

'Hugo Grotius's *Ordinum pietas*'

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Edwin Rabbie, 'Hugo Grotius's *Ordinum pietas*.' In: Rhoda Schnur et al. (red.), *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Hafniensis. Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Neo-Latin Studies, Copenhagen 12 August to 17 August 1991*. Binghamton, New York 1994, p. 849-855

Zie voor verantwoording: http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/rabb001hugo01_01/colofon.htm

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Abuse is an art. Nowadays, in our society of mutual admiration, it has regrettably declined somewhat, but in antiquity and, in imitation of that era, in the Renaissance it flowered as it had never done before. My old professor Anton Leeman used to point out with some eagerness how the better kind of humanists had the good habit of spending an hour or so reading Cicero's *In Pisonem* before embarking upon their own torrents of abuse, in order to get in the right mood. Something like that speaks volumes. One should keep this in mind when reading what follows here about another of those scholarly polemics of the seventeenth century, which may to us sometimes seem rather unsavory.¹

Our story begins in the year 1611. Jacobus Arminius, professor of divinity at Leiden University, had died two years before, and the competent authorities, in this case the States of Holland, now thought they had found a suitable successor. Sad to say, this turned out to be wrong. Not only had Conradus Vorstius² already been rather controversial when he was a professor at Steinfurt, but his latest book, published in 1610 (which bore the attractive title *On God*³), cooked his goose. Experts came across the most

- 1 On the polemics surrounding *Ordinum Pietas* see especially C. van der Woude, *Hugo Grotius en zijn 'Pietas Ordinum Hollandiae ac Westfrisiae vindicata'* (Kampen, 1961), which is, however, very prejudiced against Grotius and the Remonstrants in general.
- 2 On Conradus Vorstius (Cologne 16. VII. 1569-Tönningen 9. X. 1622) cf. H.C. Rogge, 'Het beroep van Vorstius tot hoogleeraar te Leiden,' *De Gids* 37 (1873): 2: 31-70; 499-558; J.C. van Slee, in *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 40 (Leipzig, 1896): 309-11; H.Y. Groenewegen, in *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biographisch Woordenboek*, vol. 3 (Leiden, 1914): 1342-44; C. van der Woude, in *Biographisch Woordenboek van Protestantse Godgeleerden in Nederland*, vol. 1 (Kampen, 1978): 407-10.

horrible heresies in this work; I only have to mention the names of Socinianism, Pelagianism (not to forget Semi-Pelagianism) and Ostorodianism in order to give anyone the creeps even today. But the States of Holland (read: the Grand Pensionary Johan van Oldenbarnevelt) were unwilling to drop the candidate, who had only been found after a long search, for the mere reason that a number of theologians alleged that he was a deviationist. At least they wanted to give him a chance to defend himself against his detractors.

Scripture, through the prophet Jeremiah, already points to the fact that evil originates from the north.⁴ The truth of this statement was again confirmed at that time - the year was by then 1613. Vorstius's books found their way to the far north of the Netherlands, even as far as Franeker, where a warm welcome was prepared for them by the local professor of divinity, Sibrandus Lubbertus;⁵ he avidly scrutinized them for anything which would not pass muster. And that was quite a lot. Lubbertus needed more than 800 pages in order to expose the - according to his own calculation - ninety-nine heresies of Vorstius.⁶ At that point it might still have been possible to keep the matter private, but Lubbertus had devised a clever stroke, with which he tried once and for all to annul the appointment of his Leiden colleague: he provided his book with an extensive preface, addressed to the archbishop of Canterbury, George Abbot, a person who hated the Arminians' guts more than anyone else in England. And in this dedication Lubbertus stated in so many words that the States of Holland had not acted innocently or unknowingly when they tried to carry through Vorstius's appointment. They actually wished to be deceived by him and knowingly took in a Socinian for the education of their future preachers. Lubbertus's plan succeeded. Abbot did exactly what he had counted on: he informed the king of England, James I. Thereupon the king put his ambassador to work, and thus the matter became one of national and international politics.

