

BoonBerichten

Nieuwsbrief van het Louis Paul Boon Genootschap
nummer 160, mei 2021

Het Geuzenboek van Louis Paul Boon is tot op heden niet verschenen in een andere taal. Frank Vlaeminck werkt aan een Engelse vertaling en is intussen op zoek naar een uitgever. Wij publiceren een voorproefje van zijn vertaling in deze Boonberichten.

Frank Vlaeminck:

“Ik moet zowat veertien geweest zijn toen ik voor het eerst een werk van L.P. Boon in handen kreeg en hij heeft me sedertdien nooit meer losgelaten. Dat was een leeftijd waarop ik zowat alles las wat passeerde, maar natuurlijk bleef lang niet alles hangen. Maar met Boon kom je dikwijls niet ongeschonden uit de strijd...

In *Het Geuzenboek* injecteert Boon de vaak stoffige vaderlandse geschiedenis van de vervlogen schooldagen met een grote dosis zelden fraaie menselijkheid. De vileine motieven van potentaten en geestelijke gezagsdragers worden blootgelegd in al hun kleingeestigheid, dwars op de officiële geschiedschrijving. Machtswellust, bezitsdrang en geilheid doen voor het eerst hun intrede in het leslokaal. De definitieve geschiedenis van de geuzenstrijd zal het allicht niet zijn, daarvoor zijn er teveel actoren, teveel perspectieven en teveel complexiteit in dit drama, maar wat een verademing was het om deze indrukwekkende poging tot een geschiedenis op en naar mensenmaat te kunnen lezen.

Met een monumentaal werk als *Het Geuzenboek* verdient een rasverteller van het kaliber L.P. Boon ook buiten het eigen taalgebied gelezen te worden. En aan de andere kant van het water wacht ons de vraag met welk recht wij de Engelstalige wereld dit meesterwerk zouden ontzeggen.”

Over zijn passie voor het Engels laat hij weten:

“Het Engels is er om zo te zeggen met de paplepel in gegaan. In mijn vroege tienerjaren lagen D.H. Lawrence en Ch. Dickens samen met *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* op de keukentafel. Na alle onbekende woorden - één of meerdere in elke zin! - te hebben opgezocht was het dan verder aan mij om daar de voor de auteur zinvolle betekenis aan te verbinden. Hersengymnastiek. Literatuur in een vreemde taal maakte deel uit van de ontdekkingen van de wonderjaren zeg maar. Dat ben ik steeds blijven vasthouden. Later is Engels altijd een belangrijke rol blijven spelen, zowel professioneel als in mijn privéleven.”

De opgenomen illustratie van Inez Michiels maakt deel uit van een serie waar we in een volgend Boonbericht nader op in zullen gaan.

LOUIS PAUL BOON

THE GEUZEN BOOK

Extract from Book 1 chapter 2 Munster, God's realm of the Anabaptists

translation Frank Vlaeminck

illustration Inez Michiels

THE LUTHERAN PEASANTS FROM SWABIA AND Tyrol had allowed themselves to push the pope of Rome from his throne and replace him with their own Luther. Because Luther was merely a transitional figure if the truth be told, a man the German princes made use of to curtail Roman power. Many had embraced death on his behalf and still he had only introduced a new dogma to replace the old one that fundamentally remained the same. And supported by money and power he began hurling about his bans like a new pope. The peasant rebellion in Germany was proof, however, that the time was becoming right for something that had to chase off all rotten values. And from the Lutherans, who were just as conservative as the Romans, the Sacramentalists were the first to rise, and after them the Anabaptists or Reformers. They were tired of seeing many schemers farm out God's Realm in the Hereafter and wanted to see this Realm of God created closer to earth. And the first who spoke of this, the Anabaptist Felix Manz, had his head held under water in Zurich until he drowned. The Lutherans were killed by the Romans through the fire of the pyre and meanwhile the Lutherans drowned the Anabaptists in the water of their new baptism. And so these Reformers who wanted to live in a communion of shared possessions and have free sexual relations roused general dismay, and they were even more ruthlessly exterminated than the Lutherans, like swine possessed by the devil.

