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Vorwort des Herausgebers

Das Lutherjahrbuch 2015 präsentiert im 82. Jahrgang acht Beiträge zu zentralen Themen der Luther- und Reformationsforschung. Die ersten zwei Aufsätze rufen die mit der lutherischen Lehre einhergehende lebensbedrohliche Situation in Erinnerung, in welche die Anhänger der evangelischen Bewegung geraten konnten. So entfaltet *Robert J. Christman*, wie Luther auf die Hinrichtung seiner Ordensbrüder 1523 in Antwerpen reagierte, und *Anselm Schubert* erkundet geradezu kriminalistisch die Umstände und die Rezeptionsgeschichte eines vermeintlichen Mordanschlags auf Luther im Jahr 1525. Luthers Rede von besonders begnadeten Persönlichkeiten in der Antike und im Alten Testament, sogenannten »Wundermännern«, entfaltet *Patrick Hayden-Roy* anhand ausgewählter Quellen und kontrastiert diese mit der nationalistischen Inanspruchnahme durch die deutsche Lutherforschung der 1930er Jahre. Einen historiographischen Grundsatzbeitrag bietet schließlich *Alexander Jendorff*, indem er sich der kritischen Verhältnisbestimmung von Reformationsgeschichte und Adelsgeschichte zuwendet.

Einen weiteren Schwerpunkt des Jahrbuches bilden zwei kunsthistorische Forschungsbeiträge, durch die das diesjährige Jahresthema der Lutherdekade »Bild und Bibel« gewürdigt wird. *Jutta Reinisch* analysiert in ihrer Studie die »Gesetz und Gnade«-Allegorie von Peter Dell dem Älteren in Bezug zu Lucas Cranach dem Älteren und *Doreen Zerbe* interpretiert Lucas Cranach den Jüngeren im Dienst der Wittenberger Reformation.

Die Frage, warum der 1544 verstorbene Lutheraner Valerius Cordus in einer römischen Kirche bestattet werden konnte, beantwortet *Eberhard J. Nikitsch*. Den Bogen zum Reformationsjubiläum 2017 spannt abschlie-

ßend *Michael Plathow*, welcher das Gedenken der Heidelberger Disputation im 19. Jahrhundert kritisch reflektiert und diskutiert.

In einer eigenen Rubrik berichten Buchbesprechungen über gehaltvolle Neuerscheinungen in der Luther- und Reformationsforschung. Die von *Michael Beyer* zusammengestellte Lutherbibliographie bietet in bewährter Form einen beeindruckenden Überblick über die Publikationen aus den Jahren 2014/15. Ein Hinweis auf den internationalen Kongress »Kulturelle Wirkungen der Reformation«, der im August 2017 von den drei mitteldeutschen Universitäten Halle-Wittenberg, Leipzig und Jena in Wittenberg veranstaltet wird, rundet das Jahrbuch ab.

Die redaktionelle Arbeit dieses 82. Jahrgangsbandes lag in den Händen von *Johanna Hilpert*, die durch *Susann Häßelbarth* und *Kornelia Haus* tatkräftig unterstützt wurde. Ihnen sowie dem Verlag Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht sei für die gute Zusammenarbeit herzlich gedankt.

Jena, den 24. Juni 2015

Christopher Spehr

»For he is coming«^{*}

Revisiting Martin Luther's Reaction to the Reformation's First Executions

By Robert J. Christman

On July 1, 1523, Hendrik Voes and Johann van den Esschen, two little-known friars from the Augustinian cloister in nearby Antwerp, were burned alive on the Grand Plaza of Brussels for maintaining heretical Lutheran doctrines, thereby becoming the first victims of the Protestant Reformation.¹ News of the event sent a shockwave across Europe and set a gruesome precedent for all sides in the coming struggle, but few were more

* I am grateful to Robert Kolb for reading an early draft of this essay and for the helpful suggestions he made to improve it.

1 Many historians have addressed this event from various angles. Some have examined the event itself. See, for example: D. AKERBOOM / M. GIELIS, »A New Song Shall Begin Here [...]«. The Martyrdom of Luther's Followers among Antwerp's Augustinians on July 1, 1523 and Luther's Response (in: *More than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity*, ed. by J. LEEMANS, 2005, 243–270); P. KALKOFF, *Die Anfänge der Gegenreformation in den Niederlanden*, 2 vols., 1903/1904, particularly in chapter six; O. CLEMEN, *Das Antwerper Augustiner-Kloster bei Beginn der Reformation* (Monatshefte der Comenius-Gesellschaft 10, 1901, 306–313); and IDEM, *Die Ersten Märtyrer des evangelischen Glaubens* (in: IDEM, *Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte aus Büchern und Handschriften der Zwickauer Ratsschulbibliothek* 1, 1900, 40–52). Other historians have focused on the pamphlets produced in the immediate aftermath of the event and their impact. See, for example, B.S. GREGORY, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe*, 1999; B. MOELLER, *Inquisition und Martyrium in Flugschriften der frühen Reformation in Deutschland* (in: *Ketzerverfolgung im 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhundert*, hg. v. S. SEIDEL MENCHI, 1992, 21–48); H. HEBENSTREIT-WILFERT, *Märtyrerflugschriften der Reformationszeit* (in: *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit. Beiträge zum Tübinger Symposium* 1980, hg. v. H.-J. KÖHLER, 1981, 397–446).

