁷⁶⁹ The execution caused such unrest among Antwerp’s citizens that the magistrates decided to keep the city gates closed until after the execution was over. Van Haecht further described how

⁷⁶⁵ Vivere, *Chronijcke van Ghendt*, 219; Bergsma and Waterbolk, *Geschiedverhaal van een Ommelander notabele (ca. 1550-ca. 1570)*, 38; Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 121; Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 311.

⁷⁶⁶ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 121.

⁷⁶⁷ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 312. ‘Die mare ghijnck, datter gheen vonnesse over hem ghestreken en was’.

⁷⁶⁸ *Antwerpsch chronykje*, 100; Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 108; Alphonse L. E. Verheyden, “La chronique de Pierre Gaiffier (1566-1568),” *Bulletin de la Commission royale d’Histoire* 119 (1954): 37–38; Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 301.

⁷⁶⁹ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 117. ‘maer geloof ick niet; maer dat se er me duere wilden om een grouwel en ontsich te maecken’.

Bergemont's pregnant wife came to watch the execution of her husband and was so upset that she miscarried.⁷⁷⁰

There were two main reasons for the outrage of the spectators. First, Bergemont was not Reformed. His image-breaking had no religious motivation but was caused by the fact of his being drunk. In contemporary legal theory, being drunk was seen as an important mitigating circumstance. Indeed, as we saw in Chapter One, the influence of concept of intentionality in determining guilt was increasingly overtaking that of the results of a suspect's actions. In his *Praxis Rerum Criminalium* of 1555, Joos de Damhoudere dedicated a chapter to listing "those who are to be excused and not punished for their deeds," among whom he explicitly mentioned *grootte dronckaerts* (big drunkards).⁷⁷¹ In the early modern period, being drunk was often seen as being desensitized—a state in which a person could not be held fully accountable. The fact that Bergemont was still punished as if he had intentionally assaulted the Church was thus considered unjust.

There was still another reason why spectators thought his punishment unjust. Already on September 17, a churchwarden of the Saint Joris Church—which had been granted to the Lutherans to hold their services—had come into the church and pushed over and destroyed the baptismal font used by the Lutheran priest. As this, too, constituted an act of iconoclasm, according to Van Haecht, the people were outraged and claimed that "this man has deserved the gallows, after the placard."⁷⁷² The Catholic churchwarden, however, was not punished at all, while other image-breakers were hanged without the consideration of any mitigating circumstances. It was not only the Lutheran Van Haecht who questioned this course of events. In Ghent, Van Vaernewijck had heard about the Catholic churchwarden, too, and he emphasized that this man was not an honorable priest but had a questionable reputation. In Van Vaernewijck's opinion, the churchwarden should not have "disturbed and interrupted" the Lutheran service, to the conducting of which the government had agreed.⁷⁷³

⁷⁷⁰ This detail also in Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 301.

⁷⁷¹ Damhoudere, *Practycke ende handbouck in criminele zaeken*, 78.

⁷⁷² Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 108. 'Maer elck riep: 'Desen heeft nou de galghe verdient, na het verbodt'.

⁷⁷³ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, I, 253–254. 'ende was

A similar event took place in December in Tournai. Pasquier de le Barre reported on the execution of the Reformed Jehan Hughes, whom he described as a “good and honest gentleman and hard worker.”⁷⁷⁴ Hughes, like Bergemont, had engaged in seditious acts after drinking too much wine, an act to be punished by the gallows, according to the placard in force. Because of his good reputation, however, the Reformed community of Tournai was so angry that the magistrate had to postpone the execution. Only after the Reformed ministers—who in Tournai had agreed to cooperate with the magistrate to enforce the “religious peace”—convinced the crowd that he had been convicted of sedition and not heresy were the people somewhat appeased. Under heavy surveillance, Hughes was hanged on the market square, and his body was buried according to Reformed customs in the designated graveyard of Saint Quentin.

From Temples to Gallows: The Tides Turn for the Protestant Communities

The precarious balance of the “religious peace” did not last long. For Parma, the granting of rights to the Protestants had been only a temporary measure, necessary to restore order. Apparently, the king had been so upset after hearing about iconoclasm that he spontaneously fell ill.⁷⁷⁵ After he recovered from his fever, deliberations began in Madrid over strategies to bring the Low Countries back under control and ban religious dissent for good. In government circles, a distinction was made between “good” and “bad” cities.⁷⁷⁶ The good cities, where iconoclasm had been prevented, soon received orders to once again ban the *hagenpreken*. In a second phase, religious as well as worldly order would also have to be restored in the “bad” cities, such as Ghent, Tournai, Amsterdam, and Antwerp, where the nobility had granted rights to the Protestants.⁷⁷⁷ Over the course of that fall, the governor started to install royal garrisons in the “bad” cities. Step by step, she revoked the privileges granted to Protestants by the

alsnu hemlien die zelve keercke vander overheijt toeghelaten, om haer diensten aldaer paeijsvelic te moghen doene, de welcke hij hadde commen beroeren ende verstooren’.

⁷⁷⁴ *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, I, 276–281. ‘bon and honneste mesnaiger et vaillant homme à l’ouvrage’.

⁷⁷⁵ Soen, “The Beeldenstorm and the Spanish Habsburg Response (1566-1570),” 100.

