

The Bottle, the Dagger, and the Ring: Church Discipline and Dutch Mennonite Identity in the Seventeenth Century

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On August 1, 1680, Mary Jans van de Heule and Pieter Melisz appeared before the elders of the Amsterdam Lamist Mennonite¹ congregation to address reports about their discordant and bad domestic life [*oneenig en slegt huishouden*], especially the rumors that the husband stayed out late on several nights. The couple did not deny the rumors, but promised that they would improve after the elders threatened to tell the rest of the brethren of their actions.² Less than two months later, Melisz appeared again and was earnestly admonished about his drunkenness and conflict with his wife, whom he had threatened with a knife and chased out of the house. The elders decided to cut off his charitable support and kicked him out of his church housing. Despite warnings they would oust him from the congregation, his behavior continued to deteriorate.³ In 1684, the board summoned him for smashing Michel Symons's head with a mug.⁴ In 1687, the elders informed the congregation that, despite previous warnings and promises of improvement, Melisz continued frequenting taverns and wasting his time.⁵ The next year,

¹ In this article, 'Mennonite' translates the Dutch word *Doopsgezind*. Following the Waterlander division of 1557, more moderate Dutch Anabaptist groups called themselves *Doopsgezinden*. In the 17th century, the stricter confessional groups who sought to remain true to the teachings of Menno Simons, like the Hard Frisians, referred to themselves as Mennonites. For more on the distinction, see Piet Visser, "Mennonites and *Doopsgezinden* in the Netherlands, 1535-1700," in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700*, ed. John D. Roth and James M. Stayer (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 313-14. When corresponding with outsiders, even *Doopsgezinden* often referred to themselves as Mennonites. See Troy Osborne, "The Development of a Transnational 'Mennonite' Identity Among Swiss Brethren and Dutch *Doopsgezinden* in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 88, no. 2 (2014): 195-218.

² Stadsarchief Amsterdam (Amsterdam City Archives, hereafter SAA) inventory 1120, item number (nr.) 174, page 193 [August 1, 1680].

³ SAA 1120 nr. 174, 231 [October 2, 1681].

⁴ SAA 1120 nr. 175, 18 [September 14, 1684]. His case went in front of the brothers, and he was cleared because of his admission of guilt.

⁵ SAA 1120 nr. 175, 51 [December 14, 1687]. Melisz denied everything.

The Conrad Grebel Review 35, no. 2 (Spring 2017): 114-150.

the board learned that he had threatened to cut his wife's throat.⁶ So, when he petitioned to rejoin the congregation in 1695, a skeptical board of elders decided that the testimonies of his improved behavior were not strong enough to re-admit him.⁷

Church Discipline and Confessional Identity

Cases like those of Pieter and Mary Jans are invaluable windows into the study of social discipline and confessionalization in the 16th and 17th centuries. During Europe's confessional age (1550-1700), Catholic and Protestant churches created institutions and programs to clarify the external boundaries between groups and to strengthen internally the Christian formation of their members. Some scholars have labeled Anabaptists as fundamentally "non-confessional,"⁸ but as they grew more enmeshed into the surrounding society, Mennonites in the Dutch Republic and northern Germany, like their Protestant and Catholic neighbors, used tools such as confessions, martyrologies, hymns, catechisms, and church discipline to instill greater devotion in members and to differentiate themselves from other denominations and other groups of Mennonites.⁹

Historians are attracted to the sources of church discipline for the access they provide into the lives of ordinary men and women. Those who were disciplined did not leave diaries or many letters, but their cases, which often include their own defenses, open a window on the majority who were the "copper coins of the Golden Age."¹⁰ In particular, disciplinary sources reveal how people lived out their reformation ideals in their daily lives. By looking at long-term patterns, historians can trace the successes and failures of reformers, Protestant, Anabaptist, and Catholic, in imposing Christian

⁶ SAA 1120 nr. 175, 53 [February 19, 1688].

⁷ SAA 1120 nr. 175, 118 [December 15, 1695].