moved than Martin Luther. Johann Kessler, a Swiss student studying in Wittenberg at the time, noted that when Luther heard about the deaths »he began to weep inwardly and said, ›I thought that I would be the first to be martyred for the sake of the Holy Gospel, but I was not worthy of it.«² Luther's reaction soon changed, however, for a short time later he wrote to his friend George Spalatin, »Thanks be to Christ, who has finally begun to let my, nay rather His words bear fruit.«³ What precisely Luther meant by Christ's words bearing fruit will be addressed later in this article, but for now suffice it to say that Luther saw this event as a watershed. Something new was happening. So important was this episode in his thinking that it inspired him to compose his first song, originally entitled, »A song of two martyrs of Christ, burned in Brussels by the Sophists of Leuven,« but quickly changed to »A new song here shall be begun,« the song's first line.⁴ A widely popular ballad, the song detailed the arrest, interrogations, and executions of the two men, and the aftermath of these events.

In the years to come, many individuals would be executed for refusing to recant their evangelical beliefs, and although Luther responded with compassion, none of these executions elicited in him quite the same reaction as the deaths of Voes and van den Esschen.⁵ In light of this fact, the questions this essay seeks to answer are, why did this event make such a big impression on Luther? What was the precise nature of that impression? Why did he then decide to express it in song, a medium new for him at the

2 »[...] hatt er angefangen innerlich zu wainen und gesagt, ich vermaint, ich solte ja der erste sin, der umb diß hailig euangelion wegen solte gemarteret werden, aber ich bin des nitt würdig gewesen.« J. KESSLER, Sabatta. Chronik der Jahre 1523–1539, 1866, I: 241.

3 »Gratia Christo, qui tandem cepit fructum aliquem verbi nostri, imo sui ostendere [...]« Luther to George Spalatin, 22 or 23 July 1523, WAB 3; 115,14f.

4 Martin Luther, »Eynn hubsch Lyed von denn zcweyen Marterern Christi, zu Brussel von den Sophisten zcu Louen verbrandt«, WA 35; 411–415.

5 A number of scholars have taken up the question of Luther's response to these executions. A few of the more recent studies include: AKERBOOM / GIELIS (see n. 1); R. OETTINGER, Music as Propaganda in the German Reformation, 2001, 61–69; R. KOLB, God's Gift of Martrydom: The Early Reformation Understanding of Dying for the Faith (Church History 64, 1995, 399–411); P. CASEY, »Start Spreading the News«: Martin Luther's first Published Song (in: In Laudem Caroli, ed. by J.V. MEHL, 1998, 75–94); M. RÖSSLER, Ein neues Lied wir heben an. Ein Protestsong Martin Luthers (in: Reformation und Praktische Theologie, FS W. Jetter, hg. v. H.M. MÜLLER / D. RÖSSLER, 1983, 216–232).

time? And in light of the revealing responses to these questions, just what does his reaction tell us about how he understood the Reformation at this early stage in its history?

On their surface, the answers to the first three questions appear self-explanatory, and indeed, such answers have been posited by various historians. Of course Luther would be moved when the first individuals died for an interpretation of the Bible that he had promoted; perhaps he even felt pangs of culpability. No doubt he was shocked that in distant Brussels two unknown friars were willing to die for the Gospel, and the authorities there were willing to execute them. And of course the Reformer would seek to publicize their deaths widely, as he saw them as a clear demonstration of the righteousness of his cause. These men were willing to bear witness to the truth of his views with their lives, so he must be right! And finally, well-known for his keen awareness of media, naturally Luther would choose to express his interpretation in a form that had the best chance for the broadest impact.⁶ But such explanations, while containing an element of truth, are ultimately superficial and fail to comprehend the complexity of Luther's response. As will become clear, the executions themselves came as no surprise to Luther. However, certain aspects of the event did amaze him, recalling to his mind in a most vivid way the biblical works of God. As a result, he responded in a way advocated by the Scriptures themselves – with song.

