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Deconstructing the Protestant Liberation of the Bible: The Case of the Low Countries

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Abstract: The Grand Narrative of the liberation of Scripture has long taken for granted that the late medieval Catholic Church took a negative, if not repressive, attitude towards vernacular Bible reading; that the Scriptures were only opened up for the masses with the advent of Luther and the Reformers; and that the Catholic authorities reacted by intensifying their repressive policy. Though explicitly criticized in scholarly literature over the last decade, this Grand Narrative, or Protestant Paradigm, continues to pop up in confessionally-colored scholarly publications, as well as in accounts of the Reformation that are destined for a general audience. The present essay examines three incarnations of the Grand Narrative in Dutch Protestant Bible culture. Firstly, it has been argued that the Bibles published by William Vorsterman (not only the edition of 1528, but all subsequent editions) betray sympathies with the upcoming Reformation; secondly, that the printer-publisher Jacob van Liesvelt was beheaded on account of the protestantizing marginal glosses in his Bibles, especially the 1542 edition; and thirdly, that his widow Maria Ancxt continued to print Protestant Bibles from the late 1540s until the early 1560s, in obvious violation of the anti-heresy edicts, yet without being harassed by the Antwerp authorities. The aim of this article is to debunk these incarnations of the Grand Narrative.

Keywords: historiography of the Reformation, 16th-century Dutch Bibles, Jacob van Liesvelt, Willem Vorsterman, Maria Ancxt

1 Introduction: The Liberation of the Bible as a Grand Narrative of the Protestant Reformation

In a series of articles that began in 2005, the Canadian scholar Andrew Colin Gow – a practicing Jew – has challenged what he and others have called the Protestant Paradigm. This paradigm denotes the conviction, still prevalent in Protestant

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milieus – both scholarly and otherwise – that the Bible remained a closed book for large periods of the Middle Ages, due to the strictures of the Catholic Church, and was only made accessible to the masses with the arrival of Martin Luther and the Reformation. This view, at least in part, can be traced back to the Reformer of Wittenberg himself. Gow made great efforts to remind the scholarly community that this view was, and is, erroneous, and that the Bibles that circulated in great quantities in late medieval Germany and the Low Countries, both in manuscript and in print, were avidly read by the public.¹

Andrew Gow's scholarly jeremiad was the point of departure for a Groningen group of scholars, led by Sabrina Corbellini, who concentrated on comparable prejudices regarding Bible reading (or the absence thereof) in regions such as France and Counter-Reformation Italy. The results of the group's critical work, which uncovered multiple paradigms regarding Bible reading in early modern Europe, were collected in a thematic volume of the journal *Church History and Religious Culture* in 2013.²

Notwithstanding such a multiplication of paradigms, I preferred to use Gow's initial expression "Protestant Paradigm" in a broader and more general sense when I published an article in the *Catholic Historical Review* (2018) entitled "Vernacular Bible Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The Catholic Position Revisited."³ In that article the expression "Protestant Paradigm" refers to the aforementioned outmoded idea that the medieval Catholic Church authorities forbade the reading of vernacular Bibles by the laity, and that the Bible was only opened to the masses following the Protestant Reformers' arrival on the

1 See Andrew C. Gow, "Challenging the Protestant Paradigm: Bible Reading in Lay and Urban Contexts of the Later Middle Ages," in *Scripture and Pluralism: Reading the Bible in the Religiously Plural Worlds of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and Thomas Burman, Studies in the History of Christian Traditions 123 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 161–91; Gow, "The Contested History of a Book: The German Bible of the Later Middle Ages and Reformation in Legend, Ideology, and Scholarship," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 9 (2009): 2–37; Id., "Une histoire de *Geschichtsklitterungen* protestantes: Les Bibles médiévales," in *Vernacular Bible and Religious Reform in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Era*, ed. Wim François and A.A. [August] den Hollander, Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 287 (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 29–52.

2 Sabrina Corbellini et al., "Challenging the Paradigms: Holy Writ and Lay Readers in Late Medieval Europe," *Church History and Religious Culture* 93 (2013): 171–88. See also Corbellini, "Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit and Awakening the Passion: Holy Writ and Lay Readers in Medieval Europe," in *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books, Scholars and Their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bruce Gordon and Matthew McLean, Library of the Written Word 20 (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2012), 15–39.

3 Wim François, "Vernacular Bible Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe: The 'Catholic' Position Revisited," *The Catholic Historical Review* 104/1 (2018): 23–56.

scene; in the present article, the expression “Protestant Paradigm” encompasses the related prejudice that, after the advent of the Reformation, the Catholic authorities, both ecclesiastical and civil, intensified their efforts to keep the vernacular Bible out of the hands of the laity.

Meanwhile, the same line of thought can be found in the third volume of *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, from 2016, in an article by Kenneth G. Appold, who can hardly be suspected of anti-Protestant sentiments: “Statements such as ‘Luther rescued the Bible from papal tyranny’, ‘the Reformation gave the Bible back to the people’ or ‘the Catholic church banned Bible-reading’ are among the more popular of the (typically Protestant) generalizations which, at the very least, need heavy qualification.”⁴ And in a French overview article on German and English Bible translations – the latter tradition indeed being far more restrictive than any other Continental practices – Gergely Juhász complains that “the majority of representations of the Reformation depict a late medieval Church which not only neglects the Scriptures, but even hides them from the people,” while adding that “it is clear for everybody that this position cannot be maintained anymore.” Juhász also points to the Reformers themselves as the source of these mistaken allegations, but, even more significantly, that their claims have been isolated from the polemical context in which they were expressed in the sixteenth century and taken literally by “modern readers.”⁵

It should be emphasized that the paradigm, as it was incarnated in many narratives, myths or legends, contributed hugely to the construction of confessional – especially Protestant – identities at the beginning of the Early Modern Era. These identities were subsequently reinforced in the second confessional era, between the 1850s and the 1970s, and have long been dominant in historiography. Peter Marshall, author of the book *1517: Martin Luther and the Invention of the Reformation*, contributed to an Oxford University Press blog to mark the publication of his book and the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The blog discusses 9.5 myths about the Reformation, the third myth being that “Luther was the first person to translate the Bible into German.” In his comments, Marshall observes that “Protestants themselves started the myth that the Bible was completely neglected in the Middle Ages. But if there hadn’t been a huge interest in the Bible

4 Kenneth G. Appold, “The importance of the Bible for early Lutheran theology,” in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 3: *From 1450 to 1750*, ed. Euan Cameron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 439–61, here 439.

5 Gergely Juhász, “La Bible imprimée et sa Réforme,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 106/1 (2018): 73–89, here 88: “... la plupart des présentations de la Réforme décrivent une Église médiévale tardive qui, non seulement ignore les Écritures, mais les cache délibérément au peuple. Il est désormais clair pour chacun que cette position n’est plus défendable” [English translation from the French is ours].

among medieval Catholics, Reformation ideas would have struggled to get traction.” To wind up this overview and avoid the impression of an anti-Protestant bias, I fully approve of another statement of Kenneth Appold’s: “Catholic polemicists circulate their own distortions of the Reformation, of course, but those are less pertinent to this particular issue.”⁶

Whether Gow’s concept of the “Protestant Paradigm” is preferable to the more traditional approach of “Myths of the Reformation” may be left as the subject of further debate. For my part, I refer in the title of the present section to the liberation of the Bible as one of the Protestant Reformation’s Grand Narratives, which is of course yet another concept. Whatever the preference here may be, in this essay, I illustrate how that Grand Narrative is incarnated in smaller particular narratives related to Dutch Bible culture, three of which I elaborate on and deconstruct below: firstly, the Bibles published by Willem Vorsterman (not only the 1528 edition, but all subsequent editions too) exhibit sympathies with the upcoming Reformation; secondly, the printer-publisher Jacob van Liesvelt was beheaded because the Bibles he published, especially his 1542 Bible, contain marginal glosses that articulate Protestant ideas; and thirdly, Van Liesvelt’s widow Maria Ancxt continued to print Protestant Bibles from the late 1540s until the early 1560s, in obvious violation of the anti-heresy edicts, yet without being harassed by the Antwerp authorities. Although the printer-publishers under consideration also published French Bibles, as well as Bibles in other languages, I will concentrate here on their Dutch Bible production.⁷

2 Willem Vorsterman

In 1528, the Antwerp printer-publisher Willem Vorsterman (†1543) brought his famous illustrated folio Bible onto the market.⁸ It was devised as a Catholic alternative to the Bible that his Antwerp colleague and competitor Jacob van

⁶ Appold, “The importance of the Bible,” 439.

