

13. Copernicanism as a political problem: the Velthuysen affair

In the debates dealt with so far, Copernicanism had been treated as a purely theological and academic issue. It was discussed in disputations and Latin books. Of course, discussions do not exist just in printed form, and in reality the issue will also have been addressed outside the context of learned dispute. At some places, it may even have reached the pulpit. This, of course, is difficult to determine. But that the issue was considered not just an academic one becomes clear from a Dutch pamphlet published in 1655: ‘Proof that the opinion of those who teach the rest of the sun and the motion of the earth is not contrary to God’s Word’. Its author, the Cartesian scholar Lambert van Velthuysen, later claimed that he had written it on behalf of someone who did not read Latin and whose curiosity had been raised ‘by the preaching of the ministers against the motion of the earth’.⁹¹ With this pamphlet, the debate entered a new phase. Velthuysen not only sought (and reached) a wider audience, but he also brought some new elements to the fore, which may have lurked silently in the background in the earlier discussions, but had not been ventured publicly so far. In order to understand his position as well as the vehement resistance it encountered from the Voetians, we first need to explain some of the wider connotations of Voetianism.

Voetianism as a political programme

Strictly speaking, the Further Reformation did not affect the field of politics. But, like English Puritanism, it had very pertinent ideas regarding the structure of a Christian society.⁹² Dancing, public swearing, pawnshops and theatrical performances should be forbidden – that is, forbidden not just to members of the Reformed Church, which went without saying, but to anybody. Catholicism should be effectively banned, as should practically all other dis-

⁹¹ Velthuysen (1657) 23.

⁹² Israel (1995) 690-699.

senting groups. Political office should be held only by those sincerely professing the Reformed faith – ‘sincerely’, that is, according to the Voetians. The Further Reformation advocated the idea of the Republic as a ‘Second Israel’ with all its consequences.

Voetius’ uncompromising attempts to reform society can be understood only against the background of common Calvinist ideas on the relation between Church and state. The Dutch Reformed Church had not been instituted as a formal state Church. It was a product of revolution, and suspicious of secular authority from its very start. The regents of Holland had welcomed the Reformed Church as an ally in the struggle against Spain and had given it a privileged position. This resulted in a rather independent position. This was in striking contrast to the situation in, for instance, Germany, where the national Churches had been instaurated by the governments and were fully dependent on them. Lutheran theologians developed various concepts to legitimate the preponderance of the state and the idea of a state Church. The government was acknowledged as the *praecipuum membrum ecclesiae* (‘the foremost member of the Church’ – that is, of the visible, institutionalised Church). Still later, they distinguished between an internal and an external power in the Church. The Church itself had primarily a spiritual task, and the government’s task comprised all external ecclesiastical affairs.⁹³

Such a separation of the spiritual and the secular sphere went back to humanist notions which had some popularity in the Dutch Republic, too, and which seemed compatible with Calvinism. But in the end, the Church’s relation with the government was mainly dependent on local circumstances, and not determined by theological principles. The French Reformed Church came to take on a decidedly monarchical stance during the course of the seventeenth century, as they regarded their king as their protector in a hostile Catholic environment. Consequently, the theologians of Saumur advocated the *droit divin*. However, in the early Dutch Reformed Church, things had taken a different turn. The idea that the Church had only a spiritual task, leaving external affairs to the secular arm, had been adopted by the Arminians. (This, too, was a tactical rather than a theological stance.) As a consequence, the contra-Remonstrants took the opposite position and maintained that the Church was completely autonomous, not just in spiritual matters, but also in those concerning organisation and public worship. As the contra-Remonstrants carried the day, their idea of Church government became dominant in the Dutch Reformed Church. So, whereas the German Churches had, in their relations with the government and in ecclesiastical law generally, to

⁹³ Heckel (1962) (a reprint of an article from 1938).

stand on the *factum*, the law as it was in force, the Dutch Reformed Church, on the contrary, acknowledged only the *ius Dei*, the Divine law.⁹⁴ Each tendency to give the government more say in the affairs of the Church was identified with the Arminian heresy. Therewith, it had become not only a tactical but also a doctrinal error.⁹⁵

This theocratic tendency was fully endorsed by Voetius. In principle, Voetius admitted that Church and state were two separate spheres with their own responsibilities. So, the state should not meddle with the appointment of ministers or the convocation of synods. As for the Church not meddling with the affairs of government, Voetius was less consistent. It was clear anyhow that it was the duty of the state to protect and support the Church. And, as Nobbs put it, none of the Dutch Calvinists ‘was honest enough to admit that for them the two-kingdom theory was legitimate only if the ruler endorsed the will of the ministers.’⁹⁶ Theoretically, Voetius’ position may have been sound. He was in no-one’s service and not a member of any party. His ideas on the state and on Christian society were inspired by what he thought to be the law of God, not by any earthly aspiration. Still, in actual practice, Voetius’ ideas were not politically neutral. In order to show this, we shall have to have a short look at the political situation in the Dutch Republic in this period.

The war against Spain, which had begun with the revolt in the sixteenth century, had finally ended with the peace treaty of Westphalia, in 1648. Although this did not mean that the Republic was now completely at peace – there were still struggles in the colonies, notably a conflict with the Portuguese over the possession of Brazil – the Republic’s existence was no longer directly threatened. Without the pressure of war, long-hidden tensions emerged. The same had happened before, when the 12-year truce concluded in 1609 had given rise to the Arminian troubles. Now, immediately after the peace of 1648 there was a serious clash between the stadholder William II of Orange – a grandson of William the Silent – and the States of Holland. The actual dispute was over the continuation of the war with Spain and over army reductions. But it soon turned into a power struggle, whereby the Republic’s very structure was at stake. The stadholder, representing the monarchistic element in the Dutch state, wanted to reduce the power of the town councils. William used military force and laid siege to the city of Amsterdam in 1650.

⁹⁴ Conring (1965) 185.

⁹⁵ On the Arminian theory, see Nobbs (1938) 25-107; Conring (1965) 30-43.

⁹⁶ Nobbs (1938) 254-255. See also uit den Bogaard (1955) 59-62. Voetius’ ideas on the relation between church and state are discussed by J.Th. de Visser (1926) II, 391-403, those of some later theologians *ibid.* 403-423.

The crisis ended when in November of the same year William II unexpectedly died from smallpox, aged 24. After his death, his republican opponents quickly gained the upper hand. They convened an assembly, the *Groote vergadering* ('Great Assembly'), to settle the political structure of the Seven Provinces on a permanent footing. Originally, the republican state-form had not been instaurated by choice, but had been forced upon the provinces by circumstances. After so many decades, however, people had grown used to it. The Great Assembly confirmed the federative, republican state-form and the ascendancy of Holland within it. Moreover, the regents of Holland felt justified in appointing no new stadholder for the time being. This was partly due to their recent experience with William II, which made them rather cautious to put too much power in the hands of one man. But it also was due to a new self-consciousness. By 1651, the regents had become fond of their republican system of state. Republicanism was consciously formulated as an ideal – 'True freedom' was the name they gave it. As its leader emerged Johan de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland from 1653 onward. In the history of science, he is also known as a student of Van Schooten and an accomplished mathematician.