The opinion has been defended⁷ that Lubbertus was merely acting out of self-defense. The king, they say, had been sent barking up the wrong tree in the conflict about questions like predestination between the two factions in Dutch protestantism, Arminians and Gomarists, otherwise called Remonstrants

3 *Tractatus theologicus de Deo, sive de natura et attributis Dei, omnia fere ad hanc materiam pertinentia (saltem de quibus utiliter & religiosè disputari potest) decem Disputationibus, antehac in Illustri Schola Steinfurtensi, diverso tempore, publicè habitis, breviter & methodicè comprehendens. Accesserunt etiam seorsim Annotationes, hactenus quidem imperfectae, nunc autem demum perfectae ... ad uberiorem eorum exegesis, quae in Thesibus haud satis explicata esse videbantur. Auctore Conrado Vorstio ...* (Steinfurti: excudebat Theophilus Caesar, Anno 1610); cf. L.D. Petit, *Bibliographische lijst der werken van de Leidsche hoogleraren van de oprichting der hoogeschool tot op onze dagen, Faculteit der godgeleerdheid, eerste aflevering (1575-1619)* (Leiden, 1894), 92-93 no. 3a; G. Richter, *Theophil Caesar, Drucker am Gymnasium illustre Arnoldinum zu (Burg-)Steinfurt* (Nieuwkoop, 1967), no. 74.

4 Jeremiah 1.14.

5 On Lubbertus (Langwarden ca. 1555-Franeker 11. I. 1625) cf. C. van der Woude, *Sibrandus Lubbertus, Leven en werken, in het bijzonder naar zijn correspondentie* (diss. Amsterdam, Vrije Universiteit, Kampen, 1963).

6 *Sibrandi Lubberti Commentarii, ad Nonaginta novem Errores Conradi Vorstii* (Franekerae Frisiorum: Ex officina Vlrici Dominici Balck, 1613).

7 By Van der Woude in his study mentioned above, n. 1.

and Counter-Remonstrants, which had dragged on for ten years already. The evil genius behind the king's siding with the Remonstrants - at least, this is the way it was felt then by a majority among the Counter-Remonstrants - had been Hugo Grotius, then thirty years old, judge advocate of the States of Holland and just about this time newly appointed pensionary of the city of Rotterdam, the rising star in Dutch politics. For in the months of April and May of the year 1613 Grotius had been in England as a member of a mission,⁸ and there in a lengthy conversation (as was his usual way) he had enlightened the king about what he considered to be the true background of the conflict. During this audience he had not refrained from pointing out to the king that the Counter-Remonstrants were really Puritans of a sort - a type of people with whom at that time James was rather at odds. The monarch was so shocked by this revelation that he is reported to have exclaimed: 'I am in Edinburgh, I am in Edinburgh!' Grotius worked on the king for as much as two hours, and finally managed to fool the poor man into believing that Calvin and Beza had entertained heretical opinions in the field of predestination. The king's counsellors had been brought round by Grotius, too, apart from the afore-mentioned Abbot, who kept on considering him an abominable Arminian. For these reasons it has been maintained by some scholars that after this cunning move on the part of the government, Lubbertus had every right to show the king his, that is to say the Counter-Remonstrant, side of the truth.

However - and this is something which is overlooked by those who regard the Remonstrants, especially Grotius, as the aggressors - Grotius's *démarche* had not been the first move in the game of chess being played to win the support of the English monarch. In the preface to an earlier publication of the year 1611,⁹ Lubbertus had already testified to his dissatisfaction with the ecclesiastical policy of the States of Holland. Although in this book all the details were not yet told and the readers had to guess for themselves against whom Lubbertus's torrents of abuse were directed, this will not have caused a lot of trouble for most of them. In this case, too, Lubbertus directed his eyes westward: those addressed were the council of the Dutch Protestant church in London.

Whereas Lubbertus's attack of the year 1611 had been phrased in guarded terms, this could no longer be said about the preface to the book against Vorstius. Here the States of Holland, the curators of the university, and the burgomasters of the city of Leiden were severely censured; they were accused of abusing freedom of religion in order to clear the way for heresies.