⁷ More information on the editions of the Bible that are discussed here can be retrieved from the online bibliography of Bibles printed in Belgium and the Netherlands: www.bibliasacra.nl (last accessed 29 June 2020).

⁸ For Vorsterman’s 1528 edition, see Wim François, “De Vorstermanbijbel van 1528 en later: naar een katholieke bijbel,” in *De Bijbel in de Lage Landen. Elf eeuwen van vertalen*, ed. Paul Gillaerts et al. (Heerenveen: Jongbloed, 2015), 237–65, here 238–52; François, “The Compositors’ Neglect or the True Story Behind the Prohibition of Vorsterman’s Dutch Bibles,” *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 91/2 (2015): 239–56, here 240–47; A.A. [August] den Hollander, *De Nederlandse bijbelvertalingen. Dutch Translations of the Bible 1522–1545*, Bibliotheca Bibliographica Neerlandica 33 (Nieuwkoop: de Graaf Publishers, 1997), 90–92, 189–93, 226, and 350–57.

Liesvelt had published two years earlier in 1526, but which had been viewed with suspicion because its text and canon, among other characteristics, were inspired by Luther's. However, Vorsterman's 1528 Bible can hardly be characterized as a Catholic version, as can be seen from its text, its biblical canon, and its prologue.

Vorsterman's 1528 Bible has a very eclectic prologue, which even includes elements taken from Luther's preface to his 1523 Pentateuch edition (although the harshest polemical elements of this preface were attenuated).⁹ The text of Vorsterman's Old Testament has long been the subject of scholarly debate, but on the basis of thorough text-critical research, Louis Vermeulen has arrived at new conclusions. The text is now believed to have been compiled on the basis of late medieval Dutch and Low-German Bibles, especially the Delft Bible (1477). In a second movement, these Dutch and Low-German Bibles were thoroughly compared with Latin Vulgate editions. In order to have a modern, readable text, this Vulgate translation was further adapted on the basis of Van Liesvelt's 1526 Bible; in the course of this adaptation, Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros' Complutensian Polyglot, including the Hebrew original, was consulted, with a view to a critical assessment of Vorsterman's composite. Variants according to the Hebrew have been included in the margins of Vorsterman's Old Testament, which gives it a somewhat more humanist appearance than Van Liesvelt's version.¹⁰ Curiously, the New Testament of Vorsterman's 1528 Bible was not based on Van Liesvelt's text, but on Christoffel van Ruremund's translation of 1526, which was in turn based on Luther's New Testament, albeit in various passages corrected according to Erasmus' *Novum Testamentum* (and its *Annotationes*).¹¹ In contrast to the translation of the Old Testament, which was seldom, if ever, liable to complaints regarding confessionally suspect texts, several of these Lutheran-Erasmian renderings of New Testament passages would be contested by the Catholic authorities. To mention only a few standard examples: Matt 3:2 and Matt 4:17 read "Repent!" ("Hebt berou") as a translation of the Erasmian "Resipiscite," and not of the Vulgate's "Poenitentiam agite." The "ecclesia" of Matt 16:18 is translated as "congregation" ("ghemeynte"), and not as "Church," and the "presbyteroi ecclesiae" of James 5:14 is translated as "the elders of the congregation" ("dye oudtste

⁹ For a more extensive discussion of the prologue, see François, "De Vorstermanbijbel van 1528 en later," 238–43.

¹⁰ Louis Vermeulen, "die alder beste maniere van ouer te setten: Een andere visie op het gebruik van bronnen in het Oude Testament van de Vorstermanbijbel," *Trajecta* (27) 2018: 57–126. Vermeulen's painstaking text-critical work replaces earlier studies on the text of Vorsterman's Old Testament, including the hypothesis of the Philadelphia Psalter ca. 1485, which Youri Desplenter saw as the basis for the Psalter in the Vorsterman Bible.

¹¹ I am very grateful to Louis Vermeulen for having sent me an account of his recent research regarding the text of Vorsterman's New Testament.

vander ghemeynten”), instead of “the priests of the Church.” On the other hand, in Rom 3:28 we read: “For we account a man to be justified by faith, without the works of the law,” omitting the word “alone,” in apposition to “faith,” which we find in Luther’s German translation and the Dutch versions in its wake, but which is absent from the Greek. The choice to leave out the word “alone” had already been made in Van Ruremund’s 1526 New Testament and betrays a humanist mindset. As regards the canon, Vorsterman’s 1528 Bible followed the example of the Liesvelt Bible, which was in turn inspired by Luther’s New Testament, in relegating the books of Hebrews, Jude, James, and Revelation to the back of the New Testament, where they formed a kind of deuterocanonical appendix.

The correctors who had been assigned to emend the Liesvelt Bible saw before them an edition that, retrospectively, may be characterized by scholars as a humanist version, but equally displays undeniable influences from the upcoming Reformation. In the prologue as well as in an “after-correction” (*na-correctie*) that follows the Song of Songs, the correctors showed great embarrassment with the final result. And if, with regard to the biblical canon, they were able to offer some sophisticated explanations that provided them with an acceptable escape, they were on far more delicate ground when addressing the humanist and Reformation-oriented readings that remained in the New Testament. They complained about the craftsmen in the printing office – “the compositors” according to the prologue, the “printers” according to the “after-correction,” – whom they blamed for having consciously neglected to include the emendations the correctors had recommended.

The late Cornelis Augustijn, a Church historian who belonged to a Northern Dutch Protestant tradition, did not take the embarrassment expressed by the correctors of the Bible very seriously, even suggesting that they shared the Erasmian-Lutheran ideas that were characteristic of dissident circles in the Low Countries in that period.¹² Nevertheless, the discomfiture of the correctors may have been more sincere than Augustijn allowed, since immediate steps were taken to eliminate the most outspokenly Reformation-oriented passages of Vorsterman’s 1528 Bible. In 1529, only a few months after the first edition, a revised version of the New Testament was published with the contested passages brought into conformity with the Vulgate; this revised version made use of Michiel Hillen van Hoochstraten’s 1527 Dutch New Testament.¹³ Matt 3:2 and Matt 4:17 have the

¹² Cornelis Augustijn, “De Vorstermanbijbel van 1528,” *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis/Dutch Review of Church History* 56 (1975–76): 78–94, here 88–90 and 94.

¹³ For the basic information on Vorsterman’s Catholic Bibles of the years 1529–1531, see also François, “De Vorstermanbijbel van 1528 en later,” 253–58; “The Compositors’ Neglect,” 247–49; den Hollander, *De Nederlandse bijbelvertalingen*, 93–94, 226–28, 358–60, 369–74, and 382–86.

