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Dutch Revolt (Book Review)

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of childhood, particularly as these promises and difficulties are part of the family setting. We are shown the relative innocence of children, and the adventurousness of adolescence. We see parents who had to lead and guide, and who wounded and were wounded in the process. The poet-speaker is caught between these two stages of the freedom and promise of childhood and the obligations and restrictions of adult responsibility. Typically we hear a young woman speaking and thinking, sharing her experience of things. She can no longer be the observing child, nor is she completely ready to take on the full burden of social and familial commitments. She remains at that stage of development which is devoted to the pursuit of romantic love, which, with all of its own hopes and disappointments, seems to her to be a more comfortable place to live.

Consequently, in much of this poetry we hear the voice of a woman who is alone (not necessarily lonely) and taking stock of the resources available to her. These resources include love, imagination, memory, desire, dreams, the past, and her own resilience, but her greatest source of strength is her confidence in the rightness of her own history. She has a large faith that her actions,

her desires, her motives are *right*, that they need not be put under the pressure of critical scrutiny. She does not normally cross-examine herself; she is capable of occasional keen descriptions of the tone or feeling of an event, but she stops short of doubting the adequacy or propriety of her responses. What is doubted is the faithfulness of other people, or the reliability of history itself. Whenever felicity is described, it is the felicity of another time and place, not here and not now. The present seems to be largely a place of deception and disappointment.

The stage of personal development I am describing is a crucial one; there are great temptations to stay there, and not to move on. But Nibbelink's present reluctance to take on larger commitments is not a spirited refusal, if it is a refusal at all. She, or her poetic speaker, displays a kind of caginess, a cautiousness, which gives due regard to the seriousness of the choices she faces. Nibbelink seems to be ready to face seriously the challenges of this stage of personal development; there is a necessary next step, if she is to move forward in her poetic development. The style and substance of this book give us some reason to hope for such growth in future work.

The Dutch Revolt by Geoffrey Parker. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press. 1977. 327 pages, no price given. Reviewed by McKendree R. Langley, Associate Professor, Abraham Kuyper Chair, Lectureship Center.

The rise of the Dutch Republic in the sixteenth century is one of the main events in the development of the Western world especially for Northern Europe, Great Britain and North America. Some of the finest historians of various perspectives, including Groen van Prinsterer, John Lothrop Motley and Pieter Geyl, have attempted to evaluate the genesis of the modern Netherlandic state. Geoffrey Parker, Lecturer in Modern History at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, was aware of his illustrious predecessors, yet he felt compelled to make his own contribution to the subject. The result has been an important one-volume survey of the genesis of the Protestant nation of the Netherlands. Mr. Parker is a tireless worker, having conducted archival research in Madrid, Brussels, Lille, Valladolid, The Hague, the Vatican, London, Besancon, Utrecht, Louvain, Paris and Vienna. He

has also mastered a mountain of published historical materials, both primary and secondary sources, in a number of languages. Understanding both the Spanish and Dutch sides of the conflict has been one of his main concerns. From his British perspective Parker has tried to present both the concern of King Philip II of Spain to maintain the Catholic integrity of his Lowland possessions and the determination of Prince William of Orange to create an independent Protestant Netherlandic state. Emphasis is put upon the interplay of nationalistic, dynastic, economic, geographical, military, aristocratic and religious factors.

The main emphasis of the book is the thesis that the Dutch revolt was actually comprised of three separate revolutions which occurred in 1565-1568, 1569-1576 and 1576-1581. The first revolution

was caused by the resistance of nobleman, such as William of Orange and John and Philip Marnix, to the reintroduction of the Inquisition and the creation of fourteen new bishoprics in the Low Countries. Calvinist preachers going throughout the land, the iconoclastic fury against Catholic churches, and the invasion of the Duke of Alva, the Spanish governor, with a large group of Spanish troops were the other main events of 1565-68. Parker rightly notes that "Philip II's fateful decision to send the Duke of Alva with a large force of Spanish troops to the Netherlands was a turning point in European history" (84). During the second revolt (1569-1576), Alva's heavy-handed rule was symbolized by the Tenth Penny Tax, which was both unconstitutional and a great financial burden. With a sense of humor, Parker quotes the "Paternoster of Ghent" (1572) that was dedicated to Alva:

Hellish father who in Brussels doth dwell,
 Cursed by thy name in heaven and in hell;
 Thy kingdom, which has lasted too long,
 be gone,
 Thy will in heaven and earth be not done.
 Thou takest away daily our daily bread
 While our wives and our children lie
 starving or dead
 ...
 Thou ledest all men into temptation;
 Unto evil hast thou delivered this nation
 (127).

In effect the Netherlandic people were being forced to make a financial contribution to their own oppression. Then the Sea Beggars took the coastal town of The Brill in the name of the Prince of Orange. Thereafter the military phase of the revolt dominated public events. From 1572 on, the author presents the emergence of the Prince of Orange's new order in Holland and Zeeland. In spite of the great military machine of the Spanish, the second revolt ended with the Spanish army in mutiny and Philip II's decree of bankruptcy in September 1575.

The third and final revolt of 1576-1581 was marked by the Pacification of Ghent (November 1576), which more permanently established the status quo between the territories of the Orangist Calvinists and the pro-Spanish Catholics. Then the Union of Utrecht brought together, in 1579, Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Friesland, Gelderland and part of Groningen province. During the same period the reconquest of the southern provinces by the Spanish Prince of Parma caused Parker to note that this was the foundation of modern Belgium.

The second Spanish declaration of bankruptcy (1607) brought an end to thirty years of continuous warfare. Finally, the Twelve Years' Truce of Antwerp (1609) marked the debut of the Dutch Republic as a major European power. While the historical organization of events around the three revolts is not entirely new, since Groen van Prinsterer had a similar division in his *Handbook of the History of the Fatherland* (1846), Parker has used this scheme very well. There is great merit to this new book.

Yet I have a major objection to Parker's approach. Throughout the book he presents a humanistic sociological interpretation of the Dutch Revolution. At the outset he declares that "...although I always take the religion of sixteenth-century people seriously, I am indifferent to both Protestantism and Catholicism today" (16-17). "To the eyes of many besides Orange," he asserts, "God played an important role in the outcome of the Dutch struggle" (151). Calvinism, in his view, was primarily an ideology helpful during times of difficulty, which was readily exploited for political ends by many leaders (155, 14). Parker's approach is similar to that of the historian of early Christianity, Wilhelm Bousset, in *Kyrios Christos* (1913). Bousset was concerned about the historical influence of Christianity but not its divine truth. Much the same can be said about Parker. He de-emphasizes the crucially important relationship between the Netherlandic revolt and the larger currents of the Reformation. He is not concerned about the Gospel truth proclaimed by the Calvinistic leaders in distinction from the degenerate and perverted faith of Catholicism. It is at this point that Parker reveals his commitment to the myth of a neutral or non-religious historiographical perspective. This commitment is the common intellectual presupposition of much of contemporary thought as it relates to historical and allied sciences. The book, which is helpful in many ways, is nevertheless a mild polemic against the transforming power of the Gospel in the Reformation.

Groen van Prinsterer, in his studies of the Dutch Revolution, saw the various temporal factors of geography, economics, nationalism, etc., but asserted that the Reformation was the greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit since the days of the Apostles. The Netherlandic state, Groen pointed out, had as its distinguishing characteristic and moral foundation Calvinists who believed that the Scriptural truth of God has relevance for all of life. If *The Dutch Revolt* is read with this critique in mind, it can be studied with profit. Parker has critiqued in one volume what John Lothrop Motley required seven volumes to evaluate!