⁷⁷⁶ Suykerbuyk, “De sacra militia contra iconomachos: Civic Strategies to Counter Iconoclasm in the Low Countries (1566),” 17–18.

⁷⁷⁷ Soen, “The Beeldenstorm and the Spanish Habsburg Response (1566-1570),” 109–10.

agreement of August 23.⁷⁷⁸ The downright rebellious city of Valenciennes would have to be taken by force: The governor of Hainaut, Philip de Noircarmes, started its encirclement in November 1566.⁷⁷⁹

The Protestants, however, had no intention of relinquishing their recently obtained rights. In October, it was decided at a Reformed synod held in Ghent to attempt to buy religious freedom by offering Philip II three million guilders.⁷⁸⁰ It is unlikely that the Reformed community actually expected that the king would accept, given his staunch attitude in all matters of religion. The money gathered did, however, allow the Reformed community to raise an army. They were well aware that their temporary freedom would soon evaporate as they lost their military power. Much of their fate was tied to the city of Valenciennes.⁷⁸¹ After negotiations with the city magistrates failed, Noircarmes laid siege to the city on December 14, 1566. On December 27, Reformed troops gathered in Flanders to relieve the besieged city, but their army was defeated by Noircarmes near the town of Wattlelos. Two days later, the Reformed army suffered another defeat at Lannoy. In February, they tried to establish a new military stronghold at 's-Hertogenbosch, where the militant Calvinist Anton van Bombergen took over the city at the end of the month.

The royal army nonetheless dealt a third blow to the Reformed military efforts on March 13, 1567. Again, Reformed troops had tried to come to the aid of the besieged Valenciennes. They met the government's army at Oosterweel, close to Antwerp. On hearing of the battle, the Antwerp Reformed community wanted to support their coreligionists' troops, but the governor, William of Orange, did not allow them to do so, refusing to open the gates. This decision almost led to a civil war within the city. The impact of this near-escalation shows in the self-censorship explicit in the chronicle of Antwerp citizen Josse de Weert. When describing the internal unrest, he writes that "there is much more to write about this, but I leave it at that for goodness' sake; the events are too recent and

⁷⁷⁸ Soen, *Vredehandel*, 73.

⁷⁷⁹ Yves Junot, *Les bourgeois de Valenciennes: Anatomie d'une élite dans la ville (1500-1630)*, Histoire et civilisations (Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2009), 79–100.

⁷⁸⁰ Scheerder, *Het Wonderjaar te Gent 1566-1567*, 143–44.

⁷⁸¹ Yves Junot, "La ville divisée par les violences confessionnelles. L'iconoclasme à Valenciennes en 1566," in *Divisions urbaines. Représentations, mémoires, réalités*, ed. Irène Cagneau, Pierre-Jacques Olgarnier and Stephanie Schwerter (Stuttgart: Stuttgart, 2017); Paul Beuzart, "La Répression à Valenciennes après les troubles religieux de 1566" (Doctoral thesis).

could still lead to strife nowadays.⁷⁸² The Reformed troops were crushingly defeated in the Battle of Oosterweel, and those captured were hanged from trees en masse.⁷⁸³ On March 23, Valenciennes surrendered to Noircarmes, and Van Bombergen left 's-Hertogenbosch on April 11.

In December 1566, all concessions to Protestants were revoked, and in February 1567, Protestant preaching and worship were again forbidden. In February, multiple chroniclers mention the execution of a Reformed preacher in Mechelen, who had held a service outside the city limits.⁷⁸⁴ In a surprise attack, Jan Spelleken, the provost—the royal officer responsible for the administration of justice on the countryside—arrived at the service with some of his men, imprisoned the preacher and several others and brought them to the ducal prison of Brabant in Vilvoorde. A few days later, the preacher was unceremoniously hanged from a tree outside Mechelen. Chroniclers, both Catholic and Protestant, seem to have doubted the legitimacy of this action. Vaernewijck described how the preacher was offered grace if he would publicly denounce his beliefs. Although the preacher did so, he was captured again and hanged anyway after carrying out his *amende honorable*. Vaernewijck commented, “I would not know what has moved the government to do such a sharp justice over him, seeing that he had denounced his crimes”.⁷⁸⁵

All over the Low Countries, the brand-new Reformed temples were destroyed again. The ban on Reformed worship was dramatically manifested in the building of new gallows, attracting much attention from chroniclers. The case of Tournai illustrates the importance of this highly symbolic material response. After the Iconoclast Fury, Reformed believers had been given permission to preach within the city walls. Pasquier de le Barre mentioned how the Reformed community cleared out the cloth hall on the central market square to make space for their services, tearing down the “fences and scaffolding serving

⁷⁸² N. de Weert, *Chronycke oft journal*, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 38. ‘hier af waer nogh al veel meer te schryven maer wort gelaeten om beteren wille, de saecken is nogh te seer versch ende soude in desen tijdt oock nogh twist mogen maecken’.

⁷⁸³ *Antwerpsch chronykje*, 127.

⁷⁸⁴ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 175; *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 51; *Antwerpsch chronykje*, 106; Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 114.