The settlement of 1651 was successful in keeping public peace, but some frictions remained. During his short stadholdership, William II had succeeded in building up an important following. His death left his party in disarray, but did not lead to its disintegration. Its head was now the stadholder of Friesland, a descendent of a junior branch of the Nassau family who had been regarded by many as William's evil genius. Moreover, William II left a son. For the time being, he was too young to play a role in politics, as he had been born a month after his father's death. But in this little boy were concentrated the hopes and aspirations of all those who for some reason or other were dissatisfied with the present regime.

One of the pillars of this so-called Orangist party lay within the Church. Ever since stadholder Maurice had successfully intervened on behalf of the strict Calvinists during the Arminian troubles, there had been a special bond between the house of Orange and the Dutch Reformed Church. In building up his party, William II had purposely and rigorously played on that. By adopting strict anti-Catholic measures in the areas under his jurisdiction and providing sustained support for the programme of the Further Reformation, he obliged the more intransigent wing of the Reformed Church. Thereupon, they willingly took his side in the struggle with the States of Holland. They decried the secular-minded regents of Holland as 'Arminians' or worse. After William's death and the instauration of the 'True freedom', a large number of the ministers resented the new regime. They had little confidence in the government of 'True freedom' and set their hopes on the re-

storage of the Prince of Orange.⁹⁷ There are strong indications that Voetius himself was among them.⁹⁸

The mood of the most radical Calvinists is made clear by a pamphlet published in 1650, while William II was at the acme of his power. The pamphlet is ascribed to the minister Stermont from The Hague. The author, among other things, accuses the regents of Amsterdam of conspiring to suppress the true Reformed religion. He warns that the regents should better protect religion and leave the ministers in peace: 'For else, seeing that their priestly garb is scorched, and true Religion undermined (...), they might well awake from their sleep, and be roused to a holy zeal all over the country, so that they will publicly inform and caution the congregations against the fatal and offensive plans of many governments. (...) Mind, what so many hundreds of ministers as there presently are in the country could effect if they would join forces to protect their religion and the right of the Church, entrusted to them by God, and choose the righteous side of his Highness [William II].'⁹⁹

To many regents, such language must have seemed downright seditious. Ministers should teach the people piety and obedience, not rouse them to insubordination. Dutch regents were wary of ecclesiastical pretensions anyhow. The events of William II's stadholderate made many of them suspicious of the true intentions of the Church. Voetius' uncompromising efforts to turn Dutch society into a truly Christian state were taken by many not just as a laudable, be it somewhat over-zealous expression of practical piety, but in a much more sinister way. In reaction, Dutch republicanism developed a strong anticlerical tendency. This anticlericalism was not so much religiously inspired, but rather of a political nature. The ministers should keep to their business and leave politics to the regents.¹⁰⁰

This political anticlericalism clearly anticipated the general European trend of the eighteenth century, but it was not wholly without precedence. As for Holland itself, the regents could fall back on the Erasmian tradition, but they also were aware of developments overseas, of the political successes of English Puritanism. Probably, a minister like Stermont could feel encouraged in his threats by the English example. The secularising regents, however, could draw some lessons from the English as well, in their case from the opponents of Puritanism. The political writings of Thomas Hobbes were eagerly studied in Dutch republican circles. This seems rather surprising, as Hobbes was the

⁹⁷ Israel (1995) 595-609. uit den Boogaard (1955).

⁹⁸ Broeyer (1991) 181, 184.

⁹⁹ Quoted by uit den Boogaard (1955) 74-75.

¹⁰⁰ Schilling (1993).

theorist of monarchical absolutism. The Dutch, however, managed to read his work as a treatise on republican sovereignty. Common to Hobbes and the Dutch republicans was their distaste of ecclesiastical pretensions.¹⁰¹

Lambert van Velthuysen and the struggle with Voetianism at Utrecht

One of the main advocates of Hobbes' ideas in the Dutch Republic was the very Lambert van Velthuysen whose pamphlet we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Velthuysen was a learned man – a doctor of philosophy, of medicine and of law. He obtained his degree in philosophy at Utrecht in 1644 on a triple thesis, with a physical, an ethical and a mathematical part. The physical part – *De mundo* – is rather traditional and closely follows the Aristotelian model. Velthuysen acknowledges the division into a supralunar and a sublunar world, but argues against the existence of solid orbs. In the mathematical part, he tries to find the cause of the variation of the magnetic needle. The earth is a big magnet, and the needle is diverted to greater masses of land, or to where the soil contains greater masses of material apt for magnetism. Here, he appears rather interested in the new natural sciences. The whole thesis is dedicated to the professors of theology Voetius, Schotanus and De Maets, and the Walloon minister. Initially, Velthuysen intended to become a theologian. He accomplished a study in theology, but as he did not obtain a ministry, he shifted his attention to other fields of interest. He published a large number of books on a variety of topics, besides being active in the government of his native town, Utrecht.¹⁰²

In Utrecht, Velthuysen could observe the Voetian political programme at work very closely. It was in Utrecht that tensions between the divergent tendencies in Church and society reached a climax. Voetius held sway in the church council and the theological faculty. His learnedness and his exemplary piety gained him many admirers, but on the other hand, he annoyed many people with his strictness. The issue at the centre of ecclesiastical-political debate in Utrecht was that of the secularised ecclesiastical benefices. With the arrival of the Reformation, the five Utrecht chapters had not been liquidated. They had been transformed into Protestant bodies, which exercised the political functions which formerly fell to the chapters. The successors to the medieval canons were generally drawn from the leading Utrecht families. They thus profited from the former chapters' substantial wealth.

To Voetius, this practice cried to Heaven. The chapters had obtained their

¹⁰¹ Van Bunge (1999) 328-332.