6 Such impressions are found widely in the literature. For example, CASEY writes (see n. 5), »[...] Luther constructed his ballad as an argument aimed directly at advancing the evangelical cause.« (83) And »[Luther] could use this unanticipated event to broadcast the joyous message that people were willing to die for their faith in the Word.« (90) And »[...] Luther seized the opportunity presented by the events in Brussels to exploit this sign of success of his interpretation of the Word.« (90); OETTINGER (see n. 5), 64 writes of Luther, »He wished to discredit [the Catholic Church's] version of the events and spread the news about the executions and the brave conduct of the Augustinians as quickly as possible.« And Martin Brecht surmises, »[A New Song] was a gripping ballad, which undoubtedly was intended to serve a propagandistic purpose.« M. BRECHT, *Martin Luther*, 3 vols., vol. 2: *Shaping and Defining the Reformation, 1521–1532*, trans. by J. Schaaf, 1990, 103.

I Luther's Knowledge of the Situation in the Low Countries

Let us begin with the question of why the event made such a big impression on Luther. Far from being a shock, the fact that the executions took place *when* and *where* they did could have come as no surprise to Luther, for he possessed an intimate knowledge of the situation in Antwerp and was well aware that an execution there was not only possible, but probable. In fact, he was on close terms with the leaders of that city's Augustinian cloister, he was well-acquainted with those individuals charged with silencing the Augustinians (in part from personal experience), and he had a comprehensive knowledge of their tactics. Simply put, it was precisely *because* he had such a thorough knowledge of the situation in Antwerp that the actions of Voes and van den Esschen so astonished him.

By 1523 when the executions occurred, close connections between the Augustinians of Wittenberg and Antwerp had been established for some time. Since its foundation in 1513, Antwerp's cloister had belonged to the Reformed German (sometimes referred to as »Saxon«) Congregation of Augustinians, a reform group within the Augustinian order that included twenty-seven cloisters throughout Germany and the Low Countries, among them Luther's in Wittenberg. Led by its Vicar General, Johann von Staupitz, the group's cloisters in the Low Countries were located in the cities of Antwerp, Haarlem, Dordrecht, Enkhuizen, Enghein, and Ghent, and a healthy exchange in individuals and ideas between Wittenberg and the Augustinians of the Low Countries was underway.⁷

When the cloister in Antwerp opened in 1513, Staupitz named the leader of the Enkhuizen Augustinians, Jan van Mechelen, its first prior. Van Mechelen had studied in Wittenberg, receiving the title of doctor of theology in 1511. Although he never became close with Luther who was only in Wittenberg for a short time in 1508 while von Mechelen was there, von Mechelen's ties to Wittenberg bore fruit in other ways. In 1516, he sent two friars to study there, both of whom Luther personally prepared for their

7 D. GUTIÉRREZ, *Die Augustiner im Spätmittelalter 1357–1517*, 1981, 81–110, esp. 94–98. See also TH. KOLDE, *Die deutsche Augustiner-Congregation und Johann von Staupitz*, 1879.

exams. In autumn of 1517, three more brothers from the Antwerp cloister matriculated in Wittenberg, followed by another brother in autumn of 1520.⁸ And the Ghent prior, Melchior Miritsch, former prior of the Augustinian cloister in Dresden and another acquaintance of Luther, sent four young recruits to Wittenberg to study in the summer and fall of 1521/1522.⁹ All this traffic in the direction of Wittenberg is evidence of the fact that Staupitz had declared the university there the preferred location of study for brothers of the German Reformed Congregation.¹⁰

But what made the connection even closer between the Antwerp Augustinians and Luther was the two most outstanding representatives of this Saxon/Brabant exchange, Jacob Propst and Heinrich von Zutphen, both contemporaries and close personal friends of Luther. Propst (c. 1495–1562), who came from Ypres, began his career as an Augustinian in the Haarlem cloister, then served as prior in Antwerp from 1518 to 1522. Regarding him, Erasmus of Rotterdam wrote to Luther in a letter of 30 May 1519,

There is a man in Antwerp, prior of the monastery there, a genuine Christian, who is most devoted to you and was once your pupil or so he says. He is almost the only one among them all who preaches Christ; the others as a rule preach the inventions of men or their own advantage.¹¹

This description could not have been news to Luther, as Probst had come from Haarlem to Wittenberg in 1505, receiving his *magister artium* degree there in 1509. What is more, it is possible that he was also the »Jacob« who was prior in Wittenberg from 1515 to 1518, where he would have been on hand to experience Luther's »breakthrough« before returning to Ant-

8 J. VERCRUYSE, »Was Haben die Sachsen und die Flamen gemeinsam?«. Wittenberg von außen gesehen (in: Wittenberg als Bildungszentrum: 1502–2002; Lernen und Leben auf Luthers Grund und Boden, hg. v. Evangelisches Predigerseminar Lutherstadt Wittenberg, 2002, 9–32), 13.

