

Bornkamm and Gerhard Ebeling. Moreover, though he complains of their 'en bloc' view of mysticism, his own argument suffers precisely from his failure to define at all clearly what he means by the terms 'mysticism' and 'mystical'. Although it is difficult to pin him down, he appears throughout the book to treat 'mystical' very loosely as a synonym for 'spiritual' or 'non-rational'. This enables him to cite Luther's belief in the power of prayer or in the presence of the devil as evidence of his mystical leanings. Yet how many of the Luther scholars whom he attacks would have denied the importance of either of these beliefs for Luther?

The fact is that, for all his early admiration of the German mystics, Luther's mature theology was profoundly anti-mystical, if by mysticism one understands the belief that it is possible for man to approach God directly. Professor Hoffman refers to, but fails to grasp the central significance in Luther's thought of the concept of *Deus absconditus*. For Luther God's glory is so great that man cannot perceive him directly, only through a 'veil'. Even Moses, as Luther liked to point out, was only permitted to see 'the hinder parts of God'. Man's experience of God is always mediated through natural elements, through the 'masks' (*larvae*) behind which God operates in the natural order or through the revealed Word. This is not to deny the importance of the spiritual dimension in Luther's thought. Luther was always conscious of the unseen presence of God—and of the devil—in the world; but though they are both continuously active in the world, their activities are always hidden except to the eye of faith. Thus the instances Hoffman cites of Luther's belief that the devil had appeared to him in the form of a black sow or a dog which did not bark far from providing evidence of Luther's mystical outlook, as he suggests, prove the exact opposite, for they indicate that Luther held that the devil, too, only appears to men 'masked' under a natural form. Similarly, though Hoffman is right to emphasise the importance of Luther's belief in the power of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of Christ in the believer, both beliefs are intimately bound up with his concept of the Word. For Luther the Holy Spirit operates through the Word. It is through the Word that men experience Christ, that they are united with him in faith and that they are transformed by his presence in their hearts. (*Gratia non venit sine externo verbo*.) Conversely, one of Luther's most frequent criticisms of the sectaries was that they appealed to the authority of the Holy Spirit but divorced the Spirit from the Word.

It is, perhaps, useful to be reminded of the importance of the spiritual in Luther's thinking, though anyone at all familiar with Luther's writings will be well aware of this already. But to equate this with mysticism and to categorise Luther's theology as 'mystical' in the way that Professor Hoffman does is to distort both the meaning of mysticism in its historical sense and the true character of Luther's thought.

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*De dageraad van de reformatie in Vlaanderen (1520-1565)*, I: *Tekst*; II: *Indices en Bijlagen*. By Johan Decavele. (Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Klasse der Letteren, Jaargang xxxvii, 76). Pp. lvi + 644; 210. Brussels: Paleis der Academiën, 1975. B.Frs. 2,800.

The edict of Worms might remain a dead letter in the German empire but in

the Habsburg Netherlands it inaugurated a campaign against heresy which for its ferocity and tenacity had no match in Reformation Europe. By 1565 at least 1,500 people had been executed and thousands more had received lesser sentences: in the county of Flanders alone 264 paid the ultimate penalty for their convictions and rather more than ten times that number were prosecuted under the anti-heresy legislation. The inquisitions, trial proceedings, exchequer records and official correspondence produced by this repressive policy provide the raw material for Dr. Decavele's exhaustive and meticulous study of religious dissent in the county until the eve of the politico-religious disturbances which mark the onset of the Revolt.

Given the overriding importance of judicial sources Decavele prudently begins by explaining the complicated machinery of repression. He shows that the religious policy of Charles v never enjoyed the unanimous backing of the lay judges. This may have been because the central government converted the religious crime of heresy into an offence punishable by the secular courts, while continuing to insist that the crime should still be regarded as tantamount to *lèse-majesté* against God. In this way the cherished privileges of non-confiscation, enjoyed by many Flemish towns, were called into question. Decavele then proceeds to explain why the climate was so favourable for religious dissent. In the great cities of Flanders the governing classes were receptive to the pleas of Christian humanists for a piety purged of superstition and a straight-forward evangelical theology. This brought them into conflict with the religious conservatives, led by the mendicants, who saw heresy lurking in every innovation, including the sensible proposals to laicise and rationalise poor relief. To these conservatives the flourishing chambers of rhetoric (*rederijkerskamers*) posed an especially acute threat to traditional religious values. With a few notable exceptions their dramatic productions were not overtly heretical, but these sodalities acted as cultural brokers, presenting the religious issues of the day in a form readily understandable to ordinary folk.