“vulgarized” version “Do penance!” (“Doet penitencie”). The “ecclesia” of Matt 16:18 is translated as “Church,” and the “presbyteroi ecclesiae” of James 5:14 is actually translated as “the priests of the congregation of the Church” (“de priestere vander ghemeynten der kercken”). The variant readings from the Greek, which had been located in the main text of the 1528 edition, were massively relegated to the margins. Since this was not an octavo, let alone a sextodecimo – the usual format for separate editions of the New Testament – but was rather a folio edition, it is manifest that the intention was for the 1529 New Testament to be bound together with the 1528 Old Testament. The books of Hebrews, James, and Jude were returned to their canonical, Catholic order. This process of catholicizing the Vorsterman Bible continued with the publication of two separate editions of the New Testament in 1530, one in octavo and another in sextodecimo format. This New Testament has all the remaining paratextual elements removed – including the marginal references to the Greek – and is preceded by an outspokenly Catholic prologue entitled *Den kersten leser saluyt* (*Greetings to the Christian Reader*). Both 1530 editions also include translations of the Epistle readings for the Mass that were taken from the Old Testament, a characteristic feature of Catholic editions since the Middle Ages, meant to help the faithful follow the liturgical lessons that were read or sung in Latin in the church. This process of catholicization of the Vorsterman Bible came to a climax with the publication of a new complete Bible in 1531, with a general prologue stripped of its borrowings from the Luther Bible and of other elements that were considered to be too sympathetic to the Reformation. The 1531 Bible also contains the Dutch translation of the Vulgate New Testament without marginal glosses or other paratextual elements, but is prefaced by the Catholic *Greetings to the Christian Reader*.

In 1532 a new edition of the Bible was issued, but now without the preface *Greetings to the Christian Reader*; this edition marked a cautious distancing from an all-too-outspokenly-Catholic Bible.¹⁴ More importantly, however, was the series of editions that Vorsterman began publishing in 1533–1534; these Bibles were again a reaction to the edition of the Bible that his colleague and competitor Van Liesvelt had first brought to the market in 1532.¹⁵ While preserving a Catholic Vulgate translation, Vorsterman followed Van Liesvelt by significantly increasing the paratextual apparatus of the 1533–1534 edition (and the editions in its wake).

14 François, “De Vorstermanbijbel van 1528 en later,” 258–59; “The Compositors’ Neglect,” 249–50; den Hollander, *De Nederlandse bijbelvertalingen*, 94, 228, and 397–401.

15 On the 1533–1534 Bible and its subsequent editions, see Wim François and Sabrina Corbellini, “Shaping Religious Reading Cultures in the Early Modern Netherlands: The ‘Glossed Bibles’ of Jacob van Liesvelt and Willem Vorsterman (1532–1534ff.),” *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* 6/2 (2019): 147–84; further François, “De Vorstermanbijbel van 1528 en later,” 259–64; “The Compositors’ Neglect,” 250–51; den Hollander, *De Nederlandse bijbelvertalingen*, 94, 228, and 423–27.

Vorsterman was the first among the Antwerp printers to include, in the front of the Bible, a register or table, which contains key phrases or topics, followed by a reference to the relevant Bible passages. Some of these topics may be liable to a Protestant interpretation, which is, however, balanced by other, outspokenly Catholic statements. This topical register, which offered the reader a new tool to navigate the Bible, was an alternative to the traditional liturgical reading schedule, which remained self-evidently in place in the 1533–1534 edition, more specifically between the Old and the New Testaments.

The margins of the 1533–1534 Bible – especially those of the Old Testament – were further filled with printed glosses, in addition to the references to the original Hebrew and cross-references to other biblical texts that were already in place. Some of these glosses are chronological or historicizing notes which situate the biblical events within the history of humanity since creation, connecting those events with antique empires and their kings or, even more importantly, relating them to the birth of Christ and other episodes in salvation history. Vorsterman borrowed these marginal notes to a large degree from Liesvelt's 1532 Bible, as well as from the Latin Vulgate Bibles that Jacob Sacon published in Lyons in numerous editions from 1506 onwards and to which were added, beginning in 1512, several annotations *in marginibus*; these and other sources drew extensively from the very popular, late-medieval world chronicles, a genre represented by Werner Rolevinck's *Fasciculus temporum*. New in Vorsterman's 1533–1534 Bible are the typological glosses next to the text and images; these glosses interpret Old Testament motifs as a prefiguration of the mysteries of the faith, and of the salutary events in the life of Christ, his Mother, or the Church. The glosses appeal to late medieval spiritual and theological interests, as they were canonized in books such as the *Biblia Pauperum* and *Speculum humanae salvationis*.¹⁶ New editions of what may be described as a catholicizing glossed Bible were published by Vorsterman in 1542, with reprints in 1543, 1544, and 1545, after the printer had died.

Apart from the aforementioned editions of the complete Bible and the New Testament, Vorsterman continued the publication of the Epistle and Gospel lessons for the Mass, a kind of book that was very popular from the late Middle Ages onwards and which enabled the faithful to follow the lessons that were read or sung in Latin during Mass.¹⁷ To these publications some editions containing

¹⁶ See also Wim François, "Typology—Back with a Vengeance! Text, Images, and Marginal Glosses in Vorsterman's 1534 Dutch Bible," in *Imago Exegetica: Visual Images as Exegetical Instruments, 1400–1700*, ed. Walter S. Melion, James Clifton, and Michel Weemaes, *Intersections* 33 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 89–136, esp. 108–34.

¹⁷ Suzan Folkerts, "Middle Dutch Epistles and Gospels: The Transfer of a Medieval Bestseller into Printed Editions during the Early Reformation," in *Vernacular Bible and Religious Reform in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Era*, ed. François and Den Hollander, 53–73.

separate biblical sections should be added, meaning that about 26 editions of the Bible are known to have been published by Vorsterman.¹⁸

Whereas Vorsterman as a person never had problems with the judicial authorities in the Low Countries, several of his Bibles were included on the Index of Forbidden Books that was issued in 1546 by the Louvain theologians.¹⁹ The theologians, however, managed to make a distinction between Vorsterman's biblical editions: in addition to the protestantizing New Testament and the Bible of 1528, they forbade the Bibles from 1533 to 1534 and later – mentioning only the reprints of 1544 and 1545 and obviously forgetting those of 1542 and 1543 – and they explicitly faulted the presence of indices, thus pointing the finger at the topical registers. The clearly Catholic editions of the years 1529–1532, as well as the editions containing the Epistle and Gospel readings for Mass, however, continued to be allowed. When the Louvain Bible – a Dutch translation of the Vulgate that was devised as the new, official Dutch translation for Catholics – was published in 1548, its translator Nicolaus van Winghe narrated in his elaborate prologue the story of the negligent compositors in Vorsterman's printing office, casting an aspersion of unreliability on Vorsterman's Bible production in general, despite the fact that strictly speaking only the first edition displayed a humanist and Lutheran character. Van Winghe's aim was obviously to put Vorsterman's Bible out of the market, to the greater benefit of the Louvain Bible. It is bothersome to observe that the famous Catholic Bible translator contributed to the narrative that Vorsterman was among the printers who had deliberately ventured into the market of Reformation-oriented Bibles.

The narrative was eagerly continued in the Northern Dutch Protestant historiography. Earlier we noted Cornelis Augustijn's assumption that the correctors' embarrassment over the compositors' neglect was largely feigned and that both groups shared the common goal of bringing a Bible onto the market that showed the influences of humanism and the upcoming Reformation – with Augustijn even

18 Vorsterman brought 20 Dutch editions onto the market (eight full Bibles, four New Testaments, six editions with the Epistles and Gospel readings for Mass, one Gospel edition, and one edition with the Passion of the Lord). He published three Danish editions (two New Testaments and a Psalter), two French New Testaments, and one Latin New Testament.