¹⁰² A good biography is lacking. For a very brief sketch, see Duker, III, 264-267.

wealth from donations for pious purposes. It was a grave sin to allow rich magistrates and notables to profit from them. He first ventured his opinion in 1642, much to the regret of the Utrecht nobility. At this stage already, the political struggle became mixed up with the philosophical debate. Descartes was befriended by several of prominent Utrecht nobles and appears to have been more or less used by them. In order to compromise Voetius they supported Descartes, whom they provided with some documentation on the Utrecht benefices. Descartes obligingly used this material to expose Voetius' political presumptions. However, the Utrecht city council which had to decide on the affair was not prepared to disavow their professor. As mentioned earlier, they simply imposed silence and Descartes was left empty-handed. His defeat was due not so much to unfamiliarity with Dutch ways of government, as to the fact that his Dutch friends had put him on the wrong track.¹⁰³

The decision of the town council ended the open philosophical strife for the moment, but the political tensions remained. The town government asked Voetius to put his considerations concerning the Utrecht benefices on paper, mainly as a way to keep him quiet, it seems. Voetius submitted an elaborate 'Theological advice' on the matter in 1645, but the regents temporised and nothing happened for a while. Then, in 1653, one of Voetius' friends decided to have the advice printed. It had the effect of a bombshell. As one Dutch church historian put it: 'Never before or since in the history of the Dutch Republic has a church council exercised such an open and principled criticism of the government's policy.'¹⁰⁴ Voetius dismissed established judicial practice with an appeal to the law of God. No Christian could take it on his conscience to take session in one of the Utrecht chapters, he declared. When in 1658 one of the canonries became vacant, the church council put heavy pressure on the claimants not to accept the benefice. No less than seven of them subsequently declined.¹⁰⁵

The 'Theological advice' unleashed a fierce debate. Voetius himself published in 1656 a sequel, 'Cloud of witnesses', wherein he listed many authorities supporting his view.¹⁰⁶ It is difficult not to feel some sympathy for Voetius' opinion as such. But the way he brought it forward was not very tactful, to say the least. He refused any compromise, for which the town government probably would have been ready. He squarely opposed a legitimised practice and denounced the lawful government. Moreover, he had little patience with anybody who felt differently. In a 'register of the sins, which are common here

¹⁰³ Bos, in Descartes (1996) 18-19.

¹⁰⁴ Trimp (1987) 69. On the theological advice also Duker, II, 294-305.

¹⁰⁵ Duker, II, 323-324. Trimp (1987) 77-78.

¹⁰⁶ Duker, II, 316-319.

and elsewhere in the country', drafted by the church council in 1659 in preparation for a project of reformation, 'Arminian maxims tending to transfer the power of the church to the magistrates, and speaking against all reproaching of the magistrates', are put on a par with swearing, lying, drunkenness, fornication, etc.¹⁰⁷

All this put many people on the alert. If there was one thing the regents did not like, it was ministers telling them what to do. In some of the subsequent pamphlets, these fears were clearly capitalised upon. An enormous stir was caused by an anonymous pamphlet which appeared in 1655, which claimed to present the text of a secret agreement between Voetius and his colleague Carolus de Maets, purportedly found in a book bought at the auction of De Maets' library. This agreement developed a plan for a gradual and peaceful take-over of government by the adherents of Voetius. The agreement may well have been a forgery, but if so, it was a very clever forgery which led the way to further attacks along the same lines.¹⁰⁸

So, relations between Church and government were tense in the Dutch Republic in general and in Utrecht in particular. It is not amazing that Velthuysen, who was a principled republican and had written an apology for Thomas Hobbes' *De cive*, decided to teach Voetius a lesson. He did not attack him on the point of practical politics, however, but on that of the freedom of philosophy, in particular his anti-Copernicanism. These subjects were not unconnected in his eyes. As a scholar and a Cartesian, it must have particularly annoyed Velthuysen that Voetius used his authority to decry Cartesianism as impious.

In fact, Voetius and the Utrecht church council did meddle with philosophy. Shortly before, there had been an incident which might have served as an incentive to Velthuysen. In October 1654, the Utrecht church council took notice of a disputation *De trochlea*, recently defended at the university by 'a member of the Utrecht church' – to wit, professor De Bruyn, whose Cartesianism has been discussed above. It contained a corollary: 'the souls of animals are equally capable of immortality as those of humans.'¹⁰⁹ When asked for an explanation by the church council, De Bruyn answered that he had not intended to direct himself against Church or theology, and promised to abstain in future disputations from anything that might give offence.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Van Lieburg (1989) 23.

¹⁰⁸ Duker, II, 309-314.

¹⁰⁹ A dispute on this thesis when defended on another occasion by Regnerus a Mansfeld is discussed by Thijssen-Schoute (1954) 44-45.

¹¹⁰ Resolution of the Utrecht church council, 9 Oct. 1654. State archives Utrecht, 222: church council Dutch Reformed Church, 6.

The affair did not remain at that, however. De Bruyn asked for the resolution in which the corollary was condemned to be cancelled. The church council several times postponed providing an answer, each alleging a different reason. De Bruyn had mentioned a disputation he intended to publish on the same subject. The church council thereupon decided to ask the curators of the university to prevent the said disputation, or at least that they might inspect it. Then, there appeared a little anonymous booklet (or manuscript), entitled (according to the resolutions) ‘Further message of the opinion of Mr [Johannes de Bruyn] concerning the nature of the souls of animals’, clearly written by a sympathiser of De Bruyn. De Bruyn himself disclaimed authorship. He had seen the book only after it had been published and had said nothing either in favour or against it. Among other things, the book claimed that the church council had condemned De Bruyn’s opinion without having given him a fair hearing, or even given him a warning on the issue. The church council concluded that this could only have been inserted into the book by the connivance of De Bruyn. When asked whether the author did have this from him, De Bruyn was evasive. He agreed that he had been condemned without a hearing and that he had said so on various occasions. The church council dismissed the accusation. As they explained, De Bruyn had in no way been censured or condemned. They had just found his thesis offensive, and had asked him to abstain from similar theses in the future. Neither party wanted to take the issue any further. De Bruyn answered that he had not been able to conclude otherwise than that he had been condemned without a hearing, but that he gladly would accept the church council’s explanation. The church council, on their side, seems eventually to have agreed to cancel the resolution.¹¹¹

Velthuysen himself was a member of the Walloon congregation in Utrecht. The Walloon Churches had been founded by francophone refugees in the early years of the Revolt. By the 1650s, there was no longer any real need for francophone church services, but the Walloon Churches remained in existence as a fashionable variant of the Reformed Church. They were Reformed in every respect, but they had their own organisation, up to synodal level. As a member of the Walloon congregation, Velthuysen was not subject to the jurisdiction of the Dutch Reformed church council, wherein Voetius held sway.

¹¹¹ Resolutions Utrecht church council, 5, 19 & 26 Feb. and 12 March 1655. The original resolution was probably cancelled, as it is no longer there. When this happened is not clear. A letter from Velthuysen from Jan./Feb. 1656, printed as an appendix to Velthuysen (1656), still speaks of De Bruyn’s problems with the church council.