⁷⁸⁵ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 114. ‘Wat die overheijt mocht moveren tot sulck scheerp recht over hem te laten snijden, dats mij onbekent, anghезien dat hij wederroup ghedaen hadde’.

to do the criminal executions.⁷⁸⁶ Moreover, according to De le Barre, they had used stones and fragments of destroyed statues and churches as the foundation for their temple, literally trampling on the remnants of what Catholics deemed holy—much to the latter’s frustration.⁷⁸⁷ After Reformed worship was outlawed, the Catholic chronicler Nicolas Soldoyer noted how in Tournai, new gallows were placed in the exact same spot where the Reformed community had organized their services.⁷⁸⁸ When two iconoclasts were hanged a day later, Soldoyer wrote that

It should be noted that the gallows from which they were hanged were made from elm wood, which they had intended for their temple [...]. From it, they [also] made prisons, in which they put the said heretics, and the surplus of the said wood was used for the construction of several gallows that were placed outside the city in several places to hang all the criminal plunderers who were executed in the city.⁷⁸⁹

In April 1567, Soldoyer further recorded that “a torture rack was made to use on the heretics to make them tell the truth; this rack was made from the wood which was intended for building their temple.”⁷⁹⁰ Van Haecht and other chroniclers, too, mentioned how the governor of Flanders, the Count of Egmont, “although last year he allowed the construction of a wooden church, now gave his consent

⁷⁸⁶ *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, I, 208. ‘et y renfermer aulcunes bailles’ et hourdaiges’ servans à faire les exécutions criminelles sur le Marchié’. This was allowed by Governor Horne. See Soen, *Vredehandel*, 71.

⁷⁸⁷ *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, I, 192.

⁷⁸⁸ *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, 2 vols., ed. A. Pinchart 2 (Brussels: Société de l’histoire de Belgique, 1860), 258.

⁷⁸⁹ *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, II, 259. ‘Il est à remarquer que la potence à laquelle ils furent pendus avoit été faite de bois d’ormeau qu’ils avoient préparé pour construire leur temple [...]. De là on en fit des prisons, èsquelles on mit lesdits marchands hérétiques, et le surplus dudit bois fut employé pour la construction de plusieurs potences que l’on mit hors de la ville en plusieurs endroits pour rependre tous les criminels saccageurs qui avoient esté exécutés dans la ville’. Compare with De le Barre’s report of the events: *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, I, 83.

⁷⁹⁰ *Mémoires de Pasquier de le Barre et de Nicolas Soldoyer*, II, 269. ‘on fit une gehenne pour y appliquer les hérétiques, afin de leur faire déclarer la vérité : cette torture fut faite du bois qui estoit destiné à édifier leur temple.’

to break the church down and make gallows from its wood.⁷⁹¹ With this material transformation, the Protestant denial of the power of materiality was turned upside down: By reusing material from the Calvinist temples, authorities reestablished this material's power and countered the Reformed critique of idolatry. Indeed, the many descriptions in chronicles—for this process was recorded far beyond Tournai alone—suggest that the urban population interpreted this reconfiguration from temple to gallows as a highly meaningful message.⁷⁹² At the same time, these cases of the inversion and twisting of meaning reflect the instability of the power of gallows in the aftermath of iconoclasm.

The deconstruction of the temples in Antwerp, too, drew much attention. In Amsterdam, Hendrik van Biesten wrote of how the Antwerp temples “were completely burned down and eradicated to the ground, so no one would see anymore where they had been standing.”⁷⁹³ Whereas immediately after the *Beeldenstorm*, fragments of destroyed churches from Antwerp had been offered for sale on the market in Amsterdam, now, the materials used for the construction of the Calvinists' temples awaited the same fate.⁷⁹⁴ City Governor De la Motte posted printed announcements of the auctions of these materials. According to Van Vaernewijck, the Antwerp temple had been “a beautiful temple, which had cost more than the six Ghent *geuzen* temples.”⁷⁹⁵

By the spring of 1567, the regent had largely restored the power of the government in the Low Countries. Reformed preaching and services no longer took place anywhere, Reformed military strongholds and gathered troops had been defeated, and government garrisons had been installed in the “bad cities.”⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹¹ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 174. See also Verheyden, “La chronique de Pierre Gaiffier (1566-1568),” 58–59; Jan van Ryckenroy, *Kroniek der Stad Roermond van 1562 - 1638*, ed. Friedrich Nettesheim (1876), 78.

⁷⁹² Verheyden, “La chronique de Pierre Gaiffier (1566-1568),” 58–59; Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 174.

⁷⁹³ “Vervolg der anteykeningen van Broer Hendrik van Biesten: Over het gebeurde te Amsterdam, enz. (1567-1574),” *Dietsche Warande* 8 (1869): 422. ‘dewelke worde heel affgebrand ende uitgerooid tot die grond toe, dat men niet en mach sien waer die hebben gestaan’.

⁷⁹⁴ Breen, “Uittreksel uit de Amsterdamsche Gedenkschriften van Laurens Jacobsz. Reael, 1542-1567,” 24. “Vervolg der anteykeningen van Broer Hendrik van Biesten,” 422.

⁷⁹⁵ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 317. ‘Twas eenen schoonen tempele, die meer ghecost hadde dan zes ghendtsche ghues-tempels.’

⁷⁹⁶ Hageman, *Het kwade exempel van Gelre*, 263.