19 François, "The Compositors' Neglect," 251–53; regarding editions of the Bible and the Louvain Index of 1546, see also François, "De Leuvense Bijbel (1548) en de katholieke bijbelvertalingen van de tweede helft van de zestiende eeuw," in *De Bijbel in de Lage Landen*, ed. Gillaerts et al., 266–303, esp. 270–73; A.A. [August] den Hollander, *Verboden bijbels. Bijbelcensuur in de Nederlanden in de eerste helft van de zestiende eeuw*, Oratiereeks (Amsterdam: Vossiuspers UvA, 2003), 11–21; Jesús Martínez de Bujanda et al., *Index de l'Université de Louvain, 1546, 1550, 1558*, Index des livres interdits 2 (Sherbrooke: Centre d'Études de la Renaissance / Éditions de l'Université de Sherbrooke and Geneva: Droz, 1986), 46, 65–68, 106–30, and 408–12.

denying that Cardinal Jiménez' Complutensian Polyglot was ever used. Even the printer-publisher Vorsterman himself acquired the reputation of having provided, under the guise of editing a semi-official Bible, the market with crypto-Protestant editions.²⁰ Within this tradition, attention has gone predominantly, if not exclusively, to Vorsterman's 1528 protestantizing version, giving the impression that all its features were also present in the subsequent editions. This characterization is evident in the standard work *De Statenbijbel en zijn voorgangers* [*The Dutch Standard Version and its Predecessors*] first written by Cebus C. de Bruin in 1937 and revised by Frits G.M. Broeyer in 1993, which devotes about six pages to Vorsterman's 1528 Bible and concludes by simply mentioning the subsequent "reprints," without taking into account the distinctive character of the later editions. De Bruin and Broeyer, moreover, erroneously claimed that all of Vorsterman's editions of the Bible were included on the Louvain Index from 1546 onwards.²¹

Our point is that the label "protestantizing," strictly speaking, only applies to the edition of 1528. In the eyes of the printer-publisher Willem Vorsterman himself, this edition was an abortive attempt, an anomaly, and moreover one which was very quickly superseded, first by a more outspokenly Catholic edition and later by catholicizing glossed Bibles. This was a distinction that 19th and 20th-century Protestant historians in the second period of confessionalization were either unable or unwilling to make.

To all this should be added the results of the research conducted by Bert Tops on the extant copies of the aforementioned editions of the Vorsterman Bible (ca. 245 copies). Tops focusses on the owners' marks, users' traces, and readers' annotations. This ongoing research shows that these copies were largely used and preserved in Catholic households and religious institutes.²² This is the case for all editions indiscriminately, which enables us to conclude first of all that the prescriptions of the Louvain Index (and subsequent Indices) with regard to these editions of the Bible had limited influence. Secondly, the research into the historical readers of the Vorsterman Bible confirms that it should not be primarily situated within a Protestant tradition.

20 See the aforementioned passage in Augustijn, *De Vorstermanbijbel van 1528*, 88–90 and 94.

21 Cebus Cornelis de Bruin, *De Statenbijbel en zijn voorgangers. Nederlandse bijbelvertalingen vanaf de Reformatie tot 1637*, rev. Frits Gerrit Murk Broeyer (Haarlem: Nederlands Bijbelgenootschap and Brussels: Belgisch Bijbelgenootschap, 1993), 111–20, here 118–20.

22 See the first of these studies by Bert Tops, "The Quest for the Early Modern Bible Reader: The Dutch Vorsterman Bible (1533–1534), its Readers and Users," *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* 6 (2019): 185–222.

3 Jacob van Liesvelt

We now turn to the Antwerp printer-publisher Jacob van Liesvelt (1489–1544), colleague and competitor of Vorsterman in printing and selling vernacular Bibles.²³ In contrast to Vorsterman, however, Van Liesvelt did not shy away from publishing versions of the Bible exhibiting sympathies with the upcoming Reformation, although his very first editions still had a late medieval text.²⁴ In a maximalist count, 22 editions of the Bible or parts of it are known to have left the printing office of Van Liesvelt.²⁵ His 1526 Bible, which became famous as the first complete, illustrated Bible in Dutch, was based upon Luther's text, as much as had already been published, and used Luther's canon. In most subsequent editions, Van Liesvelt's text was further adapted to Luther's, as this gradually became available, though the text of the Bibles beginning in 1538 and published under the name of Hansken (i) van Liesvelt (but not the text of the separate editions of the New Testament) followed the Vulgate in translating certain confessionally sensitive biblical passages – something that is usually overlooked in the older historiography. Hence we read in Matt 3:2: "Mend thy ways! ("Betert U"), but in Matt 4:17: "Do penance" (vulgatized)²⁶; in Matt 16:18: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church" ("kercke"; vulgatized); James 5,14: "Is any man sick among you? Let him bring in the elders of the assembly" ("vergaderingen").²⁷ On the other hand, Liesvelt was quite consistent in adding staunchly Reformation-oriented

23 Recent publications on Van Liesvelt and his Bible production include: A.A. [August] den Hollander, "De Liesveltbijbel van 1526 en later: naar een protestantse bijbel," in *De Bijbel in de Lage Landen*, ed. Gillaerts et al., 226–36; den Hollander, *De Nederlandse bijbelvertalingen*, passim.

24 Suzan Folkerts and Arend Elias Oostindiër, "New Bibles and Old Reading Habits Around 1522: The Position of the New Testament Translation of the Devotio Moderna among Dutch Printed Bibles," *Quaerendo* 47 (2017): 175–98.

25 We have copies left of 18 Dutch editions and one French edition published under the name of Jacob, and one Dutch edition under the name of Hansken van Liesvelt (1538). Two further editions of the Dutch New Testament by Jacob van Liesvelt (1542 and 1543) are included on the Louvain Index of 1546; no copies of these editions have been preserved.

26 In sixteenth century Dutch Bibles, we find Matt 3:2 and Matt 4:17 translated in three different ways: "Doet boete" is a literal translation of the Vulgate "Poenitentiam agite," which may be translated into English as "Do penance." Furthermore, we find "Hebt berou," which, as a translation of the Erasmusian "Resipiscite," emphasizes the inner aspect of remorse and regret over past mistakes, and which can be translated into English as "Repent." Finally, we read "Betert u," which may also be considered a translation of "Resipiscite," but nevertheless stresses the call to become a better person (in the future) and to act accordingly; the most appropriate English translation here is "Mend thy ways."

27 In Dutch there are three different translations: apart from "kercke" ("Church"), there is "vergaderinge," translated as "assembly" and "gemeynte," translated as "congregation."

paratextual materials from 1532 onwards,²⁸ an evolution that culminated in another famous edition of the Bible, that of 1542, which contained marginal glosses arguing in favor of justification by faith through grace alone and against the Catholic theological and sacramental system.²⁹

Van Liesvelt had run into trouble on various occasions for allegedly publishing forbidden books. As early as 1533, an anonymous citizen had denounced Van Liesvelt for having adopted a biblical canon that deviated from the official one of the Church; we do not know whether this denunciation precipitated the public burning of several books, including Bibles, from Van Liesvelt's workshop some years later in 1535–1536; in any case this act is one of the rare instances of actual Bible burning in the Low Countries. Van Liesvelt was summoned on two other occasions to appear before the judicial authorities, once in 1536 and another time in 1542, for having printed materials without obtaining the required permissions, but he seems to have been acquitted on both occasions.³⁰

In May 1545, Jacob van Liesvelt was arrested once more and brought before the local tribunal in his native town of Antwerp. The sheriff of Antwerp had initiated a new prosecution of Van Liesvelt who was again accused of having printed several books without obtaining the required permission. These renewed juridical actions were probably taken in the wake of the anti-heresy edict of 1544, which summed up the increasingly stringent censorship measures that had been imposed in the preceding years.³¹ In light of later accounts of these events,³² it is important to stress that the accusation, as it is recorded in the archival materials, preserves no

28 See Renske Annelize Hoff, "Framing Biblical Reading Practices: The Impact of the Paratext of Jacob van Liesvelt's Bibles (1522–1545)," *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* 6 (2019): 223–50.

29 On Van Liesvelt's 1542 Bible, see Den Hollander, "De Liesveltbijbel van 1526 en later," 231–33; *De Nederlandse bijbelvertalingen*, 36, 194–98, 229–30, and 480–86.