Turning now to Velthuysen's pamphlet, Velthuysen states that the discussion on Copernicanism is just an extension of the debate on Cartesian philosophy. The latter has gained ever more the upper hand at Dutch universities. Now that its adversaries have failed to fog this 'rising light' with 'a cloud of detractors', they have changed their tactics. 'A large part of the philosophy of Descartes relies on the motion of the earth. Take away this foundation, the construction built upon it will collapse. They know that it is impossible to overturn these foundations by natural reason. So what is to be done? One should take the roof from the church, and make it God's cause.' Otherwise stated, the theological objections do not come forth from theology itself, but from guile. Velthuysen then takes it upon himself to combat this guile, for two reasons: to defend Christian freedom, and to protect Descartes' honour. 'So that nobody will be subjected to prejudice too easily; religion may keep its liberty; and learned speculations and opinions will not be subjugated and torquated under the laws of such people who estimate nobody but those who wear their colours and who will have everything sifted through their sieve.'

This is not just an abstract theological or philosophical discourse. Velthuysen makes it clear from the start that he is aiming not so much at a certain opinion, as at the pretensions of a certain group of people. Still, when it comes to the question itself, he reasons with great clarity and precision. His main task is a discussion of the Biblical texts commonly adduced against Copernicanism, but Velthuysen does so only after he has given some general rules for biblical exegesis. Velthuysen's main point is that one should discern between the intention of the text and the way this intention is expressed. Where the Bible 'teaches and dogmatizes', one should take its sayings unconditionally as true.¹¹² However, one should not draw any conclusions from the expressions used. So, Velthuysen presupposes a theory of inspiration akin to those of the theologians of Saumur, whereby the Bible is inspired as regards its intention, but not in its ways of expression. As he made clear at a later stage of the debate, we should explain the Bible in the same way as we would explain the words of wise people, not stretching the meaning of the sentences beyond what is common among humans.¹¹³ With this principle, he has little difficulty in showing that the standard texts have no bearing on the Copernican question.

Velthuysen's attack led to an extensive polemic. The charge was opened by the by now familiar Jacob du Bois. He published against Velthuysen a pamphlet 'Nakedness of the Cartesian philosophy'. Velthuysen replied, in 1656,

¹¹² Cf. Velthuysen (1656) 102.

¹¹³ Velthuysen (1656) 106-107.

with a new and much amplified edition of his earlier pamphlet. Du Bois answered with ‘Harmfulness of the Cartesian philosophy, or clear demonstration how harmful that philosophy is, both in the dissolution of God’s Word, as in introducing new and harmful doctrines’. This pamphlet was published in Utrecht, as was the former. Moreover, it carried an approval of the three professors of the theological faculty of Utrecht, i.e. Voetius, Essenius and Nethenus. Du Bois had asked for the approval because, as he explained, ‘in our classis [Leiden] the visitation of books is demanded more strictly than ever before, to that purpose that editions of anti-Cartesian books are suppressed. The visitors are all devoted and allied to the side of Heidanus.’ Voetius and his colleagues were only too pleased to comply.¹¹⁴

Velthuysen rejoined with a ‘Further proof that neither the theory of the sun’s rest and the motion of the earth, nor the foundations of the philosophy of Renatus des Cartes, are contrary to God’s Word’. After his own testimony, this pamphlet was attacked in public sermons by several Utrecht ministers.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, Du Bois had been joined by an anonymous pamphleteer who published in 1656 against Velthuysen, in Dutch, ‘Short remarks on the unproved demonstration that the opinion of the rest of the sun and the motion of the earth is not contrary to God’s Word, noted to suppress an upspringing root of bitterness against the Holy Writ’.¹¹⁶ Velthuysen dismissed it as the work of some poor bungler, who apparently had sought to gain someone’s favour with it; it clearly could not have been written by a Dutchman or a theologian. This was undoubtedly deliberate sarcasm. Du Bois asserted that Velthuysen knew only too well that this author was ‘a prominent minister in the Reformed Church’.¹¹⁷ In a second pamphlet, published later that year, this time in Latin, the author revealed himself as Caspar Streso, Reformed minister in The Hague.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ The correspondence between Du Bois and the Utrecht faculty is printed in Cramer (1932) 388-392; see also 74-75. The quotation is from a letter from Du Bois dated 25 July 1656, *ibid.* 388. On p. 387 is reproduced a short notice with remarks on the pamphlet by Velthuysen, apparently for the purpose of a reply. There was no state censorship in the Dutch Republic, but according to the synod of Dordrecht, members of the Reformed church who wanted to publish on religious matters needed the approbation of the local classis, which appointed *visitatores* to investigate the writings.

¹¹⁵ Velthuysen (1657) preface, [6].

¹¹⁶ [Streso] 1656. The ‘upspringing root of bitterness’ is an allusion to Hebrews 12:15.

¹¹⁷ Velthuysen (1656) 40-41. du Bois (1656) 35. ‘Suetonius Tranquillus’ (1656)d, 20, writes he knows the author well: ‘it is an honest minister at The Hague, famous all over the country for his eminent learning, piety, peacefulness, and other good qualities.’

¹¹⁸ Streso (1656)b. Cf. p. 13, where Streso reacts to Velthuysen’s attack on his earlier animadversions, *quibus sermone Belgico represseram licentiosum istud genus torquendi & interpretandi ista sacra Dei testimonia, quae se quorundam Philosophorum opinioni de quiete caeli & motu terrae catervatim objiciunt*. The two pamphlets were by the same publisher.

It would be going too far to discuss each of these pamphlets in detail.¹¹⁹ They are full of invectives and often repeat themselves. Besides the question of the motion of the earth, they discuss an ever-growing list of points from theology and Cartesian philosophy, e.g. whether animals have feeling, whether God can cheat, the nature of spirits, Descartes' proof of God's existence, the infinity of the world, and so on. We do not need to discuss all these, but some main points should be highlighted.

The fundamental issue was, of course, the interpretation of the Bible. Whereas Velthuysen wanted to discern where the Bible 'teaches and dogmatizes' and where it simply uses common expressions for that purpose, Du Bois stated that Holy Writ 'teaches and dogmatizes' in every letter and expression. In the heat of discussion, the antithesis was of course somewhat forced. Velthuysen pointed to Exodus 10: 21, the darkness over the land of Egypt 'which may be felt', as a clear example of figurative speak. Darkness, after all, is not something palpable, but just the absence of light. Du Bois did not give in: if the Bible says this darkness could be felt, it could really be felt. Apparently, it was caused by some heavy fog.¹²⁰

Velthuysen was not impressed and pointed to the inconsistencies in Du Bois' own work. He drew attention to a passage in Du Bois' book on chronology, which was written before the controversy over Copernicanism. Speaking of the life of Abraham, Du Bois had to deal with a contradiction in the Bible. In Genesis it is said that Abraham's father was still alive when he left Ur in Chaldea, but Stephen, in his speech as given in Acts 7: 4, asserts that he already was dead at that moment. In his book, Du Bois had unhesitatingly followed the version of Genesis: 'It would be absurd to emend Moses, whose purpose it was to render the dates, by Stephen, who brings those words only in passing, without having an eye to the exact chronology'. Of course, this created a problem, viz. what to think of the words of Stephen. Either his words had been badly transmitted (in that case, we should follow the Samaritan version of the Bible), or he had simply been inaccurate and spoken 'after the opinion and the common idea of the Jews'. Du Bois chose the latter option. 'It is not strange to say that Stephen in those circumstances has spoken according to the common opinion of the Jews. Sure, he was moved by the Holy Ghost, so that he has not missed in the essence of the doctrine. But that does not contradict that in some circumstances of particular histories, he did not have all specific knowledge, or did not bother very much.' In a similar way, Du Bois said, the disciples had upheld, even after the sending down of

¹¹⁹ The debate is investigated by van Bunge (1995) 49-54 and (1999) 324-327; McGahagan (1976) 281-289.

