PART THREE

TRANSFORMATIONS
CHAPTER SIX

APPROPRIATION, 1678–1725

In the last decades of the seventeenth century, a solid market had grown out of the widespread interest in picture Bibles in the Republic. In the 1680s, initiatives to develop the genre along new lines were undertaken by the Dutch Reformed, who had kept aloof from such innovations in the 1660s and 1670s. The reactions to these initiatives indicate that the Dutch Reformed were at first reluctant to give up their old, restricted practices. Around 1700, however, new freedom arose, allowing publishers to make some large-scale investments in new plates for their publications.

The most striking innovations of this period appear to have derived from one individual, the engraver and poet Jan Luyken, who single-handedly transformed some of the most persistent emblematic traditions. His activities were embedded, however, in a broader shift of opinion regarding the role of religious imagery in the Republic—a change indicative of the ongoing rapprochement between the various denominations.

New Plates for Picture Bibles

Almost all of the innovations brought to the genre of the picture Bible before 1700 required little investment on the part of the publishers since they were based on existing copperplates or woodcuts.¹ No extra costs were, for instance, involved in the introduction of emblematic and allegorical images in the genre in the 1650s and 1660s by the Anabaptists and Catholics: printers of those volumes reused van Sichem’s woodcuts and van der Borch’s copperplates. At most, readers were offered new texts with the old plates, as in the Afbeeldingen van de heylige historien zoo van het Oude als Nieuwe Testament [Images of the Holy Stories of both the Old and the New Testament], published by Nicolaes Visscher in Amsterdam between 1684 and 1696:

¹ In some cases, publishers claimed to have used new copperplates, but on closer inspection these new plates proved to be new versions of older ones (made, for instance, when the originals were worn out). Such is the case in Justus Danckert’s Historiae Sacrae veteris et novi testamenti (Amsterdam, 1689).