
This is an impressive study of the thirteen days during which two remarkable religious debates were held between three notable Dutch Reformed ministers and Dirck Volckertsz Coornhert. These debates in Leiden (1578) and The Hague (1583) were organized by committees appointed by the States of Holland to maintain unity in political and religious affairs. Following Andrew Pettegree Marianne Roobol maintains that the usual perception of a lack of government support for the Reformed Church is superficial and not warranted by the facts. By studying the debates with Coornhert, she casts light on the religious policy of the States which was based on a special relationship between government and Reformed Church: the public church. The public legitimization of this general, public church was at stake in the religious disputations. The presiding over by government officials of both debates made it obvious that these were indeed affairs of state.

In the first chapter Roobol introduces the players—Arent Cornelisz, Reginaldus Doneteclock, Adrianus Saravia, and Coornhert—and their extensive networks of patrons and sympathizers. She shows Coornhert’s self-portrait as a solitary figure, not to depict reality—though it can be found in all the secondary literature. The chapter further introduces the wartime in which the disputations were held and the respective visions on the church of the States, Coornhert, and the ministers. Unfortunately, her description of the views of the Reformed ministers on a broad versus a narrow church and a visible versus an invisible church (pp. 59–66; 91–92) remains unconvincing.

An extensive historiographical survey forms the subject of the next chapter. The first part especially forms an excellent exposé of Coornhert-research under the fitting title ‘The Cult of Coornhert’ (pp. 43–55). Roobol quotes the “law” of Paul Oskar Kristeller that holds true for Coornhert-research as well: “in the history of philosophy the originality of a thinker stands in direct proportion to the ignorance of his [modern] interpreters” (p. 49). In light of this “law” she reconsidered the image of Coornhert as a visionary thinker and a man far in advance of his time. Coornhert’s thinking was not static, but like other mortals he continually formulated his ideas in reaction to the world around him. Coornhert was not a spiritualist, as his fighting for a pure and true visible church which is quite incompatible with a purely spiritual position...
shows. The indebtedness of Coornhert to Castellio may have contributed to the misconception of Coornhert as a champion of religious pluralism. He defended, however, religious freedom only as a temporary expedient to promote public concord and open up possibilities for debate. On this point, Roobol’s study could have been even more convincing by comparing Coornhert’s ideas to the views of for example the Calvinist theologian Pierre Viret, who in his *L’interim* (1565) argued in a similar way for a temporary *modus vivendi* of Catholics and Calvinists in France. The older literature, according to Roobol, is blind to the actual principles of Coornhert’s thinking on human salvation. Human perfectibility has been emphasized out of all proportion, while it is only a part of his view of sanctification. Coornhert’s theology was not so eccentric at all and he sought terminological harmony with his Reformed opponents. This fresh picture of Coornhert’s thinking is quite convincing, though it will certainly meet resistance from the “old school.” Hopefully it will stimulate others to demystify the thinking of other theologians (e.g. Sebastian Castellio) who are claimed to be “far in advance of their time” as well.

The debates in Leiden and The Hague should not be regarded as a matter of toleration, but “of how room could be made for debate in a period in which freedom of speech, at least for figures such as Coornhert, was drastically limited” (p. 60). This becomes all the more clear when these debates are put into a European context. Then they do not look so unique at all and appear to fit into an older European tradition of disputations. It is helpful to see that the different characteristics of each debate correspond to two different types of Reformation disputation. The Leiden disputation fits into Bernd Moeller’s description of a “political disputation” in which the opponent is refuted, while the debate in The Hague is closer to a colloquy. This distinction is very helpful to understand the course of the debates with Coornhert.

The third and fourth chapters delineate the developments leading up to the Leiden debate as well as the debate itself. Roobol gives attention to the not so well known but somewhat similar debate between Thomas Tilius and Johannes Saligher, the Lutheran minister of Woerden in 1577. The Leiden disputation was the first major event in the life of this city’s recently opened university. The main issue at stake here was the characteristics of the true church. The only source that informs us about the debate is Coornhert’s publication of its proceedings: *Vande Leydtsche disputatie* (1583). Roobol shows that Coornhert provides a highly tendentious view of the course of events. It is partial and consequently unreliable, not by deviating from the facts, but by leaving things out. Several hundred people were present to listen to the debate, so it must