¹²⁰ Du Bois (1656)a, 16. Something similar had earlier been said by Kyperus, see above, p. 134.

the Holy Ghost, the incorrect opinion that heathen should be circumcised in order to become Christians.¹²¹

Velthuysen concluded from this passage, rather triumphantly, that his own opinion was in fact vindicated by Du Bois.¹²² However, this was not completely justified. As Du Bois explained, he had tried to find a solution for a problem that arose from the Bible itself. But in the discussion at stake, it concerned plain and unambiguous biblical sentences. There was no reason to deny that these were taught expressly by the Holy Ghost.¹²³ Actually, Du Bois followed the Reformed rule that Scripture should be its own interpreter. 'Are there any reasons *in God's Word* why we should or could not take the places which speak of the sun's motion and the earth's rest [etc.] in their proper sense? Indeed, there are none...'¹²⁴ His grief was that Velthuysen applied external, philosophical principles to which Scripture should submit. Velthuysen, as Du Bois asserted, used reason as a rule of Scripture and refused to submit to Divine testimony. This came down to sheer Socinianism.¹²⁵

Du Bois repeated his by now well-known thesis that one should not diverge from the literal sense of the Bible unless forced to do so by compelling reasons, that is, when moved by intra-textual reasons or when the literal sense would result in an absurdity. Here again Velthuysen turned the argument against him. How is it, he argued, that this man wants to accuse me of Socinianism? Me, someone who asserts that we should follow the Bible unconditionally whenever it teaches or dogmatizes, even if it would seem absurd? Du Bois' own stance comes down to saying that we may diverge from the literal sense every time we feel that maintaining it would be absurd. This is really subjugating Scripture to reason. Velthuysen concluded that the feelings of Du Bois and the Socinians resembled each other like two drops of water.¹²⁶ Du Bois replied that he had drawn his exegetical principles from the works of Festus Hommius, a respected Reformed theologian, so they could not possibly be Socinian.¹²⁷ In his 'Further proof', Velthuysen thereupon extensively demonstrated the agreement of Du Bois' exegesis with that of the Socinians. On the other hand, his own exegetical principle – the distinction between 'teaching and dogmatizing' versus 'not teaching and dogmatizing' – was re-

¹²¹ Du Bois (1650) 54-56.

¹²² Velthuysen (1656) 42-43.

¹²³ Du Bois, *Schadelikebeyt*, 18.

¹²⁴ Du Bois, *Schadelikebeyt*, 18 (my italics).

¹²⁵ Du Bois (1655)b 53-54.

¹²⁶ Velthuysen (1656) 101.

¹²⁷ Du Bois (1656) 10.

commended by Voetius himself¹²⁸ (Voetius had applied the principle to other texts). Earlier, Velthuysen had stated: ‘Two eggs are not more similar than my answer is to that of the theologians. But now that it is said by a Cartesian, it is a great heresy, a rupture of the authority of Holy Scripture, a devil’s work, etc.’¹²⁹

It seems quite clear that as regards their principles themselves, the combatants did not differ very much. They were both in the Reformed tradition. The problem was how those principles should be applied and, especially, to what purpose. Du Bois became angry not so much about Velthuysen’s principles, but because of the conclusions he reached with them. Velthuysen liked to express things in a sharp and principled manner. After having accused Du Bois of Socinianism, he raised the question whether God could permit that man was misled by his natural reason. According to him, God’s sanctity and truth could not suffer that man, when following God’s testimony in nature, would eventually be deceived. But God could permit that man would temporarily err because of that testimony (as Aristotle and his followers had erred on the motion of the earth). In order to prove the latter point, he argued that the prophets themselves, even when moved by God’s spirit, could lie.¹³⁰

The exegetical issue was clearly linked with philosophical questions. Streso explicitly defends Aristotle’s theory of substantial forms, on the grounds that without them, the creatures can have neither soul nor reason.¹³¹ But on the whole, philosophical arguments do not play an important part in the debate. However, there is another central issue in these pamphlets which soon outstrips even the exegetical question. That is the question of authority. A recurrent theme in the pamphlets is the relation between theology and philosophy. Du Bois and Streso uphold the old scholastic doctrine that theology should have the upper hand, and that philosophy should submit to the dominion of its mistress.¹³² Freedom of philosophising has its limits where it contradicts the Bible, as commonly explained, and the accepted doctrine of the Reformed Church.¹³³

Streso asserted that ‘Scripture’s literal sense should not be interpreted by anybody from a literal sense into a figurative meaning. If such an interpretation is necessary, it should be done by proper authority and order, restricting

¹²⁸ Velthuysen (1657) 35-36 (on Du Bois’ ‘Socinianism’), 38-42 (on his following the method recommended by Voetius and Nethenus). See also the preface.

¹²⁹ Velthuysen (1656) 32-33.

¹³⁰ Velthuysen (1656) 102-106.

¹³¹ Streso (1656) 7.

¹³² Du Bois (1655) 10; (1656) 6, 31. [Streso] (1656) 4.

¹³³ [Streso] (1656) 5-6. du Bois (1656) 1-6.

and opposing which is not allowed to everybody.' In the Reformed Church, the explanation of the Bible is subject 'to the ecclesiastical sentence of the official ministers and other leaders of the congregation, taken from Scripture, tried, approved, and admitted by charge and order of the Christian government, and accepted not just by the high and low government, but also by all sane and regular church members.'¹³⁴ He also asserted that the Reformed are bound in their exegesis by the authorised marginal annotations of the Bible.¹³⁵

To Velthuysen, this came down to sheer popery. He commented, sarcastically: 'Sure, the purity of God's church is well preserved and the authority of Scripture is well defended when they have such proponents.' He vehemently defended his right to explain the Bible according to his own insight. Do his adversaries intend to be judges of their fellow citizens, in order to get into the government? One accepts doctrinal points because one judges them well-founded in God's Word, not because they have been imposed by some authority. The ministry has no right to censure church members for their unwillingness to accept some newly invented doctrinal points. Who teaches otherwise 'formally reintroduces popery.'¹³⁶ 'Those people who put our forebears to the gallows and to the stake, meant well too.'¹³⁷

Velthuysen's aim was not so much to contribute to the theological discussion on the exegesis of such texts as Joshua 10: 12. He rejected the theological meddlesomeness as such. The conclusion of his first pamphlet makes this very clear: 'In vain so much has been done for liberty; so long fought against gallows and hangman's noose; thrown off the yoke of the world's mighties; if one has to suffer, here and elsewhere, all days from the pride, pity, scorn and persecution by just a few persons, who, referring to zeal and religion and with a stately aspect, are aiming at nothing else but an insupportable dominion; and are trying to have all classes of people and colleges under their whip.' It was particularly lamentable that those who deserved it least of all suffered most from such injuries: to wit, people like Descartes who spend their time investigating truth. 'Gave God that those to whom it becomes to resist such a spiritual tyranny, will not lend their hand to strengthen such an unlawful control. But alas! One feels that liberty is secured, when one is allowed to do what earlier one envied in another, and called tyranny then. Yet, true liberty consists therein that, living under a good government, everybody's honour, life and goods are secure from slanderers, murderers and thieves; that

¹³⁴ [Streso] (1656) 4.