⁸ Heinz Schilling, "Confessional Europe," in *Handbook of European History: 1400-1600*, ed. Thomas A. Brady, Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 2: 641.

⁹ For the confessional process among Hamburg's Mennonites, see Michael D. Driedger, *Obedient Heretics: Mennonite Identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona during the Confessional Age* (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002).

¹⁰ A. Th. van Deursen, *Het kopergeld van de Gouden Eeuw* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1978).

values on their members and the wider world.¹¹

Although it is never a straightforward route between official mandates and changes in identity and behavior, church discipline lay at the heart of religious reform in the 16th and 17th centuries. Changing practices in discipline inform us about changes in Mennonite identity and grant a sense of what it meant to be a Mennonite in Amsterdam.¹² By outlining how, when, and why congregations disciplined their members for drinking, sex, and violence, I will track in this essay the quantitative and qualitative changes to Mennonite discipline as their members grew more enmeshed into the surrounding culture. Comparisons with other churches' discipline will illustrate the ways that Mennonite efforts to eradicate sin in their congregations mirrored those of other Amsterdam faiths, and highlight the areas where they differed. I will also offer some initial explanations for the decline in discipline.

Amsterdam's Anabaptists

Anabaptists had gathered in Amsterdam since the 1530s. By the 17th century, there was a range of Mennonite and Anabaptist groups. The conservative Old Flemish met at the Nieuwe Zijd Achterburgwal in a building known as the "6 *Kruijkes*" (6 Jars). There were also two branches of Frisians: The conservative Jan Jacobsz group met on the Bloemstraat, and the Young Frisians met at "Noah's Ark" on the Heerengracht, one of the city's principal canals. The High German congregation also met in Amsterdam, but the location is still unknown.

¹¹ Two earlier studies of church discipline among Dutch Mennonites are A.M.L. Hajenius, "Quaet Comportement. De Tucht in de Doopsgezinde Gemeente Utrecht in de Zeventiende Eeuw," *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen Nieuwe Reeks* 23 (1997): 72-73; S. Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden: Geschiedenis van de Dopersen in de Nederlanden 1531-1675* (Hilversum and Leeuwarden: Uitgeverij Verloren and Fryske Akademy, 2000), 448-54; For Mennonite discipline in German lands, see Hans-Jürgen Goertz, "Kleruskritik, Kirchengucht und Sozialdisziplinierung in den Täuferischen Bewegungen der Frühen Neuzeit," in *Kirchengucht und Sozialdisziplinierung im Frühneuzeitlichen Europa*, ed. Heinz Schilling, vol. 16 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1994), 183-98; Driedger, *Obedient Heretics*, 75-82.

¹² For discipline among Amsterdam's Reformed congregations, see Herman Roodenburg, *Onder censuur: de kerkelijke tucht in de gereformeerde gemeente van Amsterdam, 1578-1700* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Verloren, 1990).

This present study draws from 150 years of records from the three largest Amsterdam congregations. The oldest and most moderate congregation were the Waterlanders (known as the *Toren*, or tower) of around 1,000 members, the first to record their congregational discipline in 1615.¹³ In 1668, the Waterlanders merged with the Flemish congregation (known as the church “bij ‘t Lam” (*by the lamb*) but continued to meet in separate buildings. In 1678, the two *Lamist* congregations totaled 2,639 members.¹⁴ In 1664, a dispute about the role of written confessions split the Flemish congregation, with 500 members leaving to worship at the warehouse called “The Sun” (*Zon*).¹⁵ Together, the Waterlander, Lamist, and Zonist archives contain the fullest (and essentially only) records of church life in 17th- and 18th-century Amsterdam.¹⁶

Amsterdam had a variety of Mennonite-related groups because of splits around the practice of discipline that had divided the Anabaptist movement at the end of the 16th century. It is perhaps ironic that, at the same time that Mennonites grew more intolerant of each other, they gained a degree of religious freedom and toleration in the Dutch Republic. The founding document of the Republic, the Union of Utrecht (1579), guaranteed all subjects freedom of conscience, stating that “nobody shall

