

Jo Spaans

CENSORSHIP, SATIRE AND RELIGION. A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY SATIRICAL PRINT ON THE CONDEMNATION OF BALTHASAR BEKKER'S *THE ENCHANTED WORLD*

(J.A.C. van Ophem and C.H.E. Verhaar (red.), *On the Mysteries of Research. Essays in Various Fields of Humaniora*, Leeuwarden/ Ljouwert, Fryske Akademy, 2007, 273-287)

[The print discussed in this article is to be found [here](#)]

A late seventeenth-century Dutch satirical print featuring the defeat of the Devil may hardly be supposed to refer to anything other than the Bekker affair. Between 1691 and 1693, Balthasar Bekker, minister of the Reformed Church in Amsterdam, published the four volumes of his *The Enchanted World*, in which he argued that¹ the Devil had no power over humanity. The book earned Bekker undying fame. Eighteenth-century 'spectatorial' writings, and in their wake the whole of nineteenth-century historiography, revered him as the epitome of enlightened modernity and a key figure in the banishment of superstitious fears and the demise of the European witch-hunt.² His contemporaries disagreed. The Reformed Church condemned his position as unorthodox, removed him from office and denied him access to the sacrament of communion. Bekker forcefully defended himself but was eventually defeated, despite support in high places. The conflict between Bekker and the ecclesiastical authorities caused uproar throughout the Republic. At the same time, his fame spread far and wide across Europe. His book became a bestseller and was published in several translations. Bekker, however, was never reconciled with the Dutch Reformed Church, which long continued to view him as an arch-heretic.³

This *cause célèbre* produced an avalanche of pamphlets. Although the subject matter of the controversy lent itself to representation in images, such depictions were in fact very few. In this article I will discuss an example of these representations and argue that the production and sale of popular pamphlets on religious topics was a hazardous venture. Censorship limited freedom of expression, even in the relatively tolerant Republic, and criticism of ecclesiastical authorities in popular print was possible only if the artist published anonymously and shrouded his message in thick layers of allegory. Censorship was even stricter elsewhere. England, in the eighteenth century to become the cradle of the popular cartoon, in the seventeenth century produced but few satirical prints. Among those that did appear religion was a recurrent theme. All, however, supported the then current religious establishment and further used

1

² *Bekkeriana*, pp 36-41; Waardt, *Toverij*, p 258.

³ Knuttel, *Bekker*; Scheltema, *Geschiedenis*, pp 286-304; *Bekkeriana*, pp 13-14, 29-41; Fix, *Fallen Angels*.

convoluted, learned allegory as language of expression.⁴

Diabolic Battle

The later seventeenth century was a period of considerable tension within the Dutch Reformed Church but, in contrast to events that unfolded in connection with introduction of the Reformation in the later sixteenth century or the Arminian controversy at the beginning of the seventeenth, we find hardly any satirical-moralistic prints. In the period under review there were a handful only, all anonymous and highly mysterious. In shared pictorial language they comment on the internal state of the Dutch Church in the latter years of the reign of Stadholder/King William III. It may safely be assumed that these prints stemmed from 'radical Enlightenment' circles. Our print is just such a learned allegory, hiding its critical message from all but the well initiated. It bears the caption 'Diabolic BATTLE, between a SHEPHERD, a CATHOLIC Devil and a POPISH Angel. Engaged outside Isenborg, near Halverstadt'.⁵ For the sake of brevity I will confine myself to the interpretation of this one print.⁶

⁴ Miller, *Religion in the Popular Prints*, pp 15-30.

⁵ In Dutch: 'Duvels BATALJE gehouden tusschen eenen SCHAEPEHEERDER, een CATOLISCHEN Duvel, en eenen PAAPSEN Engel. Voorgevallen buten Isenborg bij Halverstadt'. Collection Rijksprentenkabinet Amsterdam, Cat. No. FM2597 [version 1676]; Museum Schielandhuis, Rotterdam, Collection Atlas van Stolk, Cat. No. 2916 and 2637 [versions dated 1676 and 1693].

⁶ These prints are the subject of my current research. For a preliminary result concerning another of these, see Spaans, 'The Alphen Pig War'.

⁷ Waals, *Prenten*, pp 12, 104-123; Klinkert, *Nassau in het nieuws*, pp 47-49.

⁸ Muller, *Nederlandsche geschiedenis*, inv. No. 2597, Vol. 1, p 394.

⁹ Visscher, *Verstooringe des Satans Ryck*.

¹⁰ Sevensma, 'Een tweetal preeken', pp 19-24; Loosjes, *Geschiedenis*, p 142, cf. Waardt, *Toverij*, p 255.

¹¹ Waardt, *Toverij*, pp 121-126 and passim; Knuttel, *Balthasar Bekker*, p 195-196, mentions foreign trials as a source of inspiration for Bekker.

¹² Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp 375-405.

¹³ Fix, *Fallen Angels*, pp 35-57.

¹⁴ Schilling, 'Confessional Europe'; Hsia, *Social discipline*.

¹⁵ Israel, *The Dutch Republic*, pp 399-477, Spijker and others, *De Synode van Dordrecht*.