¹³⁵ Streso, (1656)b 14.

¹³⁶ Velthuysen (1656) 44-48. See also 77, 122-123. See also Velthuysen (1657) 1-4, 7-9.

¹³⁷ Velthuysen (1656) 121.

virtue obtains its reward, and evil its punishment. And it is improper that one judges both according to the pronouncements of some impassioned man, instead of according to reason and equity.’¹³⁸ It is clear that Velthuysen was referring particularly to the situation in Utrecht. He openly admitted such on another occasion.¹³⁹

Du Bois and Streso violently denounced his view. Du Bois rather predictably rejoined that this talk of Christian freedom reminded him of the Remonstrants, who also talked of freedom and tolerance while filling the various councils with their men, ‘until they would have the majority of the votes and would play the comedy after their pleasure.’¹⁴⁰ The accusation of Arminianism made little impression on Velthuysen. Whereas his adversaries claimed that theologians should have the last word in philosophical matters, Velthuysen even did not want to give them full authority in theology itself. The foundations of faith are indisputable, but in minor points error is possible. ‘So it is very unreasonable that the ministers get angry if one does not understand the matter as they do. That they address the congregation as masters, by way of commandment; rebuke and condemn them, even refuse them consolation; and pretend to do all this *in the name and by charge of God*.’¹⁴¹ Velthuysen advocated a Church wherein all people subscribing to the fundamentals of Christian faith could be full members. He argued extensively for the case of ‘moderation’. In his view, even the errors of Arminianism were not fundamental.¹⁴² ‘I refer to Holy Scripture and to ecclesiastical history whether not all schisms in God’s church have arisen because of someone playing the master who, too obstinate to give in at any point, and having too much fancy in his own opinion, would not stand that any feeling contrary to his be tolerated in God’s church.’¹⁴³

Such ideas were anathema to the Voetians; also more moderate men had their reservations. Du Bois refers to professed Cartesians who disavowed Velthuysen’s opinion in public, saying that Velthuysen had written these things not as a Cartesian, but as a Hobbist. By adding that Hobbes had been an adversary of Descartes, they denied any responsibility.¹⁴⁴ Velthuysen

¹³⁸ Velthuysen (1655) 30-31.

¹³⁹ Velthuysen (1657) 13. ‘*Die de gelegentbeyt van de Kercke van Utrecht kennen, weten wel waer been mijn woorden in mijn eerste andwoordt streckten. (...)*’

¹⁴⁰ Du Bois (1656) 5.

¹⁴¹ Velthuysen (1656) 77.

¹⁴² Velthuysen (1656) 77-82.

¹⁴³ Velthuysen (1657) 14.

¹⁴⁴ Du Bois (1656) 73. See also ‘Irenaeus Philalethius’ (1656)a, 90: ‘*D Velthuysen heeft in desen deele zijn eigen gevoelen, en comt daar in wel met eenige andere gereformeerde Theologanten, maar, onses wetens, niet met eenige die voor Cartesianen uitgaen, over een.*’

was more radical than most opponents of Voetius. But he expresses clearly what people thought so irritating about his behaviour.

Related polemics in 1656

Velthuysen soon received support from several quarters. Especially the year 1656 saw a lot of controversy over the issue. We noted earlier that around this time, interest in Copernicanism at Utrecht University was at its height, too. The main reason for all this commotion was that at the time there was a major attempt by the Voetians to have Cartesianism banned from the Dutch Reformed Church, as we shall see in the following section. 1656 was an eventful year in other respects, too. ‘This year 1656 is memorable above all other years so long as the world has existed’ wrote a certain Jacob Vinck in a defence against the Utrecht church council, with which he happened to be in conflict.¹⁴⁵ Plague raged in the United Provinces and a general feeling of malaise prevailed. Vinck referred to a lunar eclipse in 1656 and other signs as indications of Doomsday. Around this time, there was even a slight increase in accusations of sorcery. This atmosphere gave extra weight to the ministers’ denunciations of sinful behaviour.

Many people apparently were irritated by Du Bois’ contemptuous dismissal of Cartesian philosophy. A satirical Dutch poem against Du Bois’ first pamphlet appeared in 1656 under the title ‘Cartesius renatus, or discovery of the envious and stubborn fanatic hidden under the guise of religious zeal, against the doctrine of Descartes’. The author seems to come from Gelderland, but prefers to remain anonymous: ‘rebuking, criticising and slandering is in this country only allowed to ministers.’ It was edited posthumously by a certain J.D.L.M.P.; it has been proposed that this should be read as ‘Johannes [Antonius van] der Linden, Medical Professor’, at Leiden. Its content is not very interesting, but it is significant that the controversy elicited this kind of reaction. The author comments on several passages in Du Bois’ pamphlet and defends Descartes. As to the motion of the earth, he stresses that one should follow the intention of the Bible, not its letter.¹⁴⁶ Another instance of the opposition Du Bois met is offered by a complaint at the Leiden church council which he made in December 1656 against the professor of law, Van Thienen. Van Thienen had called him, ‘in a public oration for several hundred people, a slanderer, who would have done a thief’s and murderer’s work, in

¹⁴⁵ ‘Dit jaer 1656 is een besonder gedenck iaer boven alle iaeren so lang de werlt gestaen heeft.’ Manuscript in Amsterdam municipal archives, archives of the Dutch Reformed church at Amsterdam no. 231, p. 66. See on Vinck and an earlier version of this tract, van Lieburg (1989) 106–118.