Provincial governors and members of the nobility who had argued for leniency and negotiations with the Protestants had either been replaced or resigned on their own account. William of Orange left the country in March 1567 after refusing to swear a new oath of loyalty to the king. His policy of religious peace had turned into a failure after the regent revoked all rights for Protestants, and Orange resigned from all his governmental functions and returned to his native Germany.⁷⁹⁷ Like him, many Protestants left the country rather than await the punishments to come.

Iconoclasts on the Gallows

At first, many Catholic inhabitants seem to have welcomed the royal garrisons. In several towns of the Low Countries, local magistrates or even the inhabitants themselves had tried to enlist the central government's help in the preceding months. Already during the Iconoclast Fury, the magistrate of Lille had begged Parma to send military reinforcements.⁷⁹⁸ Louise Deschryver has recently shown that in Antwerp in November 1566, a group of Catholic clergy and laity repeatedly asked Margaret of Parma for military intervention.⁷⁹⁹ Judith Pollmann, too, showed that Catholics everywhere began to reclaim public space in the spring of 1567, now that the tables had turned against the Protestants.⁸⁰⁰

The wave of executions that soon followed, however, turned out to be extremely problematic. On April 16, 1567, the first execution took place in Ypres. Two patients were to be hanged for iconoclasm and one for Protestant preaching. When the preacher was brought out from the prison, some spectators approached to console him and kiss him goodbye. After the preacher mounted the scaffold, he asked the bailiff's permission to address the audience. In a detailed and elaborate description, Augustijn van Hernighem recorded what happened next:

⁷⁹⁷ René van Stipriaan, *De zwijger. Het leven van Willem van Oranje* (Amsterdam, Antwerpen: QF, 2021), 284–87.

⁷⁹⁸ DuPlessis, *Lille and the Dutch Revolt*, 216–20; Suykerbuyk, “De sacra militia contra iconomachos: Civic Strategies to Counter Iconoclasm in the Low Countries (1566),” 27.

⁷⁹⁹ Deschryver, “Revolting Bodies,” 205–6.

⁸⁰⁰ Pollmann, *Catholic Identity and the Revolt of the Netherlands, 1520-1635*, 82–83.

He wasn't immediately allowed to speak, so the people started running and nobody knew why. The guards began to shoot in the direction of the crowd; the drums sounded the alarm. Never has such a sorrow been seen in the living memory of this city. Would a man own as much as one thousand pounds, he would have given half to be saved, so terrible was the shooting of the soldiers. The healthy spectators had the advantage; the old and infirm were in trouble [...]. The soldiers stationed in the market hall were shooting so horribly, it is indescribable.⁸⁰¹

In what followed, Van Hernighem provided a detailed list of his fellow townsmen who were killed (thirteen) or wounded (more than seventy) during the slaughter. He ended his account with a poem: "On the sixteenth day of April, we saw / In Ypres on the market square a miserable Wednesday."⁸⁰² Clearly, Van Hernighem was devastated by the event. This is little wonder, as the catastrophe was personal to him: Not only had he barely escaped the slaughter himself, but his brother Jan was among the wounded. He knew most of the victims. Whereas the audience unrest during the heresy executions discussed in the previous chapter had a performative and organized character, now, the confrontation between guards and spectators was chaotic and unintended. Indeed, Van Hernighem was not the only chronicler anguished by the disaster in Ypres. Chroniclers all over the Low Countries were shocked by the failed execution. The news spread quickly and far: No fewer than eight contemporary chroniclers described this execution.

Chroniclers offered different explanations of why it had gone so wrong. An anonymous observer from Ypres claimed that "foreign soldiers" were the

⁸⁰¹ Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 43–45. 'Te was zoo rasch met gheconsenteert, beghinnende te spreken, zoo heeft het volck beghonnen loopen ende niemant en wyste waeromme, die soudaeten ter stont schietende in den hoop, Daer was zulck jammere, zoo dat noyt bin menschen ghedincken in de stede ghezien en was, ja al hadde een mensche rycke ghewyst van 1.000 pont grooten, men hadden wel willen de helft gheven om ghesalveert te zynne, zoo vreselycke schooten die wals, zoo dat die best te beene was hadde voordeel ende oude crancke lyeden waren in de noot, den trommel allaerme. [...] ende de soudaten diewelcke op de Halle waeren schooten zoo afgryselijck dat niet om schryven en es.'

⁸⁰² Hernighem, *Eerste bouck*, 45. 'Op den zestiensten in April, doens zach / 't Yper ter maert eenen derrelycken Woensdach.'

cause of the “great riot.”⁸⁰³ The Reformed preacher on the scaffold, Maliaert Onger, was from the small village of Elverdinge, close to Ypres. Jacob Pladijs, a local farmer who kept a chronicle, had noted already in the summer of 1566 that soldiers had come to arrest Onger, killing a townsman in the process. Pladijs described the chaotic execution as “a great sorrow.”⁸⁰⁴ At the other end of Flanders, in Ghent, chronicler Cornelis van Campene also recorded the execution in his diary. According to Van Campene, the audience itself was to blame. He wrote that “the *Guuds* [rebels], standing behind the guards, wanted to break through with force to be closer to the preacher. When the guards saw this, they started shooting at the crowd.”⁸⁰⁵ Jan van den Vivere agreed that the fault lay with the spectators.⁸⁰⁶ Marcus van Vaernewijck, however, wrote that the audience had behaved in an exemplary fashion: “Some of the spectators compassionately invoked Our Lord, saying that they should find comfort in God and have good courage, and more words like that; in short, that even though they took away their bodies, they would not take away their souls.”⁸⁰⁷ For Van Vaernewijck, the disaster was clearly the fault of the soldiers, who attacked the spectators while they “were naked and without arms.”⁸⁰⁸