¹⁶ Bruin, 'Invoering en ontvangst'; Weekhout, *Boekencensuur*, p 142; cf. 'Niets kan haar glans verdoven'.

¹⁷ Dutch title: *De vaste spyze der volmaakten*, Franeker 1670.

¹⁸ About these factions and Bekker's position in relation to them, see Kalma, 'It rampjier'.

¹⁹ Knuttel, *Balthasar Bekker*, p 340.

²⁰ [Hilarides], *Eer en deugd van de duivel*.

²¹ Fix, *Fallen angels*, pp 107-124.

²² *Verscheyde gedichten; Vervolg van verscheyde gedigten; Tweede vervolg der gedigten*. Cf. Weekhout, *Boekencensuur*, pp 216-218 for a lively impression of the production and dissemination of this kind of propaganda.

²³ Knuttel, *Balthasar Bekker*, pp 268, 302-303.

²⁴ Loon, *Beschryving der Nederlandsche historipenningen*, Vol. IV, pp 224-227.

²⁵ Palingh, *'t Afgerukt mom-aansicht*.

²⁶ Dutch title: *De Friesche Godgeleerdheid*, Amsterdam 1693, cf. *Bekkeriana*, p 22.

²⁷ Bunge, 'Eric Walten'; cf. for similar types Cools, Keblusek and Noldus, *Your Humble Servant*.

²⁸ The Hague, National Archives, Archief Hof van Holland, inv. No. 5366/14.

²⁹ Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, pp 28-29,

³⁰ Bijl, 'De tweedracht' and Sluis, 'Het omzwaaien'.

³¹ *Bekkeriana*, pp 22-23.

³² Cf. Vermij, *Secularisering en natuurwetenschap*, pp 89-96.

It shows a rustic scene, a field containing a sheepfold, far from human habitation. On the horizon may be seen roofs and steeples. It is night. A full moon illuminates a somewhat bizarre spectacle. The central figure is a shepherd, recognisable by his staff, his dog and the flock at his feet. With his staff he has just slain a demon. On closer inspection, however, the fearsome appearance of the demon is misleading. The horns, claws and wings are part of a costume disguising an ordinary man. His human ear shows from behind the mask, and instead of cloven hooves he has at least one ordinary foot clad in a rather prosaic sandal. This does not render him harmless. In his fall he has dropped a powder horn and a cartridge from their hiding place beneath his outfit, suggesting a firearm is concealed there as well.

Meanwhile, the sheepdog can be seen to be chasing an angel that seems indeed to be 'real', in the sense that it is not obviously a human in disguise. With outstretched arms and wings unfolded, the angel flees the scene of battle while the dog hangs on by his teeth to the hem of its robe. Behind the shepherd we see a covered cart with harnessed horse. The horse follows the goings-on with interest. The flock is equally unperturbed by the violence; the animals doze, one pisses copiously, while another nibbles a green leaf.

The caption presents the print as newsprint. 'Batailles', depictions of sieges and battles by land or by sea, were popular in the seventeenth-century Republic. They offered a wide audience an impression of campaigns engaged in by State armies and fleets during the incessant armed conflicts of the time, and were widely used as decoration in the home.⁷ Like newsprint, this picture gives a precise location for the action shown: 'outside Isenborg, near Halverstadt'. The caption in combination with references to Lutheranism and the use of mock German in the printed dialogue beneath the illustration suggest its reference to an incident having taken place somewhere in the German Empire.

Taken literally, the dialogue printed underneath the print suggests that what is shown is an attempt by a (real) angel, assisted by a monk dressed up as a demon, to convert the Lutheran shepherd Johan to Catholicism. The shepherd has forcefully resisted, even killed the monk. Just as the shepherd wants to bury the corpse, a sheriff happens by in the company of some monks who recognise the dead man as a member of their community. The sheriff praises the shepherd for his valiant self-defence. He orders the monks, in very anti-Catholic formulations, to remain behind the walls of their monastery, pursue their philosophical studies and indulge in drink and women rather than trying to further the hopeless cause of their faith with the dangerous help of the Devil. This somewhat ridiculous 'foreign news' forms the outermost shell of deception hiding the real meaning of the print.

All interpretations so far suggested for the print assume that it is a cartoon addressing some Dutch ecclesiastical affair. For this very reason it is included in the collections of 'historical prints' belonging to Frederik Muller and Abraham van Stolk. Previous commentators were however somewhat uncertain as to which affair might be involved here. The fact that the print comes in two versions, mirror images bearing two different dates, presents an extra complication. The version dated 1676 shows the angel fleeing to the right; the version dated 1693 has him fleeing to the left. The first date of 1676 has led to the suggestion that ecclesiastical troubles in Middelburg of

that year were the subject of the print, but this idea is hard to sustain. There is nothing to connect the Middelburg affair with angels and demons.