¹³ W. J. (Wilhelmus Johannes) Kühler, *Geschiedenis van de Doopsgezinden in Nederland: tweede deel, 1600-1735, eerste helft* (Haarlem, 1940), 66. The Waterlander records are in two ‘Memorial’ books started by Reynier Wybrants, found in Mennonite archives at the Stadsarchief Amsterdam: SAA 1120 nr. 116, ‘Memoriael B’ and SAA 1120, nr. 117, ‘Memoriael B.’ The Waterlander records continue in SAA 1120 nr. 125, ‘Notitie van gebreckelijke litmaeten der gemeente’ and SAA 1120 nr. 123, ‘Register met verzoeken om de doop, tevens attestatieregister.’ The Lamist records are in the church board’s notes SAA 1120 nr. 173-176.

¹⁴ J. ten Doornkaat Koolman and Frits Kuiper, “Amsterdam,” Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Amsterdam_\(Noord-Holland,_Netherlands\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Amsterdam_(Noord-Holland,_Netherlands)), accessed April 15, 2015. The Lamist discipline records are found in SAA 1120 nr. 174 and 1120 nr. 175, “Notulen.”

¹⁵ Nanne van der Zijpp, “Lamists,” GAMEO <http://gameo.org/index.php?title=LAMISTS>, accessed April 15, 2015. The Zonist discipline records are housed in SAA 877 nr. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, “Notulen.”

¹⁶ Although discipline records give us a glimpse into discipline practices, scholars use them cautiously. Record keepers may not have registered all offences, and informal discipline may have occurred without being brought to the full board of elders. Judith Pollmann, “Off the Record: Problems in the Quantification of Calvinist Church Discipline,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33, no. 2 (2002): 423-26, 438.

be persecuted or examined for religious reasons.”¹⁷ The Reformed Church became the publicly recognized church (*publieke kerk*) of the young nation, but the authorities would tolerate the existence of other confessions for the sake of public concord.¹⁸

After suffering decades of persecution, Mennonites willingly accepted their secondary status in the Republic and the accommodations they received. The authorities did not force them to marry in Reformed churches but allowed them to marry in front of magistrates. Instead of serving in the military, Mennonites could perform watch duty or help build city defenses. Rather than swearing oaths, they could make a simple affirmation that sufficed as a legally acceptable alternative. While forbidden from erecting churches that might tempt the curiosity of passers-by, they could build their concealed churches (*schuilkerken*) behind the facades of warehouses or homes.¹⁹

Mennonite Identity

In her study of the socio-economic background of the Waterlander congregation, Mary Sprunger concluded that ten percent (fifty households) of the congregation would have been considered wealthy by contemporary

¹⁷ M.E.H.N. Mout, “A Comparative View of Dutch Toleration in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries,” in *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*, ed. C. Berkvens-Stevelinck, J. Israel, and G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes (Leiden, New York; Köln: Brill, 1997), 41; Willem Frijhoff and Marijke Spies, *1650: Bevochten eendracht* (Den Haag: Sdu Uitgevers, 1999), 181.

¹⁸ Willem Frijhoff, “Religious toleration in the United Provinces: from ‘case’ to ‘model,’” in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 31-37; Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), 361-67.

¹⁹ Samme Zijlstra, “Anabaptism and Tolerance: Possibilities and Limitations,” in *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), 113-114. On the cultural and social functions of concealed churches, see Benjamin J. Kaplan, “Fictions of Privacy: House Chapels and the Spatial Accommodation of Religious Dissent in Early Modern Europe,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 4 (2002): 1031-64. For the oath, see H. W. Meihuizen, “De oude dopersen en de eed,” in *Vooruitzien en terugzien. Feestbundel ter gelegenheid van de zeventigste verjaardag van H. W. Meihuizen*, ed. S. L. Verheus, D. Visser, and R. de Zeeuw (Amsterdam: Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëteit, 1976), 54-59, and Driedger, *Obedient Heretics*, 145-47.