¹⁴⁶ N.N., *Cartesius renatus* (1656).

slandering the candidate who would be promoted'. Du Bois therefore asked that the church council might call Van Thienen, being a member of the Reformed Church, to account for his unchristian behaviour.¹⁴⁷

A minor controversy at the time concerned Cartesianism generally. Paulus Voet, a son of Gisbertus Voetius and one of the most adamant participants in his father's controversies, published in 1656 his *Theologia naturalis reformata*. In a chapter on 'the idea of imaginary space', he thought it necessary to refer to the disputes on Cartesianism at Utrecht University in the early 1640s, and even reproduced all the official documents.¹⁴⁸ An anonymous person (perhaps Voetius' enemy, Maresius) used the occasion to publish Descartes' side of the story as well. In a Latin pamphlet, he published the text of a hitherto unpublished apology by Descartes to the Utrecht government, from 1645.¹⁴⁹ However, not all publications attacking Voetius refer to Cartesianism. Another pamphlet was a collection of several doggerels sharply attacking the Voetian party. None of these mentioned the Cartesian question. One satirised the *Theologia naturalis reformata* (though probably because of the attacks against the Groningen professor Maresius it contained), and four others satirised Voetius' own 'Cloud of witnesses'; the main part is directed against a sermon of the Utrecht minister Lodenstein, a close collaborator of Voetius.¹⁵⁰

Of greater importance was the support Velthuysen unexpectedly received from another side, equally in 1656. This support, too, took the form of an anonymous pamphlet. It added a new, mathematical element to the discussion, and gave rise to a second pamphlet war, which was waged parallel to the first one. The pamphlet appeared in both a Dutch and a Latin version: 'Mathematical proof of the stupidity of Jacob du Bois, reformed minister at Leiden, in his fight against the hypothesis of Copernicus, and the philosophy of Descartes'.¹⁵¹

In a later sequel to this pamphlet, the author signed himself 'I.G.H.' Most probably, he was the well-known mathematician and later burgomaster of Amsterdam, Johannes (Gerritsz) Hudde. His name is mentioned in a seventeenth-century manuscript index to a volume of pamphlets on Copernicanism

¹⁴⁷ Resolution of the Leiden church council, 1 Dec. 1656. Municipal archives Leiden, archives of the church council, 5. The issue gave rise to a protracted dispute on jurisdiction between the church council, the university and the Leiden burgomasters.

¹⁴⁸ Paulus Voet, (1656) 253-264.

¹⁴⁹ *Magni Cartesii manes ab ipsomet defensi* (1656). Descartes (1996) is a critical edition of the Dutch version of this text from the Utrecht archival records; see 41-44 for the history of the text. French versions have been published by Verbeek in *Querelle*, 401-437 and in AT.

¹⁵⁰ *Over de woorden van vader Lodestein* (1656).

¹⁵¹ [Hudde] (1656) a and b.

and Cartesianism, now at the library of Utrecht University.¹⁵² In 1656, Hudde was quite young and still unknown (Du Bois, in his rejoinder, spoke of the ‘rash and thoughtless youth’ of his adversary¹⁵³ – apparently he had quickly found out), but was already active in science. In the same year he published, again anonymously, a little work on dioptrics. He certainly sympathised with Velthuysen’s Cartesianism. As we shall see, in 1657 Hudde and Velthuysen made contact, probably as a result of the debate on Copernicanism.

As to the contents of the pamphlet (and this also supports Hudde’s authorship), it is in no way concerned with biblical exegesis or philosophical issues, but is entirely devoted to astronomical and mathematical arguments. Du Bois prided himself on having given an invincible mathematical argument against the Copernican system, and hence against Cartesianism. The Copernicans, according to Du Bois, maintain that the planets’ period of revolution around the sun depends on their distance from the sun: the further away they are, the slower they move. Mercury passes through its orbit in less than three months, Venus in about eight, and the earth in 12. As noted, the existence of such a cosmic order had been an important element in the ‘Leiden interpretation’. In particular Lansbergen had adduced this as evidencing the truth of the Copernican system.

Now, according to Du Bois, Copernican theory was clearly self-contradictory here. From Lansbergen’s own tables, it was evident that the period of Mercury is about 116 days and that of Venus about 19 months. Thus, Venus has a longer period than the earth, although according to the Copernican theory it is closer to the sun. Du Bois announced this refutation of Copernican theory in both his *Dialogus* and his book against a conclusive argument which would overturn all arguments of the Copernicans: ‘This error in your philosophy is so immense, that I hope you, having from shame deserted that erroneous spirit of philosophy, will return at last to your mind.’¹⁵⁴ He proclaimed his triumph not only in print. The Leiden professor Van Schooten, who must have known Du Bois personally, complained ‘that our Du Bois in nearly all assemblies and among all kinds of people, among professors, his colleagues and other learned men, even in barges and coaches, prided himself in such a stubborn and audacious way (for he had been alerted to his error before) that he had overturned the Copernican system and the Cartesian philosophy, that several prudent men believed his assertions without reserve.’¹⁵⁵

As Hudde demonstrated in his pamphlet, the whole argument rests on an

¹⁵² Shell number: Y qu. 79. Cf. Vermij (1995) 28–30.

¹⁵³ Du Bois (1656)b 8.

¹⁵⁴ Du Bois (1653) 36–38; (1655) 283–290; the quotation is from the latter work, p. 290.

¹⁵⁵ Van Schooten to Huygens, 30 May 1656. *OC*, I, 422 (no. 293).

elementary error. Du Bois talks about the real period of the planets with respect to the sun and the fixed stars. Lansbergen's tables, on the other hand, serve for predicting the apparent planetary positions, seen from the moving earth. Seen from the sun, our earthly point of view moves along with the other planets. Therefore, the period of Venus as calculated from Lansbergen's table is longer than the real one. One has some comprehension for Van Schooten's annoyance, and even for the uncomplimentary title Hudde gave his pamphlet. Du Bois' argument is an example of utter incompetence. On the other hand, Hudde's 40-page refutation of such a trivial argument seems somewhat overdone. Hudde demonstrates that Du Bois has not understood the argument; he shows that he does not know the literature; he gives two different proofs of the correct periods, the one algebraic, the other mechanical; and so on. The young Huygens indeed thought it a little too much. 'I agree that Mr Du Bois is rebuked and refuted as he deserves, but why at such length?' he wrote to Van Schooten – who answered that in his opinion, Du Bois had hardly been castigated enough.¹⁵⁶

Probably, Hudde had expected Du Bois to withdraw in silence, filled with shame. Du Bois, however, did not feel embarrassed at all. In a vehement reaction – 'The reined-in Cartesian' – he answered Hudde's pamphlet with utter conceit. He felt compelled to withdraw his argument; however, not because of Hudde's argument, which he, as it seems, quite simply did not understand. 'That he has recourse to algebraic calculations is rather to show off that he has learned that art, than that it serves to purpose',¹⁵⁷ he mocked. But Hudde had referred to some Copernican authors (Gassendi and Stevin) who mentioned the periods, which Du Bois had deduced from Lansbergen's tables, in their writings. Thus, Du Bois was compelled to admit that apparently these periods were compatible with the Copernican theory. Mathematics was beyond his comprehension, but referring to authorities carried some force.