9 Ibd.

10 O. RUDLOFF, *Bonae Literae et Lutherus. Texte und Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der Theologie des Bremer Reformators Jakob Probst* (HosEc 14, 1985, 11–239), 113.

11 »Est Antuerpiae Prior eius monasterii, vir pure Christianus, qui te vnice deamat, tuus olim discipulus, vt predicat. Is omnium pene solus Christum praedicat: caeteri fere aut homium fabulas aut suum quaestum praedicant.« Erasmus to Martin Luther, 30 May 1519 (in: D. ERASMUS, *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami denuo recognitum et auctum*, vol. 3 [1517–1519], ed. by P.S. ALLEN / H.M. ALLEN, 1934, 607).

werp.¹² Even Probst's enemy, the papal nuncio Jerome Aleander, connected him closely to the Reformer, referring to him in a letter to the pope's Vice-Chancellor, Guilio de' Medici (the future pope Clement VII), as »the man who only preaches Luther's doctrines,« then quoting the aforementioned phrase from Erasmus's letter to Luther about Probst as proof.¹³ And Probst's connections to Luther and his teachings were undoubtedly strengthened when Antwerp's prior spent May to September, 1521 back in Wittenberg – a trip of which Aleander was well aware.¹⁴ It was during this period that Luther, who was in the Wartburg, wrote to Melanchthon, asking him to extend his greetings to a number of individuals, but not »the fat little Flemish guy« (*das fette Flemmichen*) because, indicated Luther, he would write to him directly.¹⁵ This off-handed comment, it seems, provides some insight into the close and congenial nature of their relationship.

Upon his return to the Low Countries in late 1521, however, things quickly turned dire for Probst. Under the assurance of a »friendly conversation,« he was taken prisoner by Charles V's newly established secular inquisition at the beginning of December. Interrogated frequently, and under constant threat of the stake, on February 9, 1522 he recanted to a packed St. Gudula's church in Brussels, concluding with the statement:

And I damn all errors and heresies, especially the Lutheran ones. And I embrace the Catholic faith as held and preached by Holy Roman Church. And I promise to submit myself in faith to all things that it teaches. And I now declare, just as I have promised and declared, to adhere [to it] and to cast Luther with all his dogmas far away from me.¹⁶

12 VERCRUYSE (see n. 8), 13.

13 »[...] el qual sempre predicava la dottrina di Luther.« Aleander to Guilio de Medici, 2 September 1521 (in: Aleander und Luther 1521. Die vervollständigten Aleander-Depeschen nebst Untersuchungen über den Wormser Reichstag, hg. v. TH. BRIEGER, 1884, 262f).

14 In the same letter to de Medici, Aleander wrote that Probst had gone to visit Luther after the Edict of Worms was promulgated, then returned to Antwerp. Aleander to Guilio de Medici, 2 September 1521 (in: see n. 13), 263.

15 WAB 2; 349.

16 »et damno omnem errorem et haeresim, potissimum Lutheranam, et amplector fidem catholicam, quam tenet et predicat sancta Romana ecclesia, et ei me in fide et omnibus que docet, submitto et eidem promitto et jam juro, sicut jam promisi et juravi, adherere et Lutherum cum suo dogmate procul a me abjicere.« Anathematizatio et revocatio fratris Jacobi Praepositi, olim prioris fratrum heremitarum Sancti Augustini opidi antverpiensis (in: Corpus Documentorum Inquisitionis Haereticae Pravitatis Neerlandicae,

Probst's recantation was then published in Flemish and Latin.¹⁷ Freed, but prohibited from returning to Antwerp, he went to the Augustinian cloister in his hometown of Ypres, where he began again to preach Luther's ideas. Shortly thereafter he was summoned a second time by the inquisition, but escaped, arriving in Wittenberg in August, 1522. Despite his recantation, Probst remained friends with Luther, who even named him godfather to one of his daughters in December, 1534.¹⁸ In 1524, Probst was called to Bremen, where he would eventually become superintendent, but the point here is that his close relationship with Luther provided him a clear view of what was happening in Antwerp. Certainly the two men discussed the situation fully during the twenty months Probst spent in Wittenberg between his escape and his call to Bremen.

A second friendship that shed further light in Wittenberg on the circumstances among the Antwerp Augustinians was Luther's connection to Heinrich von Zutphen, who, as it turns out, Luther *did* ask Melancthon to greet in the same letter in which he referred to Probst as rotund.¹⁹ Zutphen had matriculated in Wittenberg in 1508 becoming a *magister artium* in February of 1511, then taking up the position of lector. During this period, he must have lived in the Augustinian Cloister, as all friars were required to do so.²⁰ He left Wittenberg in c. 1514, and after a short stay in Cologne was named the prior of the Augustinian cloister in Dordrecht, where he remained until 1520, then returned to Wittenberg to continue his education until 1522. It was during this second stay that he appears to have become good friends with Luther.