Current interpretation holds that the print refers to two sermons preached by Volckard Visscher, Lutheran minister of Amsterdam.⁸ On 3 November 1677 and again on 27 February 1678 Visscher preached on the subject of demonic possession. Shortly after this last sermon he died. Later in that same year, 1678, an anonymous friend of the minister published the sermons, declaring in a short preface that Visscher's sermons had aroused controversy among the congregation. As the minister could no longer defend himself, the publication of his sermons should serve to clear his name.⁹ Based on this preface it has been assumed that the sermons caused uproar among the Lutheran congregation comparable to the commotion that would erupt fourteen years later over Bekker's *The Enchanted World*. Lutheran historians even claimed for 'their' Visscher the honour of having denounced superstition in advance of Bekker.¹⁰ The idea would then be that the first version of the print appeared as a comment on Visscher's sermons and was subsequently pirated in 1693 on the occasion of Bekker's condemnation. It is, however, unlikely that Visscher caused a major disturbance among the ranks of the Lutheran congregation, as no trace whatsoever of such a thing can be found. Moreover, the sermons were preached in 1677 and 1678, and not in 1676, the year that appears on the print.

From the middle of the seventeenth century onwards the Devil became a hot topic in the Republic. Trials for witchcraft had long been abandoned, ever since the Supreme Court in 1594 ruled that it was a crime impossible conclusively to prove or disprove. This did not end popular belief in the existence and activities of witches. Accusations of harmful magic and a pact with the Devil continued even though they could no longer be brought to trial, and news about spectacular trials for witchcraft abroad also reached the Republic.¹¹ But more than any actual and widespread belief in witchcraft, it was the development of Cartesian philosophy which fuelled discussions about the Devil, demons and angels. Cartesian dualism denied that spiritual beings beside God could have power over matter. Among theologians Cartesian thinking was highly controversial — many suspecting unorthodox attitudes or worse, others welcoming it with growing enthusiasm — but not officially condemned.¹² Any minister publicly declaring his views on this matter from his pulpit could count on mixed reactions, and I assume this was the case with Visscher; but not to the extent that a market for cartoons was generated. Nowhere is any evidence to be found for Visscher having created an incident that made him the talk of the town both among co-religionists and outsiders, such as was the case with Bekker.

On closer inspection, the print and its accompanying text could present an allegory of Protestant Reformation, or even the person of Martin Luther. The bold anti-clericalism of the way in which the sheriff tells off the monks mirrors reformers' criticism of uselessness and laxity in a monastic life of theological hair-splitting wherein depraved morals have perverted godliness. Further, the caption specifies the incident depicted as a victory of the shepherd over a *Catholic* Devil and a *Popish* angel. Together it seems these two had attempted a conversion of the Lutheran Johan, an act characterised as godless and even demonic. The disguised monk and the popish angel get their just deserts.

This anti-Catholic standpoint is reinforced by the blatantly fictive name and address of the printer given at the bottom of the sheet. Martinus Glorianus, ‘Martin Triumphant’, certainly sounds like an allusion to the German reformer. The name given for the printer: ‘Munniken-druk’ can be taken to mean ‘Monk’s Press’, but also ‘monkish oppression’. The toponym ‘Isenborg near Halverstadt’ is also ambiguous. Localising an allegory is plainly absurd, but there is also no Isenborg or Ysenborgh to be found near Halberstadt. What is to be found in these environs is Eisleben, the birthplace of Luther, appositely located in the foothills of the infamous Bocksberg, where according to folklore the Devil presides over witches’ Sabbaths. The syllables ‘Eis’ en ‘Ys’ alliterate and are, respectively, German and Dutch for ‘ice’. ‘Burg’ might be taken to refer to Luther’s famous hymn.

The Luther references are a second smokescreen conjured up by the maker of the print to disguise his message. The shepherd/Luther here stands for Bekker and the Amsterdam minister is identified as another Reformer. ‘Slips of the tongue’ in the Luther metaphors achieve this identification. The angel, for instance, mentions a ‘Westphalian Beelzebub’ as the main threat to the ‘Catholic garden’, and not a Saxon professor of theology. Bekker’s father was an immigrant from Westphalia and, although this German territory was the homeland of many immigrants to the Republic, among them several theologians, there is only one who achieved fame for unmasking the Devil. Beelzebub and Balthasar even sound alike. And if the print refers to Bekker, the printer’s address of Ysenborgh may be taken to be ‘the city on the IJ’: Amsterdam.

The Affair Surrounding *The Enchanted World* and Pro-Bekker Propaganda

The commotion over *The Enchanted World* is usually explained first and foremost using the theological-philosophical method employed by Bekker. Two authorities support Bekker’s argument that the Devil has no power over man. According to the Bible, God has chained the Devil in Hell, only to emerge again for the last Armageddon at the end of Time. According to Descartes, spirit and matter do not interact (save for the human body and soul, according to special divine dispensation). Now Cartesianism, as already mentioned, was controversial, especially any mixing of philosophy and theology, or rather any use of Cartesianism in biblical exegesis and theological speculation was generally considered unacceptable. Descartes himself had rejected such application of his method.¹³

Although Bekker quotes explicitly and approvingly from Descartes, his main aim in *The Enchanted World* is to unmask as prejudice belief in the Devil and demonic possession. He is arguing that belief in demonic power over man stems from the distant pagan past and has been uncritically adopted by the Catholic Church. Modern Protestants should know better; but unfortunately even the translators of the Dutch States Translation of the Bible have proved unable to distance themselves from these heathen imaginings. In often bantering tone, Bekker upbraids the translators by showing that wherever they render ‘Satan’, ‘Devil’ or ‘demons’, it is mortal rather than spiritual opponents that are meant in the original. Angels present Bekker with less of a problem. The Bible never claims that angels have power over man, so that there is no clash here with Cartesianism. Bekker is convinced that in general where the word ‘angel’ occurs in the translation this refers to earthly messengers, or that the

term should be taken as a metaphor. He denies neither the existence of angels nor of the Devil.

