

The March of the Libertines: Spinozists and the Dutch Reformed Church (1660-1750) by Michiel Wielema. Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2004. Pp. 221. \$20.00 paper.

This, the second volume in the Free University of Amsterdam's RELIC (Studies in Dutch Religious History) series, offers an illuminating window into a specific form of heterodoxy within the Dutch Reformed Church in the

Netherlands during the latter half of the seventeenth and first half of the eighteenth centuries. It focuses on those influenced specifically by the philosopher Benedict Spinoza, including those libertines who attacked the standards of the Reformed faith such as the radical, Adriaan Koerbagh, and others, such as Pontiaan van Hattem and the followers of Jacob Verschoor, who were content with often heterodox interpretations of Reformed standards.

The work begins with an examination of the well-known tolerance of the Protestant Dutch Republic for religious differences. Pluralism and difference were tolerated by the civil magistrates who it seemed, resisted the use of the secular powers in religious coercion. Indeed, freedom from religious persecution and from conformity had been written into the founding documents of the Dutch state in the Union of Utrecht. However, paradoxically, freedom of conscience within the Dutch-protected church, the Dutch Reformed Church, was often not tolerated. This subject of the intolerance inside (and not outside) the state church is a much less understood and studied subject. This intolerance is this work's stated subject as it explores the tension between public religious toleration and Reformed church membership and clerical requirements to observe strict orthodoxy as defined by the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619). In fact, membership in the Dutch Reformed Church required at least nominal assent to the so-called Formularies of Unity: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the anti-Arminian theses of Dordt. Assent to these and other specifically antinomian statements were specifically required of clergy. When controversy arose, these could be supplemented by further theses such as those drawn up by regional bodies to address the views of Balthasar Bekker and Frederik van Leenhof (both dealt with in this book). Those expressing or propagating heterodox views were not only subject to questioning by local consistories but were also, in fact, subject to civil penalties, including banishment from towns, burning of publications, and the prohibition of meeting in conventicles. The emergence of new scientific and philosophical schools associated with Copernicus, Descartes, and, then, Spinoza presented immediate challenges to a dated orthodoxy. Other challenges not directly addressed in this volume were the epistemological ones presented by Cartesianism and Copernicanism. Spinozism went further by denying the personal God who revealed and gave law. The challenges were perceived on two fronts. First, Spinoza's theories raised the question of the nature of revelation and then interpretation of Scripture. He addressed this issue directly in his 1670 *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, and his philosophical hermeneutics meant ultimately that Scripture can never differ from rational human reason. Second, this raised the question of authority and ultimately, the validity of any clergy and laity distinction. In fact, this issue raised the validity of the official states' translation of the Bible. Next in line came the question of the authority of ecclesiastical creeds and standards. These in particular became the targets of another group examined in this volume, the Hattemists.

The introduction is followed by six chapters, each of which focuses on specific individuals or movements, flourishing from 1660 to 1750, and influenced by Spinoza and consequently questioned or disciplined by the Dutch Reformed Church. The first chapter deals with Jacobus Verschoor (1648-1700) and the Hebrew Movement, often called Schorists. A brief biography of Verschoor is followed by a carefully reconstructed outline of his followers' activities in Zeeland, Middelburg, and Leiden. An interesting observation here is that such movements exposed weaknesses in the church that largely responded through ecclesiastical prohibition or civil actions. The author's approach is clear in this first chapter. He draws not only on later histories that were typically doctrinal and local in scope but also on archival material from numerous church bodies, and of course on surviving materials from the individuals and movements accused of heterodoxy. The second chapter moves on to examine the popular appeal of Balthasar Bekker (1634-1698), a minister from Amsterdam well known through his work *The World Bewitched*, drawing many followers from Leiden and Woerden. However, the controversy created by his work dissipated swiftly after his dismissal, and his legacy has been a matter of dispute amongst later scholars of the early Enlightenment. Wielema nonetheless, through careful archival research, traces Bekker's influence in more rural areas and especially through his disciple Adrianus Uyterschout in Vlissingen. The chapter concludes with an interesting reflection on his influence on the Enlightenment. The third chapter directly addresses the influence of Spinoza's ideas on the Dutch Reformed Church. Figures such as the brothers Adriaan and Johannes Koerbagh (1634-1672), who developed a sharp critique of supernatural religion; Johannes Duijkerius (1661/2-1702); and Barend Hakvoord (+1735) are described and evaluated. The last mentioned was the only rationalist who held a clerical position at Zwolle. The author also mentions figures from The Hague, including Antony van Dalen who influenced a later figure, Frederik van Leenhof, who is dealt with in the next chapter. This chapter addresses his case and worldview as well as describing the salient points of the period's Spinozist Enlightenment. Chapter 5 is devoted to the rationalist theology of Willem Deurhoff and his followers, while chapter 6 deals with the conflicts and the tensions between church and state in the cases of Pontiaan van Hattem (1645-1706), minister of St. Philipsland, and the Spinozist Libertines. Van Hattem's followers, known as the Hatttemists died out as a movement with their originator and so illustrate the fate of most others described in this wonderful work. By leaving or being forced into heterodoxy, they failed to influence the Dutch Reformed Church. This case brings to the fore the largely forgotten orthodox defenders Willem Spandaw (1647-1708), minister of Oudelands and Carolus Tilman of Middelburg, whose works provide much information on figures such as Marinus Booms (+1728) of Middelburg, Jacob Brill (1639-1714), Gosinius van Buitendijk, and Hendrik Woutelaars.

This is a carefully researched, well written, and translated work that provides much material on a rather neglected aspect of religious history in the

Netherlands. In so doing, it illumines religious thought in the period of the early European Enlightenment, when challenges were raised not only to Reformed dogma, but also to the status of Scripture as a source of truth. Thus, hermeneutics becomes critical, the status of Scripture is questioned, and ultimately, the sources and role of human reason or rationality are offered as alternatives to revelation. These questions and issues are taken up, admittedly in differing directions, by the Protestant libertines described in this work. Their challenges to Reformed orthodoxy prioritized individual conscience, denied priority to clergy or clerical training, and questioned the status of the official Bible translation (Staten Bijbel).

The work makes available material not previously known and leaves us with the task of linking the implications to the present day. This assumes that the readership knows both the critical features of Spinoza's philosophy and the theological implications of the same, or more specifically, the Dutch Reformed reaction as theologically expressed. These might not be well known today and could be expanded and further developed not only for the period examined but also in the connections so tantalizingly mentioned (Newton and so English rationalism for instance)

—Iain S. Maclean