Upon Probst's arrest, recantation, and flight in 1522, Zutphen returned to the Low Countries where he was named prior of the cloister in Antwerp around which a cloud of suspicion hung. Continuing in his predecessor's ways, he quickly drew the attention of the inquisition. On September 29,

ed. by P. FREDERICQ, 5 vols., 1889–1902), here vol. 4, 94; this text may also be found in RUDLOFF (see n. 10), 27–37.

17 *Anathematizatio et revocatio fratris Jacobi Praepositi* was published in Latin and Flemish in Antwerp, Cologne, and Leipzig. RUDLOFF (see n. 10), 27.

18 On Luther's continuing friendship with Probst, see RUDLOFF (see n. 10), 198–204.

19 See note 15.

20 J.F. IKEN, *Heinrich von Zütphen* (SVRG 12), 1886, 7. Iken's biography of Zütphen is still the most complete treatment.

1522, under the pretext of being requested to visit a sick person, he was captured, only to escape through the efforts of a mob of his enraged supporters.²¹ On his way to Wittenberg he stopped in Bremen where he was asked to preach and on November 9, 1522, held the city's first evangelical sermon. From Bremen Zutphen wrote a number of letters to Luther and Probst explaining the situation in Antwerp and his escape, and there he would remain until three years later when he himself was arrested and burned in nearby Heide Dietmarsch.²²

Far from being some far-flung outpost on the periphery of Luther's mental world, then, the city of Antwerp and its Augustinian cloister were well-known quantities. The exchange between Wittenberg and Antwerp had been well-established prior to Luther's arrival on the scene, but the key to the relationship was really the Reformer's close ties to Propst and Zutphen. Throughout the lead-up to the first executions of the Reformation, these men remained in close contact, both via correspondence and their travels to Wittenberg. Moreover the papal nuncio, Aleander, who had a comprehensive view of the situation, had not only called Probst one of the two most important enemies of the church in the Low Countries (Erasmus was the other), but had referred to the Antwerp Augustinian cloister as the »home hearth« (*Hauptherd*) of the Lutheran heresy in the Low Countries.²³ It is no wonder then that one historian has queried »was Antwerp not a ›Wittenberg on the Schelde?«.²⁴

But not only did Luther know the Antwerp Augustinians, he also had a pretty clear picture of the individuals who had been charged with silencing

21 Zutphen outlines these events in a letter to Probst and Pater Reiner, both at the time residing in Wittenberg, which may be found in Zutphen's Briefe, hg. v. J. IKEN (Br) I, 1885, 241–252), 241–245; and in FREDERICQ (see n. 16), vol. 4, 157–159.

22 On Zutphen's letters to Luther explaining the situation, see RUDLOFF (see n. 10), 199; that Luther responded to Zutphen we know, but that letter is no longer extant. Luther also passed the information along to others, such as his friend Spalatin and to Wenceslaus Link, also a friend as well as the Vicar of the Saxon Augustinian Congregation since 1520 when Staupitz resigned the position. See IKEN, Zutphen's Briefe (see n. 21), 241–252.

23 KALKOFF (see n. 1), vol. 2, 39.52.

24 VERCROYSE (see n. 8), 16.

them. Upon his return from the Diet of Worms to the Low Countries in autumn of 1521, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V had established a new, state-run inquisition, naming the Leuven jurist, Frans van der Hulst, as its director. Having witnessed widespread support for Luther among the German princes and laity in Worms, Charles was keen to confront this heresy in his ancestral homelands. A layman, van der Hulst enlisted the help of various ecclesiastics who had already been working to stem the tide of the Reformation in the Low Countries, among them the emperor's father confessor, friar Jean Glapion; the papal nuncio, Jerome Aleander, both recently returned from Worms; the Leuven Professors of theology, Nicholas of Egmond and Jacob Latomus; and the well-known Dominican inquisitor, Jacob van Hoogstraaten of Cologne.

By the time Voes and van den Esschen were executed, Luther had had dealings with many of the men on this list, and had formed some opinion of each of them. He had stood before the emperor in April of 1521, with the result that he was officially declared an outlaw in *Edict of Worms*. At Worms, he also encountered the papal nuncio, Aleander, who had done everything in his power not to allow Luther to come to the Diet, and then to ensure that he simply recant without any discussion once he got there.²⁵ In a letter to a friend, Luther had referred to Glapion as the emperor's »devil,« and Egmond as »most arrogant and most Fransiscan,« demonstrating that he had formed clear opinions of these men.²⁶ The Dominican Inquisitor van Hoogstraaten, well-known for his opposition to Johannes Reuchlin, had denounced Luther's last thesis in the *Leipzig Disputation*, to which Luther responded in a treatise of 1519.²⁷ What is more, a woodcut attributed to Hans Holbein that depicted Luther as *Hercules Germanicus*, holding a kneeling Hoogstraten in his left hand, while raising a spiked club in preparation to strike the Dominican with his right hand had been published in 1522.