Anti-Cartesians, of course, objected to Bekker's use of Descartes' system, but theologians who welcomed Cartesianism too rejected *The Enchanted World*. There was widespread awareness during the seventeenth century that the biblical text was a product of history, that it originated in a distant past and a distinctly different worldview. Theologians were long used to reading biblical passages as allegory. The so-called 'accommodation theory' held that God tailored his revelations to the intellectual capacities and imaginative powers of the people who wrote the books of the Bible. This theory allowed rational explanation of miracle stories. Bekker also used accommodation theory, but took it to what was at that time an extreme position, undermining the biblical foundations of some articles in the Dutch Confession of Faith. Within a confessional state in which the sovereign powers maintained the public Church, this was inadmissible.¹⁴

In principle the Confession of Faith could be revised, but a simple minister did not have the authority to do so. Memories of the far-reaching consequences of an earlier call for revision, in theological controversies between Arminians and Gomarists in the first decades of the seventeenth century, were still fresh in the collective memory. These troubles had led to a deep crisis both in the Dutch Reformed Church and within the Republic as a whole. In 1619 the Synod of Dordrecht had decided in favour of the Gomarist position but had not touched the text of the Confession. The Canons of the Synod had been added to the existing text as a guideline for its correct interpretation.¹⁵

Moreover, in his flippancy over the States Translation Bekker insulted a sacrosanct institution. This new translation, based on the best available Hebrew and Greek texts and ordered by the States General to be published under their authority in 1637 in the aftermath of the Arminian Controversy, was regarded as containing the unadulterated Word of God. An elaborate protocol for the correction of proofs in every new edition must guarantee a flawless text. Only duly authorised printers, in full compliance with this protocol, were allowed to print the States Translation at all. Theologians disagreeing with interpretative decisions taken by the translator in relation to specific words or passages were forcefully silenced, even when their orthodoxy was undisputed. Finally, censorship, both secular and ecclesiastical, guarded against any infringement of the text or authority of the authorised translation. This paid due reverence to divine revelation, the pure form of which it was held to contain.¹⁶

Irrespective of theological or philosophical leanings, a vast majority of the reading public judged Bekker in his bold exegeses and open critique of the translation to have overstepped the limits of the acceptable. Moreover, he had irritated the ecclesiastical authorities by publishing his book without prior inspection and authorisation by his *classis* (regional ecclesiastical board). Bekker had a history of problems with ecclesiastical censorship and on an earlier occasion had been forced to give his word never again to publish without its consent.

This earlier incident had taken place in Friesland, where Bekker's career began. Between the years 1670 to 1675, his *Solid Food for Secure Believers*, a catechism for

adults,¹⁷ was alternately censored and approved several times by the Theological Faculty of Franeker and several ecclesiastical committees. This bizarre procedure can be explained against the backdrop of fierce rivalry between regent factions, resulting in swings in ecclesiastical patronage.¹⁸ Bekker cherished an ambition to become professor in Franeker, for which he needed the protection of powerful regents. He had such patrons, but he had enemies as well, and in the end these got the upper hand and he had to leave Friesland. His sponsors were, however, successful in helping him into a prestigious position as a minister in Amsterdam. His doctorate, combined with this political support, meant Bekker felt strong enough to snub the classis and its censorship and he published *The Enchanted World* without prior approval. Presumably he felt he had nothing to fear from the rural delegations in the classis. These usually proved powerless against Amsterdam, which with its thirty highly qualified ministers and distinguished elders alone wielded more theological and church-political clout than any classis.

The opposition mobilised against *The Enchanted World* by classes and synods throughout the country was directed both against Bekker's controversial use of Cartesian philosophy and his abuse of the Bible. Undoubtedly they also sought revenge for the insolence with which he had wrested support from his Amsterdam consistory despite their recurrent doubts concerning his orthodoxy. In his own defence, Bekker consistently deflected attention from his unconventional exegesis, arguing with an impressive show of erudition that his Cartesianism served sincere pastoral concerns and did not contradict the Confession of Faith. Despite some initial success, however, he eventually lost his case.