Van Vaernewijck further reported that the soldiers “were under the impression that there was a conspiracy among the spectators to free the prisoners

⁸⁰³ “Cort verhael van 't ghone binnen de stadt van Ypre en daer ontrent ghepasseert is de religie aengaende, tzydert juny 1566 tot ontrent half ougst 1567,” 257–58. ‘datter groote beroerte ter plaetse van de justicie by de vremde soldaeten 't Ypre in garnisoene liggende ghemaect es’.

⁸⁰⁴ Pladijs, “Chronike van Elverdinghe,” 272 & 276. ‘hetwelcke een groot jammer was’.

⁸⁰⁵ *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 60. ‘Aldaer ghebeurde dat de Guuds, die achter de gendaermerie stonden, wilden met fortse deur drummen om naerder den predicant te wesene. Dit ziende de gendaermes, schooten in den hoop.’

⁸⁰⁶ Vivere, *Chronijcke van Ghendt*, 241.

⁸⁰⁷ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 181–182. ‘zoo riepen zij compasselic an Onsen Heere. Dit hoorende sommich ghemeen volck, riep hemlien ooc anne, zeggende dat zij haer in Godt zouden willen ghetroot hauden ende ghoeden moet hebben, ende dieghelijcke woorden; in substancien, al nam men haer lichame, men mocht haer ziele niet nemen’.

⁸⁰⁸ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 181–182. ‘Duer dit gheruchte zijn de soldaten ommeghekeert, ende lieten haer gheschut afghaen onder tvolck, die bloot ende zonder gheweer waren’.

during the execution.⁸⁰⁹ In Antwerp, Godevaert van Haecht also blamed the soldiers. In his account of events, the number of deaths had even risen to twenty, and the burghers of Ypres had to defend themselves on the doorsteps of their houses from the pillaging troops. According to Van Haecht's account, the soldiers later tried to justify their behavior to the governor by blaming the "Calvinist" spectators, whom they accused of trying to free the prisoners. This could not, however, be true, as Van Haecht had heard that "mostly papists had come to see the execution."⁸¹⁰ The author of the *Antwerpsch Chronyckje* also mentioned the catastrophe, but he was less well informed: He provided no details and mistakenly dated events to April 14.⁸¹¹ These descriptions nonetheless make clear that the Reformed attempts of the previous years to free prisoners from the scaffold were still very much on the minds of spectators and guards alike.

In Ghent, too, executions for iconoclasm were problematic from the start. At the end of April, a royal garrison was stationed in the city. Summonses to the urban law court, the aldermen's bench, started only a few days later. With painstaking detail, Van Vaernewijck described the names, professions, and other relevant details of the "twenty well-to-do and decent men" that were to present themselves in court.⁸¹² Indeed, these men were not poor outsiders—they were well-established burghers of Ghent. Once again, Van Vaernewijck explicitly mentioned that he knew most of them personally. The executions started soon afterward. On May 7, the first three image-breakers were put to death—the first to be hanged from once again newly built double gallows.⁸¹³ On the way from the prison to the scaffold, the patients began to cause a scene, screaming that they were set to die only because they had wanted to help fight idolatry and constantly trying to stir up the gathered audience. Anticipating unrest, soldiers from the new garrison occupied the entire market square, keeping the audience from

⁸⁰⁹ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 229. 'duer de onwijsheijt vande soldaten, die waenden datter eenighe conspiracie onder tvolc was om die ghevanghenen (die men besich was met justicieren) te nemen'.

⁸¹⁰ Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 214. 'want de soldaten wilden noch segghen, dat het al calvinen waeren, die er gecomen waeren om den predicant te ontweldigen; maer het waeren meest papisten om de justicie te sien'.

⁸¹¹ *Antwerpsch chronyckje*, 130.

⁸¹² Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 196–199. 'XX gheghoedde deghelicke mannen'.

⁸¹³ *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 59; Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 200–203.

getting close to the execution scene. Van Vaernewijck recorded that he was thus unable to hear the words of the patients immediately before their executions. He did mention, however, that two Augustinians were present and that the patients knelt. In thus emphasizing how they died, Van Vaernewijck again seemed to question the guilt of those executed: After all, they died as good Catholics, not as Calvinists.⁸¹⁴

About a week later, five more executions were scheduled to take place. This time, the magistrate took even more stringent preventive measures, carrying out the executions at four in the morning and hanging the patients from trees outside of the city instead of on the market square.⁸¹⁵ Nonetheless, both Van Vaernewijck and Cornelis van Campene were well informed about these punishments. The patients died as Calvinists, and their bodies were left hanging “as an example.”⁸¹⁶ Again in June, heavily guarded executions took place in the city. Van Vaernewijck described the suffering of the patients in a compassionate way, noting that “their hands were black because they were tied so tightly” and that one of them prayed so eloquently “that he opened many hearts of those who heard.”⁸¹⁷ Once again, Van Vaernewijck referred to the gallows, mentioning that

the gallows [...] have been standing there since Lent, for fourteen weeks already. And they will remain standing there, just like the other two double gallows on the Corn Market and the Friday Market. It thus appears that things are not yet back to how they should be, or it is to deter the wrongdoers.⁸¹⁸

Perhaps the most impactful executions were two that took place in Valenciennes and Oudenaarde, also in June 1567. After the capitulation of Valenciennes, the

⁸¹⁴ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II 202.