The works of Luther were soon circulating in towns like Bruges and Ghent. But nothing approaching a confessional Lutheranism emerged: instead, circles of earnest men and women used to meet in order to read and discuss the New Testament together. They had no thought of breaking with the Church into which they had been baptised, though they were disposed to criticise many aspects of the contemporary religious scene. But their comparatively innocent activities aroused the suspicion of the conservatives, and Decavele has been able to trace the gradual polarisation of religious attitudes in some rural parishes in the early 1530s. This process was accelerated by the intrusion of Munsterite Anabaptism in the larger towns, though the Radical Reformation had been so thoroughly eliminated by 1538 that the preachers sent south by Menno Simons after 1550 had virtually to start from scratch. Though Nicodemist attitudes occur among the social *élite*, Decavele finds little evidence of support for Joris or the spiritual libertines in Flanders. Other forms of dissent also went into sharp decline c. 1545 and when the revival came in the early 1550s the stimulus came from the Reformed congregations in exile and the better organised communities in Antwerp and the industrial towns in the Walloon provinces. Decavele makes the important point that by the time that Geneva's influence was felt in the early 1560s Flemish Reformed Protestantism already had a doctrinal heritage culled from Luther, A Lasco and Bullinger as well as homegrown theologians like Anastasius Veluanus and Micronius.

By dividing the county into several regions it is possible to chart the progress and strength of the varieties of dissent. For example, Anabaptism only found support initially in the larger towns, though after 1550 it took root in the Leie valley. On the other hand, Reformed Protestantism made the running in the Westkwartier after 1550. The pattern is partly accidental: the early Anabaptists in and around Kortrijk were men of substance, while the towns and villages of the Westkwartier were especially accessible to the itinerant preachers sent across from Sandwich and London. Apart from the exclusively agrarian zones the new ideas found support across the social spectrum. Both Anabaptists and Reformed found a ready response among the proletariat in the declining towns and rapidly expanding conglomerations like Nieuwerkerke and Hondshoote. But too many entrepreneurs and intellectuals adhered to the 'new religion' to suppose that Protestantism can be explained adequately as a vehicle of social protest. And the evidence for Kortrijk casts doubt on Pirenne's characterisation of Anabaptism as 'the Protestantism of the poor'.

Decavele's achievement is considerable. On the basis of new archival information he has radically revised the chronology of the Reformation in Flanders and set this firmly within the contemporary religious and social context. The anticlericalism of the *rederijkers* and the latitudinarianism of the magistrates help to explain why the predominantly Catholic population of Flanders had so little sympathy for the work of the inquisitors. It was to take the excesses of the image-breaking to alert Catholic opinion to the dangers of the situation. Among the many interesting questions raised by this book is the relationship between late medieval and reformation dissent: Decavele detects a similarity but stops short of concluding there was any continuity. One piece of evidence employed here to establish the existence of sacramentarianism in 1520 is inadmissible if, as seems likely, the *Sermones oft Wilegghingen op alle de euangeliën* were not published until c. 1540. When discussing the religious motivation of the Flemish emigrants to England, Decavele overlooks the fact that Netherlanders had been seeking employment across the North Sea in large numbers since the early fifteenth century. But these are trivial blemishes on a study which not only adds greatly to our stock of knowledge about Flemish Protestantism but contributes to our understanding of the crystallisation of religious opinion in the age of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup>

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*Continuity and Change: personnel and administration of the Church in England, 1500–1642*. Edited by Rosemary O'Day and Felicity Heal. Pp. 304. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1976. £7.50.

The origins of this volume lie several years back in the enterprise of a group of Cambridge university research students who set up a colloquium for the study of the English Reformation in its local setting. This colloquium, which was specifically designed to help and encourage young scholars, now meets every second year, and all the papers in this collection are by members. The editors, and Leicester University Press, deserve congratulations for producing such a volume, which enables several talented newcomers to introduce themselves to the world of reformation scholarship. It is, however, in some ways an unsatisfactory book. The title is so all-embracing as to be virtually meaningless, a

<sup>1</sup> An English summary of Dr. Decavele's book will appear shortly in the *Acta Historiae Neerlandicae*.

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