25 S. HENDRIX, *Luther and the Papacy*, 1981, 131.

26 »Caesar eum pro sua sapientia inspiratus suo diabolo Glapione Minorita a confessione, superbissimo et minoritissimo monacho, commendavit Morioni illi Egmundensi et aliis sophistis in partibus inferioribus.« Luther to Lang, 26 June, 1522. WAB 2; 565, 18–20.

27 WA 2; 384–387.



Figure 1: Martin Luther, depicted as Hercules Germanicus defeating Occamists, Aristotelians and papists, by Hans Holbein Younger (1497 or 1498–1543), engraving, Switzerland, 16th century / Zentralbibliothek, Zurich, Switzerland / De Agostini Picture Library / Bridgeman Images

As to Latomus, he was a member of theology faculty of Leuven that had condemned Luther on November 7, 1519. But because the faculty had included no explanation of the condemned articles, Latomus took it upon himself to lecture on the issue in 1520, then to write a treatise in 1521 explaining the reasons why those propositions had been selected and condemned.²⁸ Luther's response appeared in September 1521 and addressed both the theological faculty in general, and Latomus specifically.²⁹ Between November 1521 and September 1523, Latomus was deeply involved in the imperial inquisition, which included taking part in the trials of both Probst and Voes and van den Esschen.³⁰ All this is to say that far from being unfamiliar with the enemies of the Antwerp Augustinians, Luther had profound knowledge of these men.³¹

What is more, Luther had seen the evidence of their work in the Low Countries in the years and months prior to the executions of Voes and van den Esschen. Under van der Hulst's direction, the inquisitors had pursued the church's most outspoken critics and by all accounts experienced a great deal of success. Since 1521, Aleander had worked to publish *Edict of Worms* there, while at the same time overseeing a dozen or so book-burnings in major cities, three in Antwerp alone.³² By candidly labeling him a heretic, the inquisitors had been able to pressure Erasmus to leave the Low Coun-

28 JACOB LATOMUS, *Articulorum doctrinae fratris M. Lutheri per theologus Lovanienses damnatorum ratio ex sacris literis et veteribus tractoribus*, Antwerp 1521.

29 The condemnation by the theology faculties of Leuven and Cologne along with Luther's response may be found in WA 6; 170–195. Luther's response to Latomus, entitled *Rationis Latomianae confutatio*, 1521, may be found in WA 8; 36–128.

30 M. GIELIS, *Leuven Theologians as Opponents of Erasmus and of Humanistic Theology* (in: *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* [Brill's companion to the Christian tradition 9], ed. by E. RUMMEL, 2008, 197–214), 205.

31 Undoubtedly so did many of the reform-minded individuals throughout Europe. In April of 1518, Wilhelm Nesen sent a long and scathing description of the »Magistros Nostros,« the key Leuven theologians, to Ulrich Zwingli. See: *Zwingli's Briefwechsel*, Bd. 1: *Die Briefe von 1510–1522* (CR 94), bearb. v. E. EGLI, hg. v. G. FINSLER, 1911, 378–401; Moreover Erasmus's letters from this period are filled with derogatory remarks about many of these men, especially Egmond. In fact, writes one modern commentator, there is hardly a letter of Erasmus from the period in which he does not complain about that »fanatical monk.« KALKOFF (see n. 1), vol. 1, 75.

32 C.C.G. VISSER, *Luther's geschriften in de Nederlanden tot 1546*, 1969, 13–15.

tries in autumn of 1521, never to return.³³ Spectacular public recantations soon followed. In April 1522, Cornelius Grapheus, the humanist city secretary of Antwerp was forced to openly revoke his views in the city square in Brussels and again a few days later in Antwerp. But, of course, most stunning of all was the fate of Jacob Probst, to which I have already alluded. Having received permission from both pope and emperor to proceed against Probst,³⁴ members of the inquisition questioned the prior in a series of interviews in which he went from overt defiance, to a grudging willingness to admit privately to some errors, to finally a full-scale public recantation, a process that he detailed in his account of the events published in Wittenberg in 1522.³⁵