However, he went on, why ascribe so much weight to this mathematical argument? 'My own argument, by which I proceed *active*, that is, demonstrative, is the authority of God's Word. That is wherewith I actually combat that hypothesis, but he does not even touch it.'¹⁵⁸ Hudde had disproven one of his arguments, but all the others remained in force; and 'if this author would have known something to say upon them, he would undoubtedly have done so.'¹⁵⁹ And if he asserts that this one error shows Du Bois' incompetence and thus

¹⁵⁶ Huygens to Van Schooten, 6 May 1656; Van Schooten to Huygens, 30 May 1656. *OC*, I, 413 (no. 288), 422 (no. 293).

¹⁵⁷ Du Bois (1656)b 8.

¹⁵⁸ Du Bois (1656)b 3.

¹⁵⁹ Du Bois (1656)b 8.

disqualifies his whole contribution to the debate, what should we think about the various errors Descartes has committed?

Hudde, apparently irritated by what he must have regarded as Du Bois' dullness, thereupon published a second pamphlet: 'The runaway astronomer J. D. B. hooded' (the hippic metaphor was a reaction to the title of Du Bois' earlier reply). He reproduced Du Bois' text in extenso, and added his own commentary. He reminded Du Bois of the triumphalism with which he had ventured his argument, and pointed out how Du Bois had paraded with it. And by now, Du Bois alleged that this 'conclusive argument' had never been of much importance. Hudde made his point in a parable with which he concluded his pamphlet: the tale of the stupid shepherd. This shepherd imagined himself to be an expert fencer. He boasted that he knew of a thrust with which he could vanquish any champion, and insisted on challenging the great masters of the art. In the end, when his boasting went beyond all limits, the masters ordered one of their pupils to accept the challenge. As the job was not a very honourable one, the pupil insisted on wearing a mask (an allusion to Hudde's anonymity). As expected, the shepherd was disarmed and brought to the ground at the very first attack. He then protested that this was not fair play. Apparently, one of the tactics he relied upon did not work, but he still had a multitude of others by which he would be able to gain an easy victory. He insisted that it was now the turn of the masters themselves to take up arms against him.

As is proper in case of a parable, Hudde finished with a moral. The bystanders, who had watched it all, in the end came forward to bring the shepherd back to reason. They urged him 'that you will exercise the office laid upon you after your best capacities; that you will care more properly for your sheep, that they will not be torn up by the wolf; that you will tend them not in dry and barren heaths, but in green meadows, at sweet brooklets. In that way, they would love and imitate you, and you would become a good Shepherd.'¹⁶⁰ A certain irritation with clerical meddlesomeness shines through. Clerics should stick to their spiritual calling and leave philosophy and other secular activities alone.

This was not the end of the discussion, however. A sympathiser of Du Bois wrote, under a pseudonym, a rejoinder in which he, in a rather peaceful way, answered the accusations levelled at Du Bois. He quoted some authorities on the point that as yet, there was no mathematical evidence for the earth's motion. This pamphlet was answered by someone who posed as an anonymous sympathiser of Hudde, but may well have been Hudde himself, who in this

¹⁶⁰ [Hudde] (1656)b 29.

way mirrored his opponent.¹⁶¹ (Likewise, he had signed his second pamphlet ‘I.G.H.’ in response to Du Bois’ signature ‘J.D.B.’). This rejoinder mainly rehearsed the whole debate as it had been waged until then, in order to demonstrate that Du Bois and his friends only tried to divert attention. These two pamphlets contain no new arguments and will not be discussed here.

A belated echo

The discussion on Copernicanism and Cartesianism had gained full strength by 1656. In that year, no less than 20 pamphlets and other writings appeared on the subject. The issue was also tackled in various disputations. After 1656, however, the intensity of the debate decreased sharply. In 1657, only Velthuyzen’s ‘Further proof’ continued the debate. 1658 saw the appearance of Regius’ short tract, and Wittichius’ *Consensus veritatis* came out only in 1659.

The very last contribution to the debate was written in 1661 by a complete outsider: the Mennonite Dirk Rembrandtsz van Nierop, whom we met before. As a Mennonite, Dirk stood apart from developments in the Dutch Reformed Church, and initially he seems even to have missed the pamphlet war completely. Still, as a defender of Copernicanism, he took the issue to heart. When he finally learnt about the matter and read the pamphlets by Du Bois, he quickly decided to publish a reply. He justified this not only with the consideration that he might have some better arguments than the earlier contestants: ‘I understand that there are still many who oppose this opinion bitterly, and try to paint it in the darkest colours, especially among those who are occupied with theology; quite as if one tried to offend, even make insecure, Holy Scripture with this feeling.’¹⁶²

Even if one takes the Reformed religion as the only true religion, says Van Nierop, how can one be so sure that all passages in the Bible are perfectly explained? In particular those on the motion of the sun, where the theologians, after all, simply follow the received opinion, ‘without investigating what is exactly the matter; as out of hundred, yea, thousand ministers, there has been before this time hardly one who knew about the difference. And even now the matter is publicly controverted, there are but a few who concern themselves with the issue.’¹⁶³

Dirk’s book is divided into four parts. The first concerns a discussion of the

¹⁶¹ ‘Irenaeus Philalethius, de tweede van die naem’ (1656); ‘Irenaeus Philalethius, de derde van die naem’ (1656). In writing Vermij (1995), I presumed that the latter pamphlet indeed had been written by someone else. Dr W. Klever first pointed out that it probably derives from Hudde himself.

¹⁶² Van Nierop (1661) preface.

¹⁶³ Van Nierop (1661) 15.

biblical sentences which seem to contradict Copernicanism. His principle is that the Holy Ghost has used a language and way of speaking which could easiest be understood by the people, or was commonly used. Still, he attaches great importance to the literal wording of the Bible. In explaining the miracle of Joshua 10:12 ('Sun stand thou still at Gibeon!'), Dirk vacillates between two alternatives. The one is that the command 'Sun, stand thou still' entails that the whole solar vortex stops moving, thus causing all planetary motions to come to rest as well (Galileo's suggestion in his letter to the Grand Duchess Christina, but now in a Cartesian jacket). The second wants the miracle to be an optical phenomenon: the earth kept on turning and the sun itself went down, but God temporarily provided a special sun to serve his people. Dirk eventually opts for the second explanation, because otherwise it would make no sense that the sun should stand still *at Gibeon*.

The second chapter deals with the credibility of the ministers in explaining Holy Scripture. It is mainly directed against Du Bois. Dirk maintains that in purely theological matters, human reason has to submit itself to revelation and that, consequently, the ministers should be believed in these matters. But in mathematical and physical things, they had better ask the experts in the field for advice. The third chapter argues that the Copernican system is in conformity with nature, and the fourth touches upon some other issues of Cartesianism, mainly in reaction to attacks by Du Bois.