⁸¹⁵ *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 61.

⁸¹⁶ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 214. ‘zoo heeft mense gheketent, omdat zij langhe zouden moghen blijven hanghende, telcx exempele’.

⁸¹⁷ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 266. ‘de handen waren zwart van dat zij zoo stijf ghebonden waren’; ‘zoo dat veel lieden therte open ghijnck, diet hoorden ende verstonden’.

⁸¹⁸ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 269. ‘De potente, daerdees justicie an ghedaen was, en was daer niet van nieuws ghestelt, maer hadder ghestaen van alf vastenen, wel XIIIJ weken; ende blijft daer noch staende, als die ander twee dobbel potenten up den Coorenaert ende Vrindachmaerct. Waeruut blijkt dat de zaken noch niet alle up haer stede en zijn; ofte tes voor een ontzich voor de quaetwillighe’.

prosecutor Antoine Lebrun had been sent to the city by Parma to oversee punishments there—although the culprits were sentenced by the Valenciennes magistrate.⁸¹⁹ Unsurprisingly, the driving forces behind the Calvinist takeover, Reformed ministers Pérégrin de la Grange, originally from the Dauphiné region of France, and Guido de Bres, originally from Mons, were among the first to be sentenced.⁸²⁰ De Bres, in particular, had been pivotal in the organization of the Reformed community in the Low Countries: He was the compiler of the *Confessio Belgica* (1561), which became the doctrinal standard of the Reformed Church.⁸²¹ He had also authored one of Fabritius' martyrological accounts in 1565 discussed in Chapter Three.

Chroniclers, however, were more shocked by the execution and confiscation of goods of the Valenciennes native Michel Herlin and his son Jean Herlin.⁸²² Herlin was not only a well-established burgher but also one of the city's most powerful and wealthy merchants.⁸²³ He was a respected member of the community, a "tall and pious man, old, with grey hair and a beard."⁸²⁴ In horror, multiple chroniclers reported how Herlin had tried to kill himself the night before his execution by stabbing himself in the chest up to six times. Several emphasized that he was so old and infirm that he had to be carried to the execution place sitting on a chair, in which he was also decapitated.⁸²⁵ Van Vaernewijck recorded the cry of a woman that summed up the feelings among the onlookers: "Dear God, if this is the fate of such powerful men, so harsh and without any mercy, what do you think our fate will be; what will become of us

⁸¹⁹ *Histoire des troubles*, 25. LeBrun was also present in Ghent during the executions in June.

⁸²⁰ *Histoire des troubles*, 25–27.

⁸²¹ Guido Marnef, "De Nederlandse Geloofsbelijdenis in context: de Confession de Foy en het vroege gereformeerd protestantisme in de Nederlanden," *Theologia reformata* 55, no. 3 (2012).

⁸²² "Chronique de Mahieu Manteau," 37; *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 62; Jan van Ryckenroy, *Kroniek der Stad Roermond van 1562 - 1638*, 76.

⁸²³ About Herlin's wealth see Junot, *Les bourgeois de Valenciennes: Anatomie d'une élite dans la ville (1500-1630)* Chapter 11, p. 19–23.

⁸²⁴ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 237. 'Michiel Herlijn was een groot vroom man, audt, met grijsen hare ende baert'.

⁸²⁵ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 237–238; Haecht, *Kroniek over de troebelen*, I, 223.

poor common folks?”⁸²⁶ One of the guards promptly struck her in the face, which immediately caused an uproar among the audience. Just as in Ypres, the soldiers began shooting into the crowd, killing some ten spectators.⁸²⁷ Because of their status as burghers, Herlin and his son were allowed to be buried in the cemetery of Saint Géry. Around six weeks later, however, even this right was revoked. Father and son were exhumed and reinterred in a most shameful place—on the riverbank where the coal and lime were stored.⁸²⁸ This shameful burial, too, was shocking to contemporaries. Lille chronicler Mahieu Manteau called it “the greatest disgrace ever felt.”⁸²⁹

In the same month, a rich merchant named Pieter Backereeuw was sentenced for his role in iconoclasm in the Flemish town of Oudenaarde.⁸³⁰ Backereeuw was captured at the beginning of June and was heavily tortured during his interrogation. Van Vaernewijck described how he tried to escape his torment by jumping out of the window headfirst onto the pavement.⁸³¹ His execution followed a few weeks later. Again, Van Vaernewijck stressed that his death

was lamented by many because he was a much-loved, honest, and well-seen man among the people, who did a lot of good for the poor. Many wondered why such a man had to die so shamefully and miserably, just like those of Valenciennes were shocked by the death of their Michel Herlin and his son. [...] This Backereeuw was pitied most of all because he, as a manner of speaking, had one wound within the other, caused on three occasions. First, his bones had been broken on the rack; second, his face, head, and breast had cracked when

⁸²⁶ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 237–238. ‘zegghende dese ofte deserghelijcke woorden: o Godt, alstover zulcke machtighe heeren moet ghaen zonder eenighe gracie, ende zoo hert snijt, hoe, meentghij, zalt over ons ghaen; wat zal ons aerme ghemeen lieden ghebueren?’