30 Wim François, "Jacob van Liesvelt as a Martyr for the Evangelical Belief?," in *More than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity*, ed. Johan Leemans and Jürgen Mettepenningen, *Annua Nuntia Lovaniensia* 51 (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 341–69, here 351–54.

31 Regarding censorship measures, see Wim François, "Vernacular Bible Reading and Censorship in Early Sixteenth Century: The Position of the Louvain Theologians," in *Lay Bibles in Europe. 1450–1800*, ed. A.A. [August] den Hollander and Mathijs Lamberigts, *Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium* 198 (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 69–96, here 79–95.

32 On Van Liesvelt's beheading, the facts, and the genesis of the narrative, see Wim François, "The Antwerpian Printer Jacob van Liesvelt, his Widow and their Bibles. Myths and Facts from a Confessional Era," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 89 (2020) – forthcoming. References are to *Antwerpsch Archievenblad*, ed. Pieter Génard, vol. 8 (Antwerp: stadsbestuur, s.d. [1872]), 346–53, esp. 347: "declaravit reus dat de boecken byden aenleggere gespecificeert, langhen tydt voer de placcaten Ons Genadichs Heeren des Keyzers ende vele jaeren te voren, by diverse boeckprinters, gedruckt hebben geweest ende mids datse by gheenem mandaten en syn verboden geweest, ende dat meer is, dat eenighe van dien syn gedruckt *cum gratia et privilegio*, dat hy vuyt

specific reference to any of Van Liesvelt's contested books, let alone to any of his editions of the Bible (although it remains possible that a list was added to the original accusation). Neither in his defense, which the Antwerp printer undertook with the assistance of two lawyers, did Van Liesvelt ever refer to the publication of prohibited Bibles, which may lead us to doubt whether an accusation of this kind can have played a major role in the trial. Considering the delaying tactics of the local Antwerp tribunal and its apparent unwillingness to condemn Van Liesvelt, the case was apparently taken over by the prosecutor general in Brussels with the result that Van Liesvelt was sentenced to death on 27 November 1545 and beheaded the next day.

The mid 1540s were years of intensified repression. Books and Bibles were included on the Louvain Index of 1546, but strikingly only Van Liesvelt's later editions were formally prohibited: inevitably the 1542 Bible, in addition to the New Testaments of 1542 and 1543 – no copies of which have been preserved – and that of 1544. In this atmosphere of increasing repression, religious dissidents from the Low Countries started an exodus to London, to territories in Germany, and eventually to Emden in East-Frisia, taking with them copies of the Liesvelt Bible, which reminded them of the heroic beginnings of their movement. New editions of the Liesvelt Bible were published in Emden, especially in the second half of the 1550s and in the early 1560s, until the *Deux Aes Bible* (1562) became the semi-official Bible of the Dutch Reformed.

The first to make an explicit connection between Van Liesvelt's execution and his Reformation-oriented Bible production was Jacob van Wesenbeke. He was not just anybody. In 1546, about half a year after Van Liesvelt had been sentenced to death, Van Wesenbeke became Antwerp's town secretary, succeeding his father, and in this sense, he belonged to the circles that were most informed about Antwerp affairs. Ten years later, in 1556, he was appointed town pensionary, the most important legal officer in the town's service. In this capacity, he became the right-hand man of William of Orange, when the latter was appointed governor of Antwerp in 1566. A year later, when the authority of the King of Spain was restored in the town, Van Wesenbeke was sent ahead of William of Orange to Dillenburg. When he left Antwerp, Van Wesenbeke is said to have taken with him the seals of the town, in addition to a large number of official records and letters. These documents may have served him well in editing his writings. In Dillenburg, Van Wesenbeke became the ghost-writer and the first propagandist for William of Orange and his movement. In this capacity he published, in 1569, a book that may have been written three years earlier and that was entitled *De Beschrijvinge*

dien (nyet meynende ydt daerane te misdoene) deselve alleenlick naegedruckt heeft voer date vanden lesten mandemente.”

Van den Gheschiedenissen in der Religien saken toeghedragen in den Nederlanden [Description of Events That Took Place in the Netherlands in the Matter of Religion]. It is in this book that Van Wesenbeke, more than two decades after Van Liesvelt's execution, included a short note, according to which the printer-publisher was accused before the tribunal as a result of a marginal note in "a Bible" which read "that man's salvation was brought about by Christ alone" – without an explicit reference to any particular edition.³³ It is very difficult to find a gloss with that specific wording in any of Van Liesvelt's editions of the Bible, not even in that of 1542, which in a later tradition has been identified as the one meant by Van Wesenbeke. The content of the gloss is of course reflected in various parts of the paratextual material added to the 1542 edition, such as the gloss on Col 1:2³⁴ and that on Matt 4:22,³⁵ amongst other passages. Given that the records of Van Liesvelt's trial do not refer to a Bible, let alone to its explicit Reformation-oriented marginal glosses, the crucial question is whether Van Wesenbeke's note gives us additional first-hand information about the trial, or whether it belongs to the beginnings of the narrative, legend, or myth that would surround the Antwerp printer and his Bible(s) in the decades and even centuries after his execution. It is not absurd to maintain that the answer to this question may be inspired by the confessional sympathies of the scholar doing the research.

Whatever the case may be, Van Wesenbeke's note was picked up from the beginning by Dutch Protestants and included in the narrative about Van Liesvelt that they handed down.³⁶ The following elements resound as a refrain when dealing with Van Liesvelt and his Bible, starting with *Boek-Zaal der Nederduytsche*

33 [Jacques de Wesenbeke,] *De Beschrijvinge Van den Gheschiedenissen in der Religien saken toeghedragen in den Nederlanden...* ([Cologne: Gottfried Hirtshorn], 1559 [=1569]), 22: "Jacop van Liesvelt tAntwerpen om eenen Bijbel in Nederduytsch na ghedruct te hebben met een Marginale Annotatie dat des Menschen salicheyt alleen doer Christum quam"; Jacques van Wesenbeeck, *La description de l'estat succes et occurences, advenues au Pais bas au faict de la Religion* ([Cologne: Gottfried Cervicornus d.J.], 1569), 20: "Jacques Van Liesvelt en Anvers, pour avoir après ung autre exemplaire imprimé une Bible avec une marginale annotation, que la salvation de l'homme procédoit seulement par Jesu-Christ" (the text has been published in Jacques de Wesenbeke, *Mémoires de Jacques de Wesenbeke*, intr. and notes Charles Rahlenbeck, Collection de mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de Belgique 5 [Brussels: Weissenbruch, 1859], 47–392, here 68).

34 Col 1:2: "genade dats vergevinge der sonden door Cristum, vrede dat is dat in ons te weten is dat wi seker gheloven door Cristum salich te zijn."

35 Matt 4:23: "Euangelie, dat is de vercondinghe der gratien ende verlossinge gecregen ende gegeuen door cristum ende lange verwacht."

36 On the spread of the narrative regarding Van Liesvelt, his 1542 Bible, and his beheading, see François, "The Antwerpian Printer Jacob van Liesvelt, his Widow and their Bibles," – forthcoming.

Bybels [*The Library of Dutch Bibles*], published by Isaac Lelong (1712).³⁷ First, the Liesvelt Bible was at the heroic beginnings of Protestant Bible production and Bible reading in the Low Countries, and as such it was held in honor and it was used, especially the 1542 edition, as a basis for further editions and revisions of the Bible used by Protestants (of all denominations); second, Van Liesvelt was beheaded precisely because of the Protestant marginal notes in one of his Bibles; third, the Catholics who executed Van Liesvelt were opponents of the pure Word of God, having prohibited Van Liesvelt's Bible as well as other vernacular versions; the Dutch Louvain Bible based upon the Vulgate and published in 1548 was presented as a forgery.