As in Friesland in the 1670s, Bekker's patrons were just not mighty enough. But they were strong enough to save him from falling very far. The Amsterdam burgomasters who had warmly supported his appointment to their city continued payment of his salary after he was deposed from office, and even boycotted the appointment of a successor to take his place. A circle of friends said to number hundreds asked Bekker to minister to them in private services, a request he resolutely refused. Instead he published a collection of sermons for this audience.¹⁹

A few pro-Bekker pamphlets appeared, mostly anonymously. They represented a tiny minority portion of the overwhelmingly negative publicity surrounding *The Enchanted World*. One of these pamphlets includes a print showing a bust of Bekker mounted on a sturdy column. At the foot of the column we see a representation of Hell, in the form of a steaming and presumably reeking dunghill in the unwholesome depths of which lies the Devil in chains. The prejudice fought by Bekker is depicted as a clump of poppy heads spreading a soporific odour that mingles with the noxious vapours from the midden. According to the explanatory text this scene illustrates how Bekker's reasoning overcomes delusions of demonic activity produced by stupidity and ignorance.²⁰ The pamphlet, which simply corroborates Bekker's opinion, is the only one that bears the name of its author: Johannes Hilarides, vice-rector of the Latin school in Dokkum. Most pro-Bekker pamphlets were even more radical than *The Enchanted World* itself.²¹

Poems in praise of Bekker were written in larger numbers than pamphlets, and most of these too are anonymous. We may assume they initially circulated orally and in

manuscript. Some are set to popular tunes, suggesting they were meant for singing. This was a well-known way to evade censorship. Nobody knew the origins of such songs and they could be sung in a tavern or in some merry company who, when challenged by the authorities, could always claim drunkenness and ignorance of the contents. Satiric verse was a not uncommon form of critical commentary. Enough was produced on the commotion surrounding *The Enchanted World* to fill three volumes, and demand was apparently lively enough to interest a printer.²²

Apart from pamphlets and doggerel, commemorative medals were struck on Bekker and his book. All feature a portrait of Bekker on one side and on the other either a short poem or an allegorical picture. The rhymes praise Bekker as a champion of reason over superstition and as a martyr to the cause of correct reading of Scripture — to the outrage of the Amsterdam Reformed consistory.²³ There are no recorded reactions to the pictures on the other medals. Possibly these were less widely distributed and attracted less attention. On two we find references to the Amsterdam magistracy, which had not yet withdrawn its protection over Bekker; this reference may also be a reason for the lack of objection to these medals. Another shows the True Church, personified as a woman with Bekker's book under her left arm, in her right hand a double-tailed flail with which she threatens a fire-breathing monster. The whip ends each carry a star, representing the twin lights of natural reason and divine revelation. Next to her lie two crossed palm-leaves encircled by a snake biting its own tail: a symbol of eternal glory. Another medal shows a personification of Truth carrying two keys in his hand, an All-seeing Eye above his head. He is resting on a book, presumably again *The Enchanted World*, which is lying on a pillar. Two smaller figures symbolising the common people pursue little flying devils with raised arms. A fifth medal shows Bekker dressed as Hercules defeating a two-headed monster with a club while Envy, a woman with serpentine hair, wrings her hands in the background.²⁴

The Diabolic Battle as a Commentary on Bekker

The commotion surrounding *The Enchanted World* thus generated more than enough general interest to create a market for satirical prints. Our print of the Diabolic Battle appears to be one example. The central motif is the defeated demon; that is, not the Devil himself but a man in disguise. Here we find key arguments from Bekker's *The Enchanted World*, as his contention is that the real Devil lies chained in Hell and that where the translators of the Bible render 'Devil' the original text actually refers always to human opponents. The disguised monk is about to have his mask removed: an undoubtedly conscious allusion to the earlier work of Abraham Palingh, *Witchcraft Unmasked*, explicitly quoted by Bekker. Palingh argues in this book that phenomena commonly blamed on witches and demonic possession always turn out to be no more than deceitful trickery.²⁵

The shepherd, of course, stands for Bekker himself. Ministers are shepherds of their congregations. The angel pursued by his dog is real; so real that the dog can sink his teeth into it. It is a messenger of flesh and blood as, according to Bekker, were those messengers designated 'angels' by the translators. Because he does not deny the existence of angelic spiritual beings, the angel is depicted as 'real'. Here it stands for the States Translation that, after all, relays the Word of God to mankind. Bekker

denounces belief in the influence of the Devil and biblical literalism as essentially Catholic. Where Rome declared the Latin Vulgate to be the authoritative Bible, Luther had provided a more accurate vernacular version. In his turn, Bekker was purifying the Dutch States Translation from prejudices based on pagan and Catholic error. This is why the caption of the print describes the angel as ‘popish’. All the associations with Luther in this print point out that Bekker in his *The Enchanted World* now completes the Reformation initiated by the German reformer.

Amongst the flock at the shepherd’s feet we find both sheep and goats. This is a usual representation of mankind, or the Church, as a mixed company of the righteous and the unrighteous. At the Last Judgement these will be separated, the sheep destined for heaven, the goats for Hell. The sheep are quietly dozing. The goats, those churchmen who opposed Bekker, are more active; one is pissing copiously whilst another nibbles a green leaf, suggesting envy and greed. The horse and covered cart appear on almost all the contemporary satirical prints that address religion. The depiction is of a rubbish or ‘night soil’ cart. This motif is best known from prints on the expulsion of the Arminians in 1619, in which they are shown leaving for exile in just such a shameful and smelly conveyance. In our print, the rubbish cart stands idle: Bekker’s opponents may have banned him from the Church but he did not have to leave Amsterdam.