Then there was the fate of Melchior Miritsch, which further exposed the workings of the inquisitors to Luther, as well as the weakness of his fellow Augustinians. This erstwhile prior of the Reformed German Augustinians in Dresden had been sent in 1520 to the cloister in Ghent to shore up support for the Reformed Augustinians there. In early 1522, just as Probst was being arrested for a second time, Miritsch, too, was picked up and questioned by the inquisition. Because he was able to convince them that he posed no threat to the church, he was released, eventually sending a letter to George Spalatin describing these events. Spalatin passed the letter on to Luther, whose response demonstrates his deep disappointment in Miritsch:

I have read the letter of Miritsch, that most prudent apostate, and as much as I suffer concerning the miserable fall of Jacob [Probst], so much I resent [Miritsch's] most impious sham.³⁶

Sending information from Miritsch's letter on to his friend and fellow Augustinian, Johann Lang, Luther's distress is even more palpable: »Melchior Miritsch did not recant, but he writes that he acts prudently so that he

33 KALKOFF (see n. 1), vol. 2, 35–56.

34 KALKOFF (see n. 1), vol. 2, 57f.

35 JACOB PROBST, *Fratris Iacobi Praepositi Augustiniani quondam Prioris Antuuerpiensis historia vtriusque captivitatis propter verbum Dei*, Wittenberg, 1522. A modern edition may be found in RUDLOFF (see n. 10), 42–65.

36 »Literas mirisschii, prudentissimi apostatê, legi, et, quantum de miserabili lapsu Iacobi doleo, tantum huius fuco impiissimo indignor.« Luther to George Spalatin, April 12, 1522. WAB 2; 493,15–17.

might preserve their favor, that is he worships Satan and pretends to know Christ, charming boaster!«.³⁷ Clearly Luther was deeply disappointed in Miritsch's reluctance to stand up for evangelical ideas. All of this news left Luther with the distinct impression that Satan was exceptionally active in the Low Countries. To Wenceslaus Link, successor to Staupitz as Vicar General of the Reformed German Augustinians, he would write, »For Satan rages powerfully everywhere, but especially in the Low Countries, where power is given to the sophists to rule over us.«³⁸

More information on the methods of the inquisition in the Low Countries as they pertained to the Augustinians soon followed. So vocal had the Antwerp Augustinians been that the emperor's queen-regent in Brabant (Charles had left the Low Countries for Spain in May of 1522), Margaret of Austria, decided to dissolve the Augustinian cloister altogether. On October 6, 1522, just over one week after Zutphen's arrest and escape, she had the remaining friars seized, and on the following day led a procession of the Eucharist out of the cloister church, symbolically demonstrating the heterodoxy of the Augustinians. She would eventually have the cloister destroyed and its church made into a parish church. That Luther was following all of this closely we know because in a letter to Link dated December 19, 1522, he wrote:

The brothers have been expelled from the monastery, some imprisoned in various locations, some let go, having denied Christ, while some have remained steadfast until now. Those who are sons of the city have been scattered in the houses of the Beghards. All of the monastery's goods have been put up for sale, and the church and monastery

37 »Melchior Mirisch non revocavit, sed scribit se prudenter egisse, ut gratiam eorum servaret, hoc est, Satanam adoravit, et Christum simulavit se scire, bellus gloriator!« Luther to Johann Lang, Wittenberg 12 April 1522. WAB 2; 495,21–23. On the same day Luther wrote to his friend the Augustinian Vicar General, Wenceslaus Link, something quite similar about Miritsch. WAB 2; 496.

38 »Satanas enim ubique irascitur fortiter nimis, praesertim in inferioribus partibus terrae, ubi sophistis datum est regnum super nos.« Luther to Johann Lang, 11 June 1522. WAB 2; 559,5–7. Nor was this the first time Luther had connected the activity of the devil with the events in the Low Countries. A month earlier, upon hearing the news of Probst's recantation and Miritsch's actions to avoid arrest, Luther had written: »Satan summis et omnibus viribus nos petit.« Luther to Johann Lang, Wittenberg 12 April 1522. WAB 2; 495,18f.

have been blockaded, eventually to be torn down. With great pomp the Sacrament was transferred to the church of Our Lady, as if out of a heretical place, where it was received honorably by Lady Margaret. Several citizens and women have been harassed and punished.³⁹

All of this information is accurate, for at the time it was Margaret's intention to destroy the church along with the rest of the monastery.⁴⁰ And Luther continued to be updated on the situation. Between October 6, 1522 and July 1, 1523, while the inquisitors interrogated the captive Augustinians, convincing all but three to publicly recant, Zutphen, now in Bremen, was kept informed of the events surrounding the fate of the Antwerp Augustinians, and he passed this information on to Luther and Probst in a series of letters.⁴¹

Clearly the position of the Antwerp Augustinians had been deteriorating for some time. Someone as well-informed and perceptive as Luther must have suspected that it was only a matter of time before someone was burned. Indeed, upon hearing that Probst had been forced to recant in the spring of 1521, Luther had written to Lang prophetically, »This is no longer a joke or a game, but it will now become serious, and it will exact life and