The little and forever with their lives paying people were still reading Luther's writings, sought comfort in the bible, but became aware that this new pope of the Reformation could offer no solution. And here and there they started to follow the Sacramentalists, while the most desperate and embittered had themselves baptised again so that cleansed from the rottenness of this world they could start life in a communist society. In Holland, still sufficiently remote to escape Charles' vengeful hand, the Sacramentalists formed their new communities and held their meetings of men and women in secret.

It was the eighteenth of the month of March of the year 1528 when Brechtje Lambrechts was arrested for organising in her house a meeting of men and women who no longer recognised the pope, nor saw Luther as a way out. And Southland skipper Willem Gieleszoon constantly ferried his ship from Zeeland to Brabant and Flanders, dropped anchor on arrival and invited to come on board and pray with him all who considered themselves Sacramentalists.

And in Amsterdam too a number of citizens who had shown contempt for the Holy Sacrament were arrested and for punishment their tongues were pierced with an iron, and in this state they were publicly exhibited. And they also burned Hillebrand van Zwolle who had declared the sacrament ordinary bread. In Rome drunken prelates offered communion, shamelessly blurting out: "Bread thou art and bread thou shalt remain." But in Amsterdam honest people paid with their lives because they no longer wanted to accept this fraud. And convicted together with Hillebrand van Zwolle in Delft and Haarlem were David Jorisz. and Jan Matthysen, and feeling the hate burn in their hearts they afterwards became Reformers, ready to overthrow this whole rotten stinking world. And the same happened in Dordrecht to the simple cordwainer Cornelis Wouters who distributed writings he himself composed. He too paid with his life, but all of this blood made the soil in the Netherlands all the more fertile for the all conquering new.

THE HAY MONTH OF THE YEAR 1529 HAD ARRIVED as Charles the Fifth embarked in Barcelona on a journey by sea to Genoa. He was about to turn thirty and almost no day went by without his confessor having to reprimand him for his bouts of lethargy, indecisiveness, and not knowing what to want. In contrast there were equally fierce episodes of ambition and, exceeding anything else, limitless greed. One day he would chase his target stubborn like a mule, only for the next to sit still, wan, ill and unhealthy, with a hanging lower lip and dull eyes staring into a void. Still, his appetite for women and feasting and carousing remained. In his unbridled gluttony he devoured unlikely amounts of meat and fish. On board the ship for Genoa he threw away the gnawed chicken legs and continued by gobbling up dishes of frogs' legs and fried eel with one eye already on pastries and fruit and pies. All this was his diabetes playing tricks on him, but he did not know.

Meanwhile his ships were making for Genoa when surely everybody had advised him not to leave Spain to his niece and spouse Isabella in those days. They dropped anchor in the harbour and from there the journey continued to Rome where he was to receive the iron crown of the kings of Italy and subsequently the golden crown of the holy Roman Empire. Four hundred soldiers took up positions to protect him and two thousand Spaniards with their

cannon were stationed at the Piazza della Signoria. And still the bridge he had to cross to go from the town hall to San Petronia collapsed. But if it was to be considered an attempt on his life, then their trouble was wasted. The bridge imploded just short of his heels.

He had himself crowned then according to the rite, ordained with the Diaconal tunic and an eye-blinding gown adorned with pearls, rubies and diamonds. Pope Clement the Seventh celebrated mass for him and as Christ's city holder on earth offered him sceptre and crown. "I swear to be and to remain the loyal defender of the one and true Roman Church". They then embraced each other, the Holy Father and the Sovereign of Europe, and when both trod under the same baldachin "these two brightest lights in the world shone simultaneously, like the sun and moon in the same sky".

In Spain his niece Isabella ruled, and in Flanders and Holland his aunt did. As a widow still dressed in black and praying her rosary like a nun, Margaret negotiated a provisional peace with France called the Ladies' Peace, as it was reached between herself and the mother of the king of France. They swapped among themselves like two old garrulous aunts over a piece of pie. Francis' mother received Burgundy and in return she revoked any claim to the Southern Netherlands, Artesia and Cambrai, Tournai and Lille, Douai and Orchies. And Friesland, Utrecht, Overijssel, Drenthe, Groningen and Zuthphen were all to be annexed. In this way two old aunties divided the European pie and decided on life and death of peoples. And to commemorate this peace between two biscuit nibbling ladies the "Chimney of the Franc" was erected in Bruges.