Thus most elements of the print may be read as a commentary on the Bekker case. A few conundrums remain. Why the two mirror-image versions dated 1676 and 1693? The latter date does not coincide with the final verdict against Bekker, which was delivered by the North Holland Synod in 1692. In 1693 his *Frisian Divinity* was published, in which Bekker looked back upon the troubles he had had in that province in the 1670s and which, with hindsight, had found a sequel in the affair surrounding *The Enchanted World*.²⁶ But why also a version dated 1676? And why does the print suggest the fake Devil carrying a gun beneath his outfit? The nocturnal setting is also curious, especially in combination with the printed dialogue: why would a sheriff walk around at night with a couple of monks? Wouldn’t it have been more logical to have the Devil unmasked in plain daylight?

It would help if we knew who was the maker of this print, or what was its intended audience. Nothing can be said with any certainty about this. The ‘message’ of the print suggests that both maker and audience belonged to the ‘radical Enlightenment’. A key figure in these circles was Ericus Walten, a German immigrant whose claims to degrees in theology, philosophy, law and medicine were dubious but who was demonstrably widely read: a polyglot and able communicator.²⁷ He was arrested in 1694 for blasphemy. We know he was the author of several pamphlets in defence of Bekker, but papers confiscated by the Provincial Court of Holland at the time of his arrest show that he did more than write. He organised production and distribution of the medals carrying Bekker’s portrait, both the textual and the pictorial, struck by silversmith Johannes Smeltzing of The Hague and later by his widow. It was through Walten that a number of booksellers and other sympathisers were supplied each with small numbers of medals in several sizes and made of lead or silver, the latter only by special order.

Walten was also interested in cartoons. Among his papers is a drawing intended as a draft for a print. We see the enchanted world: a globe upon which the devil sits

enthroned. Various types of cleric support his throne. He lulls the entire world to sleep, sprinkling it with poppy seed. Bekker stands aside, holding a telescope, implying that he alone is alert and far-sighted enough to see the Devil for what he really is. There is no print known to have been made from this design. The drawing had been sent to Walten by the unknown artist with the suggestion that he write some accompanying verse and have it printed. Walten was well known to have the ability, the means and the motive to accomplish all of this.²⁸

But like many of his contacts within the radical Enlightenment, Walten himself held ideas more radical than those of Bekker. If the print of the Diabolic Battle indeed stems from and was intended for Walten's circle, its message may be expected to be equally radical. The shepherd/Bekker vanquishes belief not only in dark powers but also in the ecclesiastical establishment, which had defeated him in the classis and the synod. This did not of course reflect reality, but wishful thinking, a dream, or as dreams were called at that time a 'night apparition'; the Dutch word *nachtgezicht* is often used in the titles of satirical pamphlets playing on unreal hopes or fears. This would explain the nocturnal setting of the Diabolic Battle. The secret weapon hidden beneath the clothing of the disguised monk/Devil/ecclesiastical establishment might then signify the political protection enjoyed by anti-Cartesians at the time.

This in turn might lie behind the mirrored double-image and the two dates. The years 1676 and 1693 can be explained as two turning points in factional rivalries in politics and within the Reformed Church during the reign of Stadholder William III. At his accession to power the Stadholder had skilfully exploited existing differences of opinion concerning both the best form of government for the Republic and the direction to be taken by Reformed orthodoxy. Dominating politics after the death of Stadholder William II in 1650 was the so-called 'Loevestein' view, which held that the Republic should be structured upon decentralised government, power lying in the hands of local regents. In the Church the Coccejans advocated a switch from theology based on Aristotelian thought to development of Reformed orthodoxy by means of contemporary philosophies and biblical scholarship. When in 1672, the 'Year of Disaster' in which England, France, Munster and Cologne jointly declared war on the Republic, a *coup* brought to power William III he overturned the entire establishment. Riding on a wave of support from those who saw advantage in more centralised organisation under the States General and a stadholder from the House of Orange, he intervened in Church affairs in favour of the Aristotelian, Voetian school of theology. These policies caused deep divisions in what now coalesced to form religio-political parties.

The changing climate led in 1676 to formal condemnation of Cartesio-Coccejan theology at the University of Leiden. Abraham Heidanus, professor of theology, successor to Coccejus on his death in 1669 and a protagonist of his school, was deposed from office in 1676.²⁹ The same year William III intervened spectacularly in the Reformed church of Middelburg, preventing the appointment of Coccejan Willem Momma, deposing prominent minister Johannes van der Waeyen and replacing political opponents in the local magistracy with Orangists.³⁰ It can hardly be a coincidence that in that very same year the provincial authorities (*Gedeputeerde Staten*) in Friesland declared Balthasar Bekker forever unfit for a position at Franeker University.³¹ In 1676 the Orangist-Voetian faction reigned supreme.