standards. At the other end of the scale, fifteen to eighteen percent of the members (365 men, women, and children), the majority of whom lived in the Jordaan and Haarlemmerdijk sections of the city, partook of the church's poor relief in 1658.²⁰

At the other end of the economic spectrum, elites within the congregation actively participated in the commerce and trade of the Republic. The Waterlanders active in foreign trade focused their investment in the nation's "mother trade" (*moeder handel*) in Baltic grain, as well as in fishing, shipping, and industry. In addition to commercial enterprises, Mennonites were also active in the cultural world of the Republic's Golden Age. For example, Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679), the greatest poet of the period, began his literary career while a member and deacon of the Waterlander congregation. Other Mennonites became doctors, professors, artists, and patrons.²¹ It was the staggering wealth that the richest families had concentrated among themselves through inter-marriage that supplied funds for the church's active poor relief, which fed, housed, and clothed

²⁰ Mary Sprunger, "Rich Mennonites, Poor Mennonites: Economics and Theology in the Amsterdam Waterlander Congregation During the Golden Age" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1993), 36-42, 133; Mary Sprunger, "Waterlanders and the Dutch Golden Age: A case study on Mennonite involvement in seventeenth-century Dutch trade and industry as one of the earliest examples of socio-economic assimilation," in *From Martyr to Muppy [Mennonite Urban Professional]: A Historical Introduction to Cultural Assimilation Processes of a Religious Minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites*, ed. Alastair Hamilton, Sjouke Voolstra, and Piet Visser (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 1994), 135-37.

²¹ S. Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden*, 484-89; Piet Visser, "Aspects of Social Criticism and Cultural Assimilation: The Mennonite Image in Literature and Self-Criticism of Literary Mennonites," in *From Martyr to Muppy*, 10-12. For biographies of several Mennonite painters, writers, and poets, see Piet Visser and Mary S. Sprunger, *Menno Simons: Places, Portraits and Progeny* (Altona, MB: Friesens, 1996); Marijke Spies, "Mennonites and literature in the seventeenth century," in *From Martyr to Muppy*, 83-98; S.B.J. Zilverberg, "Met pen, passer en penseel: Doopsgezinde en cultuur," in *Wederdopers, Menisten, Doopsgezinden: in Nederland 1530-1980*, ed. S. Groenveld, J.P. Jacobszoon, and S.L. Verheus (Zutphen: Walburg Pers, 1981), 180-94; A.L. Broer, "Doopsgezinde schilders van vroeger en nu," *Doopsgezinde Jaarboekje* 74 (1980): 70-80; S.A.C. Dudok van Heel, "Doopsgezinden en schilderkunst in de 17e eeuw—Leerlingen, opdrachtgevers en verzamelaars van Rembradt," *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen, Nieuwe Reeks* 6 (1980): 105-23, and Piet Visser, *Broeders in de Geest: de doopsgezinde bijdragen van Dierick en Jan Philipsz* (Deventer: Uitgeverij Sub Rosa, 1988): 22-81.

the congregation's neediest members.²² However, despite members with remarkable wealth, Sprunger's careful work is a reminder that "a large majority of Amsterdam Waterlander Doopsgezinden were from the bottom half of occupational levels."²³

Mennonite Discipline

In the multi-confessional Dutch Republic, individuals could choose which confession to join and even whether to join any congregation at all. Like Catholics, Lutherans, and Reformed groups, Mennonites used sermons, printed confessions, songs, and martyrologies to shape and maintain their denominational identity and loyalty. At the end of the 16th century, most Mennonite congregations held that they had to be cleansed from any "spot or wrinkle" by disciplining offending members. The early Anabaptist desire for a visible, pure church of regenerated believers led to an emphasis on discipline as the primary mechanism of maintaining the integrity of the congregation. For Menno Simons's followers, the question was not whether to discipline members, but who should do the disciplining and how strict it should be.²⁴ Even the Waterlanders, who consistently called for a milder position on disciplinary issues than their co-religionists, disciplined their members.