In the period of the so-called second confessionalization, running from about 1850 to 1970, the gap between Catholics and Protestants was reaffirmed, and their respective identities were reinvigorated. In the Netherlands, this evolution crystallized around the reestablishment of the Catholic hierarchy in 1853, which led to a vehement reaction among the Protestants and a revisiting of national confessional history. This was precisely the context in which Albert van Toorenenbergen, with his *Schetsen uit de lijdensgeschiedenis der Protestantsche Apostolisch-Katholieke Kerk* [*Historical Sketches from the Persecution of the Protestant Apostolic-Catholic Church*], produced a work that was part polemical history and part Protestant martyrology.³⁸ Recalling the Catholic violence against the nascent Protestant movement, Van Toorenenbergen praises Van Liesvelt as a martyr who spread the true Word of God, as someone who deserved to be included in the official martyrologies of ancient times. Thus, Van Toorenenbergen added a fourth component to the aforementioned elements of the narrative.

During this period of the second confessionalization, explicitly non-confessional ideologies with their own secular identities entered the debate. In the southern part of the Low Countries, which became in the nineteenth century the current state of Belgium, Catholics and anti-clerical liberals came to loggerheads. The liberal Antwerp historians Frans Hendrik Mertens and Karel Lodewijk Torfs, in their eight-volume *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen* [*History of Antwerp*], argued that Van Liesvelt's condemnation may have been provoked by, in addition to the famous annotation already recorded by Van Wesenbeke, what they considered an anti-clerical image inserted into the Gospel story about the

37 Isaac Le Long, *Boek-Zaal der Nederduytsche Bybels...* (Amsterdam: Hendrik Vieroot, 1732), 567–69.

38 Albert van Toorenenbergen, *Schetsen uit de lijdensgeschiedenis der Protestantsche Apostolisch-Katholieke Kerk*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: C.L. Brinkman, 1854), 84–89, here 89: “Nauwelijks was de laatste uitgave in 1542 voltooid, waar Liesveldt onderscheidene kanttekeningen had bijgevoegd ... maar vooral, nauwelijks had de geestelijkheid gelezen, dat ‘de saelicheyd der menschen alleen compt door Jesum Christum’ of het lot des uitgevers was beslist.”

temptation of Jesus in the desert (Matt 4:3). The image in question shows the devil in a monk's frock, his horns sticking out from the cap and his goat's paws from below the habit; a rosary dangles from the cord around his belly. This image must have ignited the ire of the Catholic authorities, according to the conjecture of Mertens and Torfs, who were unhindered by the complete absence of such a motif in the sources or by the very same depiction of the motif of the devil in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15) in irreproachably Catholic publications, such as *De Woestijne des Heeren* [*The Desert of The Lord*], which was compiled by the Franciscan friars Peter Godefridi and Frans Vervoort and published in 1551 by Hans (II) van Liesvelt. In defiance of the obscurantism and repression of the Catholic authorities, Van Liesvelt behaved as an early herald of the (liberal) freedom of the printing press, according to Mertens and Torfs.³⁹ The reference to the image accompanying the Gospel story about the temptation of Jesus in the desert was picked up in Protestant historiography in the North, where it was included by Hendrik van Druten in his valuable *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Bijbelvertaling* [*History of Dutch Bible Translation*], published in several parts between 1895 and 1905. However, the author was careful enough not to state explicitly that the illustration played a role in the condemnation of Van Liesvelt. Van Druten also stressed that it was not because of his text but because of his notes that Van Liesvelt's 1542 edition had been outlawed and the printer himself found guilty and sentenced to death – the specific reference to the unfindable gloss quoted by Van Wesenbeke was altogether omitted by the Church historian.⁴⁰

The five elements that collectively make up the narrative of Van Liesvelt during an important part of the second confessionalization were gradually, but inevitably, deconstructed by scholars. The first professional historian to engage in the deconstruction process was, not by coincidence, the Antwerp town archivist and Catholic priest Floris Prims, who in his elaborate history of the town of Antwerp, in the seventh of 29 volumes, observed that the alleged reason for Van Liesvelt's death sentence, namely, the inclusion of the above-discussed marginal gloss in his 1542 edition, is not to be found in the archival records. Prims argued that no further conclusion could be drawn than that Van Liesvelt was sentenced to death because he had dared to publish books without the prior consent of the

³⁹ Frans Hendrik Mertens and Karel Lodewijk Torfs, *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen sedert de stichting der stad tot onze tyden*, vol. 4 (Antwerp: Drukkery van J.-E. Buschmann, 1848), 275–76: "... zy verdedigden de vryheid der drukpers, welke men toen al bedacht was aen banden te leggen."

⁴⁰ Hendrik van Druten, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Bijbelvertaling, tweede deel. Eerste stuk* (Rotterdam: D.A. Daamen, 1897), 428–30, here 428: "Niet om zijn tekst maar vooral om de aantekeningen was deze editie vogelvrij verklaard en de drukker zelf des doods schuldig bevonden."

competent authorities.⁴¹ By discussing the less critical works that were published in the decades before Van Liesvelt's execution, the aforementioned Dutch Church historian C.C. de Bruin also made a valuable attempt at offering a more objective view of Van Liesvelt and his Bible production. Nevertheless De Bruin still accepts without question the view that the sheriff of Antwerp prosecuted Van Liesvelt because of the marginal note in the Bible of 1542.⁴² The Dutch historian of the religious book, A.A. [August] den Hollander, was reluctant to mention this very element in his already referenced 1997 bibliographical work *De Nederlandse Bijbelvertalingen 1522–1545. Dutch Translations of the Bible 1522–1545*.⁴³ The same author critiques the traditional view in the chapter he wrote on the Antwerp printer for the 2015 book *De Bijbel in de Lage Landen: Elf eeuwen van vertalen [The Bible in the Low Countries: Eleven Centuries of Translating]*,⁴⁴ which includes the main lines of an article written in 2005 by the author of the present essay. Nevertheless, the tenacious narrative about Jacob van Liesvelt and his beheading on account of his (1542) Bible(s) and its Protestant gloss(es), still resurfaces in popular and semi-scientific publications, without nuance or regard for recent scholarly insights into the dossier. The case of Jacob van Liesvelt illustrates how difficult it is to debunk the narratives, legends, and myths of past historiography.

4 Maria Ancxt

This section of the essay focuses on a passage from the book *Pragmatic Toleration* published by the American scholar Victoria Christman in 2015, which repeats a position she defended in an article that appeared in *The Sixteenth Century Journal* in 2011.⁴⁵ Christman adds a new element to the Van Liesvelt narrative by arguing that his widow, Maria Ancxt (†1566), analogous to four other widows discussed in the text, continued to print heterodox Bibles after the execution of her husband, during a period in which imperial and papal legislation was growing increasingly stringent with regard to such

41 Floris Prims, *Geschiedenis van Antwerpen*, vol. 7: *Onder de eerste Habsburgers (1477–1555)*, 1: *De politieke orde* (Antwerp: Standaard Boekhandel, 1938), 128–29; but also vol. 7/3: *Geestelijke orde* (Antwerp: Standaard Boekhandel, 1940), 291 and 294–96.