But the peace was useless to the people, after dividing the pie Margaret ruled at will over the lands of the Flemish, the Dutch and Walloons, and she could focus more than ever on persecuting all of those who, unlike her, did not count their rosary beads. Because of the too guilty behaviour of inquisitor Frans van der Hulst, who had not hesitated making up indictments, forging testimonies and eliciting fake confessions under torture and duress, she had been forced to intervene. The more so after he had accused the knight Joos de Backere of heresy, had his tongue pierced and, with the permanent stigma of the red crucifix sown to the sleeve, sent him off to Rome on a foot journey as penance. Up to that moment only the commoners had been convicted, the poor and needy, and nobody had bothered about them, yet now the knights grumbled, for one of their own kind had been taken by the Inquisition. And Margaret allowed van der Hulst to leave the country with impunity, so that he might secretly request Charles V and Clement VII to appoint new inquisitors, and to do so with haste.

So it came to pass that Oliver Buedens, the dean of the church of Saint-Martin in Ypres, was recommended for Flanders, and for Brabant and

Holland it was Jan Coppin, the deacon of the church of Saint-Peter in Leuven. Both had already delivered samples of their handiwork. Jan Coppin, the deacon, had informed on almost one hundred people, half of which climbed the pyre, the other half taking the road to exile. And in The Hague then Jan Wadden and two of his friends were roasted over a slow burning fire for being field conventiclers, and Adrian Brouwer was thrown alive in a dung pit and covered with straw and lime.

But the pope wanted more and wanted worse and he appointed the archbishop De la Marcke to Inquisitor General for the entire Netherlands. Charles too interfered, and approving of his aunt's choice he confirmed her candidates under De la Marcke. And for Hainaut and its surroundings he had furthermore appointed Nicolas Houseau, the prior of the schools in Mons. And more, to encourage people to inform on heretics the emperor promised half of the possessions to the informants as long as the amount did not exceed hundred pounds Flemish sterling. If the property amounted to more then it would be his due and the informers received a different reward. And so in Flanders and Brabant, Hainaut and Liège they started to accuse everyone they envied for their modest wealth or to get to their wives or young daughters, or to get their hands on their houses and their possessions.

So winter approached and one after the other snow shower came down, and hundreds of people died from the sweating sickness that came from England through the port of Antwerp and infected the entire Flemish territory. And famine was king in the Walloon region. In the land around Liège they saw whole flocks of emaciated people, like black crows in the snow, swaddled in their rags of clouts and hollow-cheeked with the madness of hunger in their eyes. Then they rebelled, yet not only on account of the hunger but also because of archbishop De la Marcke who tormented them even more, who arrested hundreds to behead, hang or ban them. And evening fell when against the now bluish snow they saw along the roads of Liège large processions of exiles who had to leave behind whatever meagre means they possessed. They trudged on towards Germany. And behind them the wintry trees bore strange fruit: the hanged, tied back to back, swaying in the icy wind.



They trudged on towards Germany.
And behind them the wintry trees bore strange fruit:
the hanged, tied back to back, swaying in the icy wind.

BUT AS OVER THAT SAME DENSELY FALLEN SNOW hundreds of exiles from the Liege area stumbled towards Germany, they were met by large groups of other exiles coming from Germany who hoped to either settle in the high North or the deepest South of the Netherlands. They were the universally hated Anabaptists, condemned by both the pope and Luther, who wanted to bring God's Realm on earth. On the Reichstag in Spiers their teaching had been condemned for once and for all and they fled to escape murder.

It had started innocuously enough with another of Luther's colleagues from Wittenberg, the long-bearded canon Karstadt came up with the idea that one could only be baptised in the faith, in other words when one was fully matured and underwent the baptism voluntarily. And after him came Melchior Hoffman, a furrier from Swabia, a dreamer, a zealot convinced that God's Realm on earth was about to commence. And possessed by this faith he crossed the northern countries, the Scandinavian countries, Livonia and Frisia. He preached in Strasbourg and wanted to found God's Realm, but his words were the raw language of the people, and talking of shitting on the powerful of this earth and chopping off their bollocks, he was chased off by the powers that be. After many long wanderings he arrived at Emden on the border of Germany with the high North of the Netherlands, and they listened to him and were baptised anew. His most special acolyte was the clog

maker Jan Volkerts from Hoorn, and they then founded the church of the "Allies" in Emden.