By 1693, however, the tide was on the turn. Bekker's deposition the previous year had been a new victory for Orangist-Voetian strongholds like Utrecht, Middelburg, Groningen and Rotterdam. But victory was short-lived. The burgomasters of Amsterdam had to accept the ecclesiastical procedures against their minister, but continued to pay his salary and denied the consistory its request to appoint another minister in his place. Resisting pressure from the provincial synods, the States of Holland refused to prohibit publication of *The Enchanted World*. The Voetians still had influence but the political backing they had enjoyed from Orangist regents was rapidly fading.

In 1694 the States of Holland would rule that henceforth all theological polemic between Coccejans and Voetians was forbidden and the parties were to tolerate each other. Since his accession to the English throne Stadholder/King William III had become more interested in the international balance of power. On the Dutch political stage he made attempts to pacify the factional strife he had fuelled two decades earlier and which had caused fierce turmoil in politics and in the public Church. By 1693 it must have become obvious how Pyrric had been the victory of the Voetians over Bekker and that their hegemony, so unassailable in 1676, was over. 'Prejudice' (meaning one-sided hegemony), of whatever theological colour, was banished from the public sphere in favour of more 'reasonable' Christianity. This may not have been the outcome envisaged by Bekker, but it fitted the agenda of the radical Enlightenment.³²

Conclusion

Where does all of this lead us? First, towards the decoding of a somewhat mysterious print, one that has so far defied satisfactory interpretation. The anonymity of the print, the intended obscurity of its meaning and the lack of external indications as to possible maker(s) and audience mean that my interpretation must remain somewhat hypothetical. It does, however, fit the political situation and the religious climate of the period. And if I have got its message right, this print sheds new light on the Bekker affair. Patronage, envy and greed within the context of power struggles pervading political and ecclesiastical establishment during the reign of William III come to feature more prominently than does rivalry between philosophical schools, or Bekker's opposition to the witchcraft craze and allied superstitions. It is precisely this political aspect which explains the mysteriousness of the image. In my interpretation, the hidden message of the Diabolic Battle is denouncement of the ecclesiastical authorities, that ousted Bekker from his pulpit, and of the political authorities that tried to quell the turbulence of the 1670s and 1680s, not by resolving these conflicts but by declaring them over and irrelevant. This was the kind of criticism that was silenced within the Republic, as everywhere, by censorship.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bekkeriana. Balthasar Bekker biografisch en bibliografisch, ed. Jacob van Sluis, Leeuwarden, Fryske Akademy, 1994.

Bijl, M. van der, De tweedracht van voetianen en coccejanen in politiek perspectief, (The Discord between Voetians and Coccejans in Political Perspective), in: Broeyer,

- F.M.G., and Wall, E.G.E. van der (eds.), *Een richtingenstrijd in de gereformeerde kerk. Voetianen en coccejansen 1650-1750*, Zoetermeer, Meinema, 1994, pp 74-94.
- Bruin, C.C. de, Invoering en ontvangst van de Statenvertaling (Introduction and Reception of the States Translation), in: *De Statenvertaling 1637-1937*, Haarlem, De Erven Bohn, 1937, pp 51-83.
- Bunge, Wiep van, Eric Walten (1663-1697): an Early Enlightenment Radical in the Dutch Republic, in: Bunge, Wiep van and Klever, Wim (eds.), *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700*, Leiden, Brill, 1996, pp 41-54.
- Cools, Hans, Keblusek, Marika and Noldus, Baldeloch (eds.), *Your Humble Servant: Agents in Early Modern Europe*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2006.
- Fix, Andrew, *Fallen Angels. Balthasar Bekker. Spirit Belief and Confessionalism in the Seventeenth-Century Dutch Republic*, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999.
- [Hilarides, Johannes], *Eer en deugd van de duivel (The Honour and Virtue of the Devil)*, (1691) [Knuttel 13715].
- Israel, Jonathan I., *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness and Fall 1477-1795*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Israel, Jonathan I., *Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.
- J.J. Kalma, J.J., 'It rampjier en de dûmnys' (The Position of the Reformed Ministers in the Year of Disaster 1672), in: Kalma, J.J. and Vries, K. de (eds.), *Friesland in het rampjaar 1672. It jier fan de miste kânsen*, Leeuwarden, Fryske Akademy, 1972, pp 144-174.
- Klinkert, Christi, *Nassau in het nieuws. Nieuwsprenten van Maurits van Nassaus militaire ondernemingen uit de periode 1590-1600 (Nassau in the News. Newsprint on Maurice of Nassau's Military Campaigns)*, Zutphen, Walburg Pers, 2005.
- Knuttel, W.P.C., *Balthasar Bekker. De bestrijder van het bijgeloof (Balthasar Bekker: the Battle Against Superstition)*, 's-Gravenhage, Martinus Nijhoff, 1906.
- Loon, Gerard van, *Beschryving der Nederlandsche historipenningen (Catalogue of Dutch Commemorative Medals)*, 4 dln., 's-Gravenhage, Christiaan van Lom et al, pp 1723-1731.
- Loosjes, J., *Geschiedenis der luthersche kerk in de Nederlanden, (History of the Lutheran Church in the Netherlands)*, 's-Gravenhage, Nijhoff, 1921.
- Miller, John, *Religion in the Popular Prints 1600-1832*, Cambridge, Chadwyck-Healey, 1986.
- Muller, Frederik, *De Nederlandsche geschiedenis in platen. Beredeneerde beschrijving van Nederlandse historieplaten, zinneprenten en historische kaarten*,

(*Dutch History in Prints. Catalogue of Dutch Historical and Allegorical Prints and Historical Maps*], four volumes, Amsterdam, Muller, 1863-1882.