⁸²⁷ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 237–238. The numbers differ. Le Boucq mentioned ten, Vaernewijck eight. In a letter concerning the details of the executions, chancellor Anthoine Lebrun reported only four. Arsène Loin, “Documents concernant les placards, l’inquisition et les troubles religieux dans les Pays-Bas, et spécialement dans le comté de Hainaut, sous les règnes de Charles V et de Philippe II,” *Bulletin de la Commission royale d’Histoire* 24, no. 8 (1856): 59.

⁸²⁸ *Histoire des troubles*, 25–27.

⁸²⁹ “Chronique de Mahieu Manteau,” 37. ‘la plus grande infirmité qu’on sentit jamais.’ See also *Histoire des troubles*, 25–27.

⁸³⁰ *Dagboek van Cornelis en Philip van Campene*, 62.

⁸³¹ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 245–246.

he fell, and his legs were crushed; and third, the noose was cutting around his neck.⁸³²

Van Vaernewijck, along with the spectators of the execution, was clearly moved by the cruelty of this act. Indeed, the level of physical suffering was difficult for the chronicler to comprehend: “God’s judgment is wondrous; that is why he lets one suffer so much more than the other.”⁸³³

The way in which chroniclers described these executions reflects how shocking they were to contemporaries. These patients had been respectable people, well-known members of the urban community, and most of them died as good Catholics. They were nothing like the “heretics” who had rejected the script of the *ars moriendi*, purposely looking to achieve a martyr’s death on the scaffold. Nonetheless, they were treated even worse. Time and again, chroniclers focused on the physical suffering of these patients, recording their pain and bodily deformations before or during their executions. The fact that many were hanged also played a role in this reaction: Hanging was considered the most shameful form of capital punishment, one reserved for “common thieves.” During a hanging, a patient could start to shake uncontrollably, release urine or feces, or have their tongue stick out or their face become distorted. The fact that wealthy and respectable burghers were executed in this manner was considered outrageous. How the bodies were treated afterward—buried in shameful places or left hanging from trees—added to the shock.

The unrest that emerged during these executions also made clear that order was not fully restored. Over the course of the summer of 1567, Margaret of Parma embarked on a more ambitious and large-scale project to further

⁸³² Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 248–249. ‘ende was van vele zeer beclaecht, want hij een wel bemint, ghezien ende eerlic man was, onder tvolck, die ooc veel duechden den aermen dede; zoo dat menich zoo groot wonder ghaf, dat zulck een man zoo schandelic ende miserabelic steerven moeste; als die van Valenchiene verwondert ende verscric waren in de doot van haren Michiel Herlijn ende zijn zone [...] Desen Backereeuw was te meer beclaecht, om dat hij, in manniere van spreken, deen wonde in dander hadde, tot drij reijzen toe. Eerst, waren hem zijn leden ghebroken up de pijnbanck; ten tweeden zijn aensicht, hoofd ende burst gheborsten met zijnen spronck, ende de beenen (es wel te dijncen) al ghemurselt; ende ten derden, dat snijende strop an zijn kele’.

⁸³³ Vaernewyck, *Van die beroerlicke tijden*, II, 249. ‘Maer Godts oordeelen zijn wonderlic: waeromme dat hij den eenen zoo veel laet lijden buijten den anderen. In welcke abijme wij niet terden en willen; want daer gheenen gront in te slane en es’.

reinforce authority. Working closely with the provincial courts, she started to focus on organizing the investigations into the culprits of iconoclasm in greater detail. To that end, the governor appointed commissioners to compile *informatiën*, or investigations. In Antwerp, Parma commissioned two members of the Council of Brabant to arrange investigations into the organizers of iconoclasm.⁸³⁴ In addition, urban magistrates were required to submit an account of the measures they had taken to prevent or combat iconoclasm—with these justifications, they had to prove they had done everything in their power to prevent trouble.⁸³⁵

In the meantime, however, in Spain, the king and his councilors had developed their own plans to put an end to the paralysis of local government and quash and punish what they considered a rebellion by heretics.⁸³⁶ According to many, the severity of the situation required the physical presence of the king himself, which was considered to have a restorative influence. For the king, a strategy of punishment was, from the start, coupled with another strategy: that of pardoning. As we saw in Chapter One, pardoning was the most important tool for justice wielded by the central authorities. It was decided, therefore, that a military mission would be sent to restore order and impose punishments in the Low Countries, after which the king himself would arrive with a general pardon. The king appointed Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, third Duke of Alba (1507-1582), a seasoned military commander, to lead this mission.⁸³⁷ The news reached the Low Countries at the beginning of 1567.⁸³⁸

After the capitulation of Valenciennes, however, the governor Margaret of Parma had felt that the situation was already under control, and according to her, Alba's visit to the Low Countries was no longer needed. Moreover, anticipating the need for royal pardons, she had already drafted an outline for grace and the moderation of punishments in the peace agreement she

⁸³⁴ Marnef, *Antwerpen in de tijd van de Reformatie*, 151–56.