42 De Bruin, *De Statenbijbel en zijn voorgangers*, rev. Broeyer, 94–103 and 151–52, here 102.

43 Den Hollander, *Nederlandse Bijbelvertalingen 1522–1545*, 28–36.

44 Den Hollander, “De Liesveltbijbel van 1526 en later,” 233–34.

45 Victoria Christman, *Pragmatic Toleration: The Politics of Religious Heterodoxy in Early Reformation Antwerp, 1515–1555*, Changing Perspectives on Early Modern Europe 17 (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2015), here 80–82; Id., “The Coverture of Widowhood: Heterodox Female publishers in Antwerp, 1530–1580,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 42/1 (2011): 77–97, here 77–78, 84–85, and esp. 86–89.

activity, though she herself escaped any form of judicial censure. In reply to Christman's position,⁴⁶ it should first be acknowledged that in the wake of the imperial edict of 1540, and especially the recapitulative edict of 1544, control of the printing industry did increase and repression hardened; indeed it was precisely this decree that led to the death sentence being imposed on Maria Ancxt's husband, Jacob van Liesvelt. It should be emphasized, however, that vernacular Bibles as such were never forbidden by imperial decree. What continued to be forbidden, and had been since the early 1520s, was publishing editions of the Bible that were provided with registers, marginal glosses, summaries above the chapters, and other paratextual elements that could steer a reader's interpretation in a heterodox direction. Moreover, Dutch Bibles based upon the German Luther Bible were increasingly regarded with a skeptical eye. Bibles displaying these characteristics were eventually included on the Louvain Index of 1546. A few weeks after the publication of the Index, the imperial authorities, the Louvain theologians, and the printer-publisher Bartholomew van Grave undertook to publish a "trustworthy" Dutch and French translation of the Vulgate, one devoid of all marginal glosses and intended to replace all former editions.⁴⁷ In the period that followed, there were simply no printers left in the Habsburg Low Countries who continued to, or dared to, publish heterodox Bibles. It is even more surprising that Christman also argues that Maria Ancxt continued to bring such Bibles onto the market in open defiance not only of the imperial decrees but also of the first papal Index of 1559. In the Index, we read, amongst other stipulations, that no edition of the Bible in the vernacular, nor any edition of the New Testament, should be printed, purchased, read, or held in possession without the written permission of the Holy Office of the Roman Inquisition. In reply to Christman's argument, I would point to the historical fact that this first Roman Index was so excessively restrictive that it received no application at all in the Catholic regions of Europe (let alone being in force in the Low Countries).⁴⁸

46 For a fuller treatment of this topic, see François, "The Antwerpian Printer Jacob van Liesvelt, his Widow and their Bibles," – forthcoming. On Maria Ancxt see also Heleen Wyffels, "Weduwen-drukkers in 16de eeuws Antwerpen. Samengebracht in een biobibliografisch repertorium," *De Gulden Passer* 95/2 (2017): 231–60, esp. 239–40, and <https://www.arts.kuleuven.be/nieuwetijd/english/odis/impressae-women-printers-in-early-modern-antwerp-leuven-and-douai> (last accessed 29 June 2020).

47 Regarding censorship measures culminating in the Louvain Index of 1546, see François, "Vernacular Bible Reading and Censorship," 79–95.

48 Jesús Martínez De Bujanda et al., *Index de Rome 1557, 1559, 1564: Les premiers index romains et l'index du Concile de Trente*, Index des livres interdits 8 (Sherbrooke: Université de Sherbrooke / Centre d'études de la Renaissance and Geneva: Droz, 1990), 37–39, 128–31, 137, and 307–31, here 325 and 331. Also Giorgio Caravale, *Forbidden Prayer: Church Censorship and Devotional Literature in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Peter Dawson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 71–73 and Wim François, "The Catholic Church and the Vernacular Bible in the Low Countries: A Paradigm Shift in the 1550s?," in *Discovering the Riches of the Word: Religious Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed.

It is true that Maria Ancxt was not subjected to judicial censure, but the reason for this is that the majority, if not all, of Ancxt's editions of the Bible were Catholic, or at least catholicized translations. Although some of her editions explored the limits of what was permissible, all bore an official approbation on either the title page or as part of the colophon. In other words, the evidence that Christman adduces in support of her thesis, uncritically published in her book and in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, needs serious reappraisal based on accurate evaluation of the editions themselves. My own observations are based on an appraisal of nearly 20 vernacular editions of the Bible that I have been able to identify as having been published by Maria Ancxt.

Ancxt's publication activity started with two vernacular editions, in 1547 and 1548, respectively, of a quite traditional biblical genre, namely, the Epistle and Gospel readings for Mass. Even the most convinced adversaries of vernacular Bible reading were prepared to allow the laity to read such books, and their publication was seldom, if ever, contested. Surprisingly, Maria Ancxt used as a basis for her publications the text of the editions her husband had published and that are said to have caused him so much trouble. But as we remarked above, in the editions of the Bible published by the Van Liesvelt house since 1538, some of the confessionally delicate passages were catholicized, in the sense of being adapted to the Vulgate (and the passages with which this was not the case, such as James 5:14, were not used as readings at Mass). An example of this vulgatzation can be found in Matt 16:13–19, the pericope that was read on the Feast of the Chair of Saint Peter (*sinte Peeters verheffinge dach*, 22 February) as well as the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul (29 June). There we find the sentence: "Thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church," instead of the Protestant "my congregation." Moreover, the Epistle and Gospel readings are preceded by a saints' calendar, traditionally printed in red and black ink. At the back of the book, a schedule is included which lists all the Sundays and feast days, and for each day indicates the page where the readings are to be found. In short, on the basis of a heterodox Bible, a thoroughly Catholic edition, containing the Epistle and Gospel readings for Mass, was composed. It comes as no surprise that both editions refer on their title page, and even more extensively in the colophon, to the approval of the competent book censor.

In addition to the Epistles and Gospels that were read at Mass, the Psalms were the Church's liturgical texts par excellence; consequently, from the Middle Ages onwards, the Psalms were frequently translated, copied, and

Sabrina Corbellini, Margriet Hoogvliet, and Bart Ramakers, *Intersections* 38 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 234–81, here 262–63.

printed. Quite evidently, Maria Ancxt also ventured into this market. What is very peculiar, however, is that she used the text by Joannes Campensis, professor of Hebrew at the Louvain College of the Three Tongues (1519–1531). On the basis of the Hebrew text, Campensis had made a Latin paraphrase of the Psalms that was published for the first time in 1532 and went through several reprints in subsequent years. In 1533, the Louvain theologians, replying to a request for advice from the governess of the Low Countries, had pronounced a negative judgment on the publication of a Dutch and French translation of Campensis' Psalter. Notwithstanding the negative advice, several editions containing a Dutch, French, or other vernacular version had been published in the course of the 1530s. Strangely enough, not a single such edition was later put on the Louvain Index of 1546. This is obviously the reason that in 1548 Maria Ancxt reprinted the Dutch text of the Psalter according to Campensis' version, with three print runs known to have been undertaken in the same year. Moreover, in this case too, she received explicit permission from the competent book censor. The text of the Psalms in this edition is followed by the Dutch translation of the Letter of Saint Athanasius to Marcellinus; this version was based upon the Latin translation that Johann Reuchlin had made from the Greek original. The material regarding the Psalms is followed by a Dutch paraphrase of the book Ecclesiastes, likewise made by Campensis, as well as a meditation on praying the Our Father. The booklet as such is introduced by a letter from Campensis to Joannes Dantiscus, bishop of Culm since 1530, as well as by an address of Campensis to the reader.⁴⁹ From the second edition onwards, a saints' calendar was added immediately after the title page. Moreover, in 1549 or 1550, Maria Ancxt did publish a Dutch translation of the Wisdom books of Solomon – again with explicit ecclesiastical approbation – followed in 1551 by a second edition.