39 »Monasterio expulsi fratres, alii aliis locis captivi, alii negato Christo dimissi, alii adhuc stant fortes, qui autem filii civitatis sunt, in domum Beghardorum sunt detrusi; vendita omnia vasa monasterii, et ecclesia cum monasterio clausa et obstructa, tandem demolenda. Sacramentum cum pompa in Ecclesiam beatae Virginis translatum, tanquam e loco haeretico, susceptum honorifice a Domina Margareta. Cives aliquot et mulieres vexatae et punitae.« Luther to Wenceslaus Link, 19 December 1522. WAB 2; 632,7–13.

40 We know this because on 10 January 1523, the emperor wrote to Margarete, »Et quant à la démolicion que désirez faire dudit cloister et de l'église pour une perpétuelle mémoire du cas y advenu, je suis bien d'aviz, quant en aurez eu le congié de nostre sint père, que les habitacions des religieux soient desmolies en réservant seulement en son entiere l'église pour en faire une paroisse. [...]« Letter from Charles V to Margaret, January 10, 1523, FREDERICQ (see n. 16), vol. 4, 176.

41 Zutphen himself writes to Probst that a citizen of Bremen brought him news of the events in Antwerp. For Zutphen's letters from this period, see IKEN, *Zutphen's Briefe* (see n. 21), 241f. Ortwin Rudloff claims that in December 1522, three letters from Zutphen arrived in Wittenberg, all containing information on the events in Antwerp and Bremen. However only one, Zutphen's letter to Probst mentioned above, has survived.

blood.«⁴² And in fact, for a while after Probst had been recaptured in May of 1522, Luther thought that he, along with two others, had been burned.⁴³

Finally, Luther had a thorough knowledge of the executions themselves, primarily through the eyewitness accounts that were published as pamphlets shortly after the events.⁴⁴ In their descriptions of the deaths, the Reformation-minded authors emphasized four themes.⁴⁵ First, they asserted the corrupt and immoral behavior of the churchmen and inquisitors in charge of the trial. The inquisitors, we are told, were covert in their actions so that no one would know what they were doing until it was too late.⁴⁶ And although they turned out in full regalia for the ritual degradation

42 »Res iam non amplius iocus aut ludus, sed serium erit, et vitam exiget et sanguinem.« Martin Luther to Johann Lange, 12 April 1522. WAB 2; 495,28f.

43 »Iacobus, Prior Antverpiensis, denuo captus est, et praesumitur iam exustus esse, et alii duo cum eo.« Luther to Johann von Staupitz, 27 June, 1522. WAB 2; 567,30–32.

44 The eyewitness accounts include: ANONYMOUS, *Der Actus und handlung/ der degradation und verprennung der Christlichen dreyer Ritter und Merterer, Augustiner or/ dens geschehen zu Brüssel, 1523*; ANONYMOUS, *Historia de Duobus Augustinensibus, ob Evangelij doctrinam exustis Bruxellae, die trigesima Iunij. Anno domini M.D.XXIII. Articuli LXII. per eosdem asserti* (n.p., 1523). This pamphlet was translated with slight alterations and additions into German and published by MARTIN RECKENHOFER, *Dye histori so zwen Augustiner Ordens gemartert seyn tzu Bruxel in Probant von wegen des Evangelij. Dye Artickel darumb sie verbrent seyn mit yrer asblegung und verklerung, etc., Erfurt 1523*; MARTIN LUTHER, *Ein brief an die Christen ym Nidder land, Wittenberg 1523, WA 12; 77–80, esp. 79f.* Luther's letter is not a firsthand account, but appended to a number of publications of it was the fragment of what purportedly is a letter sent to Luther by an eyewitness to parts of the trial, entitled *Die artickel warumb die zwen Christliche Augustiner münch zů Brussel verprandt sindt.*

45 Brad Gregory's analysis of the pamphlets' themes differs slightly from mine. He sees them as: the linking of the deaths to »evangelical« articles of faith; the likening of the inquisitors to the persecutors of Christ and the broader evocation of parallels with Christ and the apostles; the conviction that suffering was a demonstration of God's love, an exhortation for the faithful to remain true to their beliefs even in death; and a conviction that martyrdoms were a sign that the restoration of God's word had led to a backlash by the anti-Christ, signaling the apocalypse. GREGORY (see n. 1), 145 ff.

46 ANONYMOUS, *Historia de duobus Augustinensibus* (see n. 44), 1. This may well have been the case, for on more than one occasion when the authorities had attempted to move against the Augustinians, crowds gathered to defend them. For example, the following scene was played out when the rumor went around that the Augustinian prior,