8 On Grotius's visit to James I, cf. J. den Tex, *Oldenbarnevelt*, vol. 3 (Haarlem, 1966), 284-85; 288-92.

9 *Sibrandi Lubberti De Iesu Christo servatore, hoc est cur et qua ratione Jesus Christus noster servator sit, libri quatuor contra Faustum Socinum* (In Academia Franekerana: excudebat Aegidius Radaeus, Ordinum Frisiae typographus, 1611).

Although he had already been appointed pensionary of the city of Rotterdam, Grotius once more put pen to paper in his rôle as judge advocate of the States and wrote a counterattack on Lubbertus, the *Ordinum pietas*, in full: *Ordinum Hollandiae ac Westfrisiae pietas a multorum improbissimis calumniis, praesertim vero a nupera Sibrandi Lubberti epistola quam ad reverendissimum archiepiscopum Cantuariensem scripsit vindicata per Hugonem Grotium, eorundem Ordinum fisci advocatum*,¹⁰ that is: *The piety of the States of Holland and Westfriesland, vindicated against the very base calumnies of many, but especially against the recent letter of Sibrandus Lubbertus, which he addressed to the most reverend archbishop of Canterbury, by Hugo Grotius, judge advocate of those States*. The title was as plain as day, and the contents are not to Grotius's credit, either, who willingly paraded as an irenic figure standing above the parties. After the book had been published, he indeed admitted in a letter to a friend (Gerardus Vossius) that he had been somewhat emotional when writing his book.¹¹

No one, apart from the editors of Grotius's theological writings and one or two other eccentrics, nowadays still reads *Ordinum pietas*, and that is a pity, for certainly the first part, which relates to the question of Vorstius's appointment, is worth the trouble of perusal. For one thing, one can see there that Cicero's invectives were in Grotius's mind when he wrote his tract. It is a fine sample of polemics, in which all rhetorical means to cast a slur on the opponent are applied lavishly and with a great deal of verve. The author twists quotations, repeatedly applies the device of apostrophe and does not shun the indignant exclamation. The opponent is constantly belittled as he is time and again referred to by his first name - another favorite technique of Cicero's. The second and third parts are of a much more technical nature. They concern the defense of the orthodoxy of the Remonstrants and the right of the secular government to interfere in church politics. In these parts, too, a well-balanced display of abuse against Lubbertus is found, as a result of which the attention of any reader who threatens to doze off because of the abstruse character of the argument is quickly attracted again.

Since both the date of publication of Lubbertus's book and that of *Ordinum pietas* are known, we know exactly how much time it took Grotius to write his work. It cannot have been more than two months; the author worked so fast that did not even find leisure to divide his text into paragraphs.¹² Now it is well known that Grotius was a quick worker, but taking

10 Cf. J. ter Meulen and P.J.J. Diermanse, *Bibliographie des écrits imprimés de Hugo Grotius* (La Haye, 1950) [henceforth *BG*], nos. 817-22. I am preparing a critical edition with introduction, English translation and commentary, to be published as vol. 2 of the series *Hugo Grotius, Opera theologica* (Assen-Maastricht: Van Gorcum).

11 P.C. Molhuysen, *Briefwisseling van Hugo Grotius*. Rijks Geschiedkundige Publicatiën, vol. 64 ('s-Gravenhage, 1928) [henceforth: *BW*], vol. 1: 271 no. 295 d.d. 27. x. 1613: 'Fateor me commotiorem fuisse cum scriberem....'

into account the quantity of learning which is heaped up in the work one might easily be inclined to qualify this achievement as unbelievable. Such a conclusion would, however, be incorrect. As is well known, erudition in the seventeenth century, and at any rate with Grotius, expresses itself preferably by throwing about on a generous scale quotations from authors from classical antiquity. Consequently, this is something which in *Ordinum pietas* is done unremittingly, mainly in the second and third parts, that is to say, in the major part of the text. Grotius would have had to consult a well-nigh endless series of sources if he had collected all his quotations himself, as they are from classical authors, church fathers, other early Christian authors, medieval historians and theologians, and modern authors. This would indeed constitute a superhuman performance.