After having published editions of the Epistles and Gospels as well as of the Psalter, Maria Ancxt ventured into the market for New Testaments, both in Dutch and in French. Seven editions of the Dutch New Testament are known to have left her printing office between 1553 and 1565, and she may have published even more editions. All editions were provided with a *cum gratia et privilegio* as a guarantee that they had been officially approved. They are part of the more than 40 editions of

⁴⁹ Henry de Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense 1517–1550*, 4 vols. (Leuven: Librairie universitaire, 1951–1955), vol. 2: 120–22 and vol. 3: 154–208, esp. 190–95; Id., “Campensis' Psalterium,” in Id., *John Dantiscus and His Netherlandish Friends, As Revealed by Their Correspondence 1522–1546*, *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 16 (Leuven: Librairie universitaire, 1961), 136–48; Jamie H. Ferguson, “Miles Coverdale and the Claims of Paraphrase,” in *Psalms in the Early Modern World*, ed. Linda Phyllis Austin et al. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 137–54.

the (Catholic) New Testament that are known to have been published before the 1570s, all having the text of the Dutch Catholic Louvain Bible of 1548,⁵⁰ including its rendering of the aforementioned confessionally delicate passages (as well as others) in complete conformity with the Vulgate. All these New Testaments have, typically, a similar composition: the text is preceded by a calendar of saints and followed by those passages from the Old Testament that were read as a lesson during Mass, as well as by a schedule indicating which pericopes from the Bible were to be read on each Sunday and feast day and the pages where those pericopes were to be found. The peculiar shape of the editions of the Catholic New Testament in this period made them fit to follow the official liturgy of the Church.

Nevertheless, two features of Maria Ancxt's Dutch New Testaments made them somewhat peculiar. First, they bear on the title page a quotation of Mark 16:15-16a: "Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." According to August den Hollander, the printing of this quotation on the title page was an element that induced the Louvain theologians to include such editions on the Index of 1546, since they considered it a token of a dissident mindset, although the theologians did not make this suspicion explicit.⁵¹ If this is actually the case, Maria Ancxt's inclusion of this Bible verse was somewhat daring and, thus, an attempt to explore the limits of what was still possible. Moreover, Ancxt also included summaries above the chapters of her New Testament that were essentially borrowed from the New Testament and editions of the Bible that the Van Liesvelt house had published in the prior decades, though the summaries were largely catholicized in Ancxt's Bibles. Such a strategy may have been necessitated by the simple fact that these summaries were absent from the Louvain Bible of 1548 and were only added in its second edition of 1553, obviously too late for Ancxt to have them included in her first edition of the New Testament in the same year. As an illustration, I refer to the summary above Matt 16, which, according to the Liesvelt New Testament, has the words "How Jesus said that He would build his Church on the confession of the faith."⁵² Since the addition "on the confession of the faith" and thus the concealment of Peter's ministry was considered an expression of Protestant ideas, Ancxt had it removed from her editions of the New Testament. The

50 François, "Catholic Church and the Vernacular Bible in the Low Countries," 265–75.

51 Den Hollander, *Verboden Bijbels*, 21.

52 Summary above Matt 16, according to Van Liesvelt's New Testament (1540) (comp. Liesvelt Bible [1535]): "Van die leeringhe der Pharizeen, Hoe Jesus sprac, dat hi zijn kercke tymmeren soude **op die belijdinghe des gheloofs**. Hoe Petrus nae sijn belijdinghe van Christus ghestraft wert, Ende dat een yeghelijck zijn cruys draghen moet, die Christum na volghen wil, **Ende dat sommige die doot niet sien en sullen voor dat si den sone des menschen in sijn rijcke sien**" [emphasis added in bold].

catholicization of the summary was completed by the addition of the sentence “God will reward everybody on the basis of his works” – the emphasis on works as a source of salvation being a genuine Catholic standpoint.⁵³ Also, in her later editions of the New Testament, Ancxt retained these summaries, which resulted in the summary above Matt 16 sounding even more Catholic than the summary included in the 1553 edition of the Louvain Bible, which has a quite neutral tone!

In 1560, Maria Ancxt printed two editions of the complete Bible for Jacomyne Bars, the widow of Henrick Peetersen van Middelburch. The text and its summaries are the same as the 1553 Louvain Bible, and the whole is preceded by a (shortened) prologue of the translator Nicolaus van Winghe, which is also contained in the same edition of 1553. Ancxt’s Bibles, as is the case with all her biblical editions, display the *cum gratia et privilegio* wording on the title page; on the verso of the title page the following is printed: “the Bible was checked and approved by learned men who received a mandate for that purpose by the Emperor,” and that it was therefore “admitted to be printed.” A more Catholic format than that was not to be found on the market at the time. Rarer still, is the edition that Maria Ancxt printed for another Antwerp publisher, Symon Cock (in the same year 1560), with the same format as the edition printed for Jacomyne Bars.

Maria Ancxt also ventured into the market for French New Testaments. In 1553, in the same year that she published a Dutch New Testament, she also brought a French edition onto the market, with an updated version published in 1561. And in 1555, a French version of the Epistle and Gospel readings for Mass left her printing office. Comparable conclusions can be drawn here as those that we found above relating to the Dutch Bible translations – conclusions that I explain elsewhere in greater detail.⁵⁴ To complete this section, it should be noted that none of the editions of the Bible printed by Maria Ancxt were ever included on the Index of Forbidden Books.

In conclusion, Christman’s argument that Maria Ancxt, after the death of her husband Jacob van Liesvelt, continued to publish Protestant biblical material without the consent of the competent book censors, and in open defiance of royal edicts, yet without being harassed by the authorities, cannot be maintained. Close investigation of the biblical copies in libraries in Europe and beyond clearly

⁵³ Cf. summary above Matt 16, according to Ancxt’s New Testament (1553): “Van die leeringhe der Phariseen. Hoe Jesus sprack, waer op dat hy zijn kercke tymmeren soude **[text passage removed]**. Hoe Petrus na zijn belijdinghe van Cristus ghestraft werdt. Ende dat een yeghelijsch zijn cruys dragen moet, die Christum na volghen wilt, **ende dat God een yegelijc doen sal naer zijn gewercken**” [emphasis added in bold].

⁵⁴ On Ancxt’s French Bible editions, see François, “The Antwerpian Printer Jacob van Liesvelt, his Widow and their Bibles,” – forthcoming.

demonstrates that the copies contain Catholic or largely catholicized material, and that the editions, without exception, bear the consent of the competent book censors. Maria Ancxt largely conformed herself to the censorship requirements; during the period in which she managed her printing office, no printer in the Habsburg Low Countries would have dared to do otherwise. She nevertheless tried to be innovative and creative within the boundaries of what was possible, as is shown by her publication of Campensis' Psalms. We do not see something as a "pragmatic toleration" that Ancxt or her publications may have needed from the part of the Antwerp city magistrate. This conclusion of course does not detract from Ancxt's merits as a widow who courageously continued the family business in unfortunate times, as Christman has rightly emphasized in both her publications. We may nevertheless hope that Christman's conclusions do not mark a new stage in the development of a confessionally biased Van Liesvelt narrative that does insufficiently take into account the format and content of the biblical materials themselves, nor engages in a critical discussion with the historiography.

5 Conclusion

The Grand Narrative or Paradigm of the liberation of Scripture by the Protestants, and the suppression of the Bible by the Catholics, has made its way into various narratives, myths or legends that developed within particular, national confessional traditions – I have shed light upon three such narratives from the Dutch Protestant confessional culture. In the Netherlands and in other regions of Europe,⁵⁵ more examples could be found, and contemporary historians ought to examine them with a critical eye. Notwithstanding the deconstruction into which this essay has ventured, and with a clear acknowledgment of the blind spots that are also present in Catholic historiography, I would like to stress as a final word that biblical culture was certainly more developed in early modern Protestantism than in early modern Catholicism, a difference that is reflected in the number of editions of the Bible that were printed in the respective milieus. The difference was due to the considerable reluctance among Catholic authorities to countenance

⁵⁵ An interesting and obvious parallel is William Tyndale, who was executed in 1536 in Brussels because of his "heretical" theological positions, whereas Protestant historiography since the seventeenth century propagated that he was martyred for having dared to translate the Bible into English. See Gergely Juhász and Paul Arblaster, "Can Translating the Bible Be Bad for Your Health? William Tyndale and the Falsification of Memory," in *More than a Memory*, ed. Leemans and Mettepenningen, 315–40.

vernacular Bible printing, which manifested itself far more outspokenly from the 1560–1570s onwards, a period later than the one I have discussed here.

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