'Niets kan haar glans verdoven'. 350 jaar bijbel in Statenvertaling, ('Nothing can Mar the Splendour'. 350 years States Translation), ordrecht, Gereformeerde Bijbelstichting, 1987.

Palingh, Abraham, *'t Afgerukt mom-aansicht der toverye. daar in het bedrogh der gewaande toverye ontdekt, en met gezonde redenen (...) aangewezen wort*, (*Witchcraft Unmasked, in which it is Demonstrated with Good Sense that what is Commonly Held to be Witchcraft is Nothing More than Deception*), Haarlem, Jan Rieuwertz, 1659.

Rijn, G. van, *Atlas van Stolk. Katalogus der Historie-, Spot- en Zinneprenten betrekkelijk de Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, (*Catalogue of Historical, Satirical and Allegorical Prints Concerning the History of the Netherlands*), ten volumes, Amsterdam, Muller, 1895-1931.

Scheltema, Jacobus, *Geschiedenis der heksenprocessen. Eene bijdrage tot den roem des vaderlands*, (*History of the Witch-hunt: A Contribution to the Glory of our Fatherland*), Haarlem, Vincent Loosjes, 1828.

Schilling, Heinz, 'Confessional Europe', in: *Handbook of European History 1400-1600, Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, Vol. II: Visions, Programs and Outcomes, ed. Thomas A. Brady, Heiko Oberman, A. and Tracy, James D., (eds.), Leiden, Brill, 1995, pp 641-681.

Sevensma, T.P., 'Een tweetal zeventiende-eeuwsche preeken tegen het bijgeloof', (Two Seventeenth-century Sermons Against Superstition), *Het Boek*, second series, 1 (1912) pp 19-24.

Sluis, J. van, 'Het omzwaaien van Johannes van der Waeyen', (The Realignment of Johannes van der Waeyen), in: Broeyer, F.M.G. and Wall, E.G.E. van der (eds.), *Een richtingenstrijd in de gereformeerde kerk. Voetianen en coccejansen 1650-1750*, Zoetermeer, Meinema, 1994, pp 95-103.

Spaans, Joke, 'The Alphen Pig War', in: W. van Asselt, P. van Geest, Müller, D. and Salemink, T. (eds.), *Iconoclasm and Iconoclasm: the Struggle for Religious Identity*, Leiden, Brill (in press).

Spijker, W. van 't (ed.), *De Synode van Dordrecht in 1618 en 1619*, Houten, Den Hertog, 1987.

Tweede vervolg der gedigten, &c., so voor, als tegen het boek genaamt de betoverde werelt, (*Second Sequel to an Anthology of Poems For and Against the Book 'The Enchanted World'*), N.p. n.d. [Knuttel 13901].

Vermij, Rienk H., *Secularisering en natuurwetenschap in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw: Bernard Nieuwentijt*, (*Secularisation and Natural Science in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Bernard Nieuwentijt*), Amsterdam, Rodopi, 1991.

Verscheyde gedichten, so voor, als tegen het boek genaamt: de betoverde weereld, (An Anthology of Poems For and Against the Book 'The Enchanted World'), N.p. 1691. [Knuttel 13725].

Vervolg van verscheyde gedigten, &c., so voor, als tegen het boek genaamt de betoverde werelt, (Sequel to An Anthology of Poems For and Against the Book 'The Enchanted World'), N.p. 1692. [Knuttel 13900].

Visscher, Volkhard, *Verstooringe des Satans Ryck. Voorgesteld in twee predikatiën (...), (Two Sermons on the Disruption of Satan's Empire)*, Amsterdam, Joh. van Someren, 1678 [UBA 396 G 16/8], reprint. Amsterdam, Jan Rieuwertz, 1691 [Knuttel 13710].

Waals, Jan van der, *Prenten in de Gouden Eeuw. Van kunst tot kastpapier, (Prints in the Golden Age: Between Art and Decorative Paper)*, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 2006.

Waardt, Hans de, *Toverij en samenleving, (Witchcraft and Society). Holland 1500-1800*, Den Haag, Stichting Hollandse Historische Reeks, 1991.

Weekhout, Ingrid, *Boekencensuur in de Noordelijke Nederlanden. De vrijheid van drukpers in de zeventiende eeuw, (Censorship in the Netherlands. The Freedom of the Press in the Seventeenth Century)*, Den Haag, Sdu Uitgevers, 1998.