However, the situation is somewhat different. With some searching it can be proved that most of these quotations had already been collected by other great scholars before Grotius and that he only had to copy them from their work. I here take as an example the third part of *Ordinum pietas*, which is about government authority in ecclesiastical matters. From the large number of authors adduced to support the argument, I might mention the early church historians, Socrates, Eusebius, Sozomenus and Evagrius, the church fathers, Athanasius and Augustine, and the medieval authors, Nicholas of Cusa, Marsilius of Padua and Gregory of Tours. Proof of wide reading, indeed. But, among all those names, there figure two modern authors, Thomas Bilson (1546/47-1616, Bishop of Winchester)¹³ and William Whitaker (1548-1595, Master of St. John's College, Cambridge).¹⁴ Upon reading their works (not one of the most pleasant occupations one can imagine), one is surprised to find that all, or at any rate almost all, quotations from the afore-mentioned earlier authors are already cited in their works. He who wishes to practice science in an objective way can try to explain this remarkable fact by means of two hypotheses: 1. in reading church historians, resolutions of councils and medieval historians and theologians Grotius hit upon exactly the same examples as his predecessors. 2. Grotius cribbed his quotations from Whitaker and Bilson. I rather like the second hypothesis.

Furthermore, it is worth remarking that the authors whose works were pillaged by Grotius (if for convenience's sake we accept this hypothesis) were both Englishmen, whose works were printed in England. Other English books are also mentioned in *Ordinum pietas*. We know that Grotius was in London in the spring of the year 1613. We may safely assume that he bought those books there. But this may almost be taken as an indication that already at that time - even before Lubbertus's book was published - he

12 Cf. *BWI*, 262 no. 283 d.d. 13. ix. 1613 to Johannes Wtenbogaert: 'Partes libelli separare et velut interiungere me scribendi properatio vetuit.'

13 *De Perpetua Ecclesiae Christi gubernatione ... liber ... primum anglice scriptus, nunc demum ab auctore Thom. Bilsono ... recognitus, auctus et ... latine redditus ...* (Londini: impensis J. Billii, 1611).

14 *Praelectiones doctissimi viri Guilielmi Whitakeri, ... in quibus tractatur controversia de conciliis contra pontificios imprimis Robertum Bellarminum, jesuitam, in sex quaestiones distributa... editae opera et cura Joannis Allenson ...* (Cantabrigiae: excudebat J. Legat, 1600).

was planning to publish something himself in the field of the authority of government in ecclesiastical matters. There is, therefore, a good possibility that - at least as far as the third part of *Ordinum pietas* is concerned - Lubbertus's actions only offered a welcome occasion which enabled Grotius to put his oar in. I do not see why the same cannot hold true for the second part, too.

At the same time as the Latin text of *Ordinum pietas*, or at any rate shortly afterwards, two translations, into Dutch¹⁵ and into French,¹⁶ were published, in order to enable a large circulation among non-Latinists. About the French translation not much can be said, but the Dutch version is surely worth our attention. It becomes clear from Grotius's correspondence that it was made by Johannes Wtenbogaert, the leader of the Remonstrants and a personal friend of Vorstius, and at the same time one of the latter's most fervent supporters. Wtenbogaert corresponded with Grotius about the translation of certain terms and phrases; one letter of his and several of Grotius's answers have been preserved.¹⁷

Still in the year 1613 (at least, that is what the title-page says, which does not prove everything), but at any rate within a short time, a reprint of the Latin text¹⁸ was published, but it was not characterized as such. The text of this edition is different in a considerable number of places from that of the first edition. The reactions to the first edition had been such that it had apparently also occurred to Grotius himself that by acting as he had done he had been pushing things too far. Instead of promoting unity the book had got across to the Counter-Remonstrants as a declaration of war. Up to that time nobody had really known Grotius for what he was: he seemed to be no supporter of Vorstius's appointment, he seemed to be not unfavorably disposed towards the Counter-Remonstrant point of view, he seemed to want to prevent an open conflict. But his pamphlet against Lubbertus put an end to all doubt: these were the words of a fierce Remonstrant and a champion of the hard line in ecclesiastical politics. A torrent of pamphlets against Grotius's work broke forth¹⁹ (one of the first to be published was by Lubbertus himself²⁰), in which he was accused of everything imaginable: quoting inaccurately, wrenching words from their context, interpreting ancient authors erroneously, misusing the authority of Melanchthon and