There were not only zealots and dreamers among them, but also men of action who unwittingly were fomenting insurgency and revolution. For they believed that the end of this rotten world was very near, that all evil would be destroyed and that they would enter the new Realm of God singing psalms. Not in the Hereafter, but now, today if possible. And Jan Matthyssen from Harlem and his successor Jan van Leiden brought the movement on a revolutionary course. They tried to precipitate the advent of God's Realm on earth by appealing to all of the chosen to conquer together a city where a new world of communalism had to be built. Freely and peacefully they would leave this world of sin and settle in a city that would be the New Jerusalem.

Now the rulers became suspicious, for in the innocence of these dreamers and zealots and hands-on men lurked a grave danger. If these Anabaptists grew to large numbers and peacefully conquered God's cities on earth, then the old power of pope and emperor and banker was finished. Everywhere in Germany, and foremost in Swabia where many lived who had participated in the destruction of Rome, the princes now started to persecute the Anabaptists as if these were seasoned hard criminals. The princes had paid attention to Luther and had cheered him on because he rid them of an Italian pope and because he had plucked their German jingoistic string. But the Anabaptists did not pluck any such string, they turned their backs on the world and wanted to live among themselves in communalism. And by fire and sword they were exterminated for it.

Melchior Hoffman had come from Strasbourg to hand over the brotherhood torch to Jan Matthyssen from Harlem and his successor Jan van Leiden, and in the Southern Netherlands Herman Bijstervelt arrived in Ghent. The South, however, was far more dangerous than East Frisia from where he originated and he was soon apprehended and brought to death in the Gravensteen fortress. His followers moved to Bruges, at that time still a metropolis facing the threat of its own demise, where the word of the Anabaptists was eagerly listened to. It was here that the wool shearer Hector van Dommene brought the wholly new teaching among the people. Although he too was caught and burned, his word had already opened the eyes of many and the entire municipality appeared to be infected with it. The commoners were killed and those of name and fame were banned. In secret they disappeared, to the furthest corner of Flanders, called the West-Quarter, to Armentières and Valenciennes, Tournai and Belle and Hondschoote. For there they no longer lived in the dying era of nobility and knights, of burghers and guilds, but in the new upcoming age of a ruthless industry in which they slaved in dirt and dust to turn wool into balls of yarn in return for a crust of bread. Hundreds of balls of yarn per day, thousands of balls of yarn per day they produced in ever faster tempo, to be transported to the port of Antwerp, to be distributed over the whole of Europe. And those who were exiled because of their belief found an anonymous shelter in the industrial towns of Armentières and Hondschoote - where they lived in darkness and died with their allotted crust of bread - , and became Anabaptists and wanted, weapon in hand if need be, to found their New Jerusalem.

BoonBerichten

Uitgave van het Louis Paul Boon Genootschap
Samenstelling en redactie: Erik van Veen

Bestuur Louis Paul Boon Genootschap:
Luckas Vander Taelen (voorzitter), Wim Dijkstra en Luc Geeroms
(ondervoorzitters), Herman Verlint (secretaris),
Erna De Ridder, Erik van Veen, Bert Ummelen

De Erven Boon zijn adviseur van het bestuur

Secretariaat:
Herman Verlint
Willy la Croixstraat 41, 1069 PB Amsterdam, Nederland
+31 (0)20 6100999 / +31 (0)6 45679098

mail@lpboon.net

Website: www.lpboon.net

Bankrekening: BE36068200494781 t.n.v. L.P. Boon Genootschap,
Oude Vismarkt 13, 9300 Aalst, België

Word lid van het Louis Paul Boon Genootschap!

U bent al lid vanaf € 50 per jaar
Lees [hier](#) alles over het lidmaatschap

De activiteiten van het Louis Paul Boon Genootschap worden mede mogelijk gemaakt door steun van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse Taal en Letteren (KANTL), Stichting Maria Elisa, firma Jan de Nul, Stad Aalst en Provincie Oost-Vlaanderen



Stad Aalst

provincie
Oost-Vlaanderen