THE EVENTS OF 1534

After completing his job of weaving together a reformation, Dr. John Westerman returned home to Lippstadt on December 28.

On the feast of the Circumcision of the Lord, the Rothmanite Henry Roll gave a sermon in the Church of St. Giles. When the council learned of this, they sent attendants there to take the keys from the beadle at the end of the sermon and close the church, so that no one of that faction would have any ability to preach there. On the other hand, when Brixius was mounting the pulpit in St. Martin’s to give a sermon, he was shoved down by the Rothmanites. At the instigation of Rothman, Peter Wirtheim was also kept from preaching when he was driven away from the Church of St. Ludger. For this reason, the church was closed by the council to avoid commotion. Fabricius, who stood out among the evangelicals for the outstanding authority and favor which he enjoyed and who eclipsed the others by virtue of his tongue, was the only one whom the Rothmanites had to tolerate against their will. All the preachers were viewed with contempt, and he alone was valued; all the others were rejected, and he alone was allowed to teach doctrine; all the other churches were closed, and only St. Lambert’s was open for him. For this reason, he gained for himself such a reputation for erudition in the eyes of most people that no one seemed to know anything that he did not, and hence he began to acquire no little smugness and to swell up with arrogance, though he tempered this with such moderation in words and character that among the people of his stripe no one seemed humbler, no one milder, no one gentler.

At the end of a sermon that he gave from 6 a.m. till 7 on January 4, Fabricius publicly attacked Rothman’s doctrine. Since Rothman was assuring the people on various occasions that he would defend his doctrine in a public debate against anyone, even at the risk of his life,

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1 We do not know how the edict of November 6 that banned the preachers affected Roll or when he returned to public life in Münster (see “Events of 1533” n. 82). According to a report from August of 1534, he was in Holland and Frisian around Christmas time in 1533.

2 Recall that St. Lambert’s had also refused to take Rothman back after the council allowed him to resume preaching (see “Events of 1533” n. 73).
and also said that the evangelicals were shirking and refusing to face him. Fabricius too offered to debate against all the Rothmanites and Cerberus\(^3\) himself at his own risk before any fair and uncorrupted judges at all. Learning of the wishes of the disputants and of their mutual eagerness to debate, the council thought that there would now be an end to the wrangling. The councilmen therefore gave their approval and advised that it was necessary to employ the services of certain learned and pious men | who were to be designated by evangelical princes and entrusted with the judgment of who was victorious. The council promised to attend to this with municipal funds. Everything was agreed to by both sides, but when the council discussed a specific date for the debate, Rothman began to make excuses, to quiver, and to prevaricate. He said that even if, as he was certain would happen, he defeated his adversaries with manifest Scriptural passages from both the Old and the New Testaments, the world had deviated from the path of truth to such an extent that it was unwilling to recognize the truth even when it recognized it. While some people had been led astray by the enactments of the popes, others had been bewitched by Luther’s ravings and made deranged through the views of other heretics and schismatics, all of them clinging so obstinately to the opinion adopted by them that they would not allow themselves to be deflected by any reasoning or arguments. Everyone was so hostile to him, he said, that he knew that when he brought forth the truth into the light of day, no judge would decide in his favor. It was therefore safer for him, he argued, to entrust the decision of his case not to a court of men, since such courts can be subverted through bribery and favor, but to the Supreme Judge. Thus, this debate, which the council and many others had been awaiting, came to nothing.\(^4\)

On January 4, certain womenfolk who were not so much bold as impetuous approached the burgher masters at 3 p.m. when they were making themselves available in the customary way in the marketplace.\(^5\) Through their spokeswoman, they asked for the removal from his of Fabricius, an unknown foreigner who did not know the Westphalian

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\(^3\) Mythological reference to the three-headed dog that guarded the exit from the underworld.

\(^4\) Apart from the fact that one of the learned disputants was going to be Herman Kothe, who had been a chaplain at St. Lambert’s, nothing else is known about this abortive debate.

\(^5\) This event is reported only by K.