15 Cf. *BG* no. 823.

16 Cf. *BG* no. 824.

17 Cf. *BW* I, nos. 277, 282, 283, 285, 287, 288, 293.

18 Cf. *BG* no. 818. The title is: *Ordinum Hollandiae ac VVestfrisiae pietas Ab Improbissimis Multorum Calumniis, simulque à nupera Sibrandi Lubberti Epistola, quam ad Reverendissimum Archiepiscopum Cantuariensem scripsit, vindicata: per Hugonem Grotium, Eorundem Ordinum Fisci Advocatum* (Lugduni Batavorum: Iohannes Patius ..., Anno 1613).

19 Cf. J. ter Meulen and P.J.J. Diermanse, *Bibliographie des écrits sur Hugo Grotius imprimés au XVIIe siècle* (La Haye, 1961), nos. 227, 228, 231, 232, 235, 242, 246, 248, 255.

20 *Sibrandi Lubberti Responso ad Pietatem Hugonis Grotii* (Franequerae: Excudebat Rombertus Doyema, Anno 1614).

others, but, above all, rudeness against Lubbertus, who had been showered with invective, but who, after all, had done nothing more nor less than be honest about his own convictions.

Grotius's reaction was of a peculiar ambivalence. On the one hand he reacted to Lubbertus's answer with an anonymous pamphlet, sarcastically entitled *Bona fides Sibrandi Lubberti*²¹ (*The good faith of Sibrandus Lubbertus*), which in fierceness of imputation measured up to *Ordinum pietas* in all respects; on the other hand he still tried as far as was possible to turn the tide by publishing a new edition. The change in the tenor of this reprint is already evident from the title. Whereas the first edition mentioned 'improbissimae calumniae,' 'very base calumnies,' among which 'especially' ('praesertim') Lubbertus's letter was included, the attentive reader of the title of the second edition could not but get the impression that this letter was *not* necessarily included among the afore-mentioned 'very base calumnies,' for the word 'praesertim' had been changed into 'simulque' ('at the same time'). In the text itself, too, the edges have been more or less blunted. Here and there parenthetical clauses have been inserted, as to suggest e.g., that Lubbertus perhaps had only acted at the evil instigation of others; designations of the adversary such as 'doctor umbraticus' ('cloistered pedant'), 'noster rhetor παρατραγωδων' ('our friend the bombastic orator'), 'ridiculus professor' had been deleted; in a considerable number of places the sting had been taken out of the personal imputations by replacing the quasi-familiar designation 'Sibrandus' by 'zelotae quidam' ('certain zealots').

However, Grotius himself must have realized that the tide could not be turned anymore and that his reputation with the Counter-Remonstrants had been destroyed for good. *Ordinum pietas* marked the fiasco of his striving after unity in the Dutch church. Oldenbarnevelt and Grotius were able to maintain their ecclesiastical politics for exactly five years after *Ordinum pietas*, against an ever increasing resistance and supported by an ever declining majority in the States. Then, *das Militär* in the person of stadtholder Maurice intervened and the curtain fell for both of them. The result is well-known: the scaffold for Oldenbarnevelt and for Grotius life-long imprisonment. There were no more reprints of *Ordinum pietas* during Grotius's lifetime. A much more broadly based work on the authority of secular powers in ecclesiastical matters, *De imperio summarum potestatum circa sacra*,²² although substantially finished by 1617, was not printed during Grotius's lifetime. But that is another story.

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21 Cf. BG no. 839.

22 Cf. BG nos. 894-904. A critical edition with introduction, English translation and commentary, edited by Dr. H.-J. van Dam, will be published as vol. 3 of the series Hugo Grotius, *Opera theologica*.