⁸³⁵ Toben Braeckevelt, "Les grands devoirs, diligences et bons offices faits par messieurs de la loy de la ville': Een discours-analytische studie van de justificaties van Vlaamse stadsmagistraten na de Beeldenstorm (1567-1573)" (Unpublished Master's Thesis, KU Leuven, 2015).

⁸³⁶ Soen, "The Beeldenstorm and the Spanish Habsburg Response (1566-1570)," 111.

⁸³⁷ Gustaaf Janssens, "The Duke of Alba: Governor of the Netherlands in Times of War," in Ebben; Lacy-Bruijn; van Hövell tot Westerflier, *Alba*, 95.

⁸³⁸ Vivere, *Chronijcke van Ghendt*, 227.

reached with the city of Antwerp in May 1567.⁸³⁹ Philip II was not pleased to hear that such a decision had been made without consulting him. Parma's protests were to no avail. By June, the Duke of Alba left for the Low Countries. All summer, chroniclers waited in anticipation for his arrival, and rumors that the king would join him were recorded in abundance.⁸⁴⁰ When Alba and his army arrived in the Low Countries at the end of the summer, it turned out that Philip II intended to cancel virtually all of Margaret of Parma's policies and edicts. Frustrated, Parma resigned, leaving Alba as the new governor-general.⁸⁴¹

Conclusion

Whereas historians of the Dutch Revolt have focused mostly on the perception of religious restoration after the Iconoclast Fury, this chapter has shifted attention to the experience of justice and order and the attempts of the urban authorities to restore peace after iconoclasm. We have seen how the Iconoclast Fury and the meltdown of authority and the administration of justice that followed made chroniclers hypervigilant. The construction of gallows, the publication of placards, the gathering of troops and movements of the nobility, rumors of the king's return: Every move was scrutinized and analyzed. Executions, in particular, became pivotal indicators of societal tensions. Chroniclers recorded in detail not only the executions themselves—which were much anticipated and highly charged—but also the responses of their audiences. We see, then, that these chroniclers considered themselves responsible for recording order and peace in their communities, or the lack thereof. At the same time, their detailed recording and reporting of what was happening in their local and broader environments might have functioned as a coping mechanism, providing a sense of order and control amid the turmoil.

The heightened awareness of government communication and practices of justice allows us to see how the perception of executions and justice

⁸³⁹ Gustaaf Janssens, "De ordonnantie betreffende de pacificatie van de beroerten te Antwerpen (24 mei 1567): Breekpunt voor de politiek van Filips II ten overstaan van de Nederlanden." *Bulletin de la Commission royale des anciennes lois et ordonnances de Belgique* 50 (2009).

⁸⁴⁰ For example: "Vervolg der anteykeningen van Broer Hendrik van Biesten," 423.

⁸⁴¹ Soen, "The Beeldenstorm and the Spanish Habsburg Response (1566-1570)," 111-12; Janssens, "The Duke of Alba: Governor of the Netherlands in Times of War," 95.

changed during this period. Those dying for heresy in the 1550s and early 1560s had mostly been poor people and anonymous outsiders, whose deaths made less of an impact on chroniclers. Certainly, martyrs had started to reject the script of the *ars moriendi* in the first half of the sixteenth century, but their executions had only really begun to bother onlookers when they were disrupted by members of the audience, breaking the urban peace. Support for heresy executions among spectators had consequently crumbled, as they failed to contribute to order and peace in society. In the aftermath of iconoclasm, the restorative function of executions disintegrated even further. In the first executions in the late summer of 1566, city magistrates were careful to execute mostly outsiders and framed the punishments as being for theft, not for iconoclasm per se. This strategy, however, hardly seems to have convinced spectators. Chroniclers were well aware that the low-class rabble stealing from the churches amid the chaos of iconoclasm was not responsible for the meltdown of social order. Such behavior was despicable and should be punished, but it was more of a symptom than the cause of the troubles. Indeed, in describing the image-breaking, chroniclers mentioned the mimicking of execution methods, such as the decapitation of statues, a form of destruction that was far from mindless vandalism or theft: It was symbolic violence, signaling revenge. During the tense period of the “religious peace” that followed, when those guilty of infringing the peace edicts were prosecuted, executions again failed to be restorative events. Chroniclers, both Catholic and Protestant, now deemed the punishments too strict—in their opinion, people were being executed despite mitigating circumstances, such as diminished accountability in the case of drunkenness, or when grace was expected.

The real turning point came in the spring of 1567. Now, the patients on the scaffold were burghers, respectable members of the community with good reputations, whom chroniclers and audiences often personally knew. Like common thieves, however, these individuals were executed shamefully and their bodies disgraced. No matter their crimes, for chroniclers, this treatment of their neighbors was extremely shocking. It should be emphasized, then, that the first major wave of problematic executions started before the Duke of Alba had even set foot in the Low Countries. As we will see in the next chapter, however, his arrival would lead to many more.