In an undated and unpublished treatise on church discipline, Reynier Wybrandtz (1573-1645), an elder in the Amsterdam Waterlander congregation, composed a practice so that the "congregation would remain at peace and everyone's conscience could remain free and unconstrained."²⁵

²² Sprunger, "Waterlanders and the Dutch Golden Age," 138-40; Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden*, 465-74. For the 'mother trade,' see Jan de Vries and Ad van der Woude, *The First Modern Economy: Success, Failure, and Perseverance of the Dutch Economy, 1500-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997), 366-76.

²³ Mary S. Sprunger, "Being Mennonite: Neighborhood, Family, and Confessional Choice in Golden Age Amsterdam," in *Religious Minorities and Cultural Diversity in the Dutch Republic*, ed. August den Hollander et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 154-55.

²⁴ Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden*, 448.

²⁵ "... op dat de Gemeinte in rust, ende ijdere gemoet vrij en[de] ongeperst mocht blijuen." Amsterdam, (n.d.), SAA 1120 nr. 131, 1, "Reynier Wybrantsz, "Wat reden datmen can by brengen, daer van datmen yemandt, die beispelyck is, vermaent dat hy vande tafel des heren voor een tyt sal blijuen." For a brief biography of Wybrantsz, see N. van der Zijpp, "Wybma, Reynier Wybrantsz," in *The Mennonite Encyclopedia* 4: 998.

At the heart of discipline, Wybrantdtz understood there to be two types of ban, the greater and lesser ban.²⁶ With the greater ban, or excommunication, members “were not so much pronouncing their judgment, but God’s”²⁷ on offenders, whose actions had already separated them from God and the congregation. Excommunications occurred only for serious offenses. Among conservative Old Flemish or Hard Frisian congregations, shunning (*mijding*) was the social avoidance of excommunicated members. Other than greetings required by common courtesy, all social interaction with offenders was forbidden.²⁸ Shunning does not seem to have been practiced by any of the three large Amsterdam congregations. The social pressures of shunning would have worked more easily in the close relations of smaller villages than in the anonymity provided by the city.

Instead of shunning, Amsterdam congregations pronounced the lesser ban, which temporarily denied a person access to the communion table while maintaining membership in the congregation. The ban’s primary goal, Wybrantsz wrote, was to bring forth the shame and repentance of the offender, although the punishment might also serve as an example to warn others against sinning. Discipline, he concluded, should be administered with care in order that the sinner might repent and reconcile with the congregation.

Before communion, the ministers visited with members in their homes and the congregation heard a special preparation sermon (*proefpredicatie*). If a member’s offense was not publicly known, the elders would admonish the person privately about the need for improvement during the visitation. If the sin was publicly known, the offender had to appear in front of the church board (*collegie* or *kerkeraad*). A recalcitrant member who continued in a sinful walk would be admonished by the council to abstain from taking

²⁶ The idea of the greater and lesser ban has a longer tradition in Christian discipline. Catholic, Reformed, and Lutheran doctrines defined two different categories of major or minor excommunications or greater or lesser bans. For a brief discussion of the tradition of discipline with a focus on the Reformation debates, see Amy Nelson Burnett, *The Yoke of Christ: Martin Bucer and Christian Discipline* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 9-25.

²⁷ “Wij niet so seer onse, als wel Godts oordeel wtspraecken”: Wybrantsz, 1.

²⁸ Karl Koop, *Anabaptist-Mennonite Confessions of Faith: The Development of a Tradition* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004), 127.

communion; if he or she continued leading a wayward life regardless of continued admonition, the church council would require an appearance before the congregation (*broederschap*). At that point the offending member would be cut off completely from the congregation if the entire membership agreed.²⁹

As a correction to earlier historians of social control who emphasized a top-down structure of church discipline, historians now stress the importance of the horizontal forces of honor and shame in the discipline of the public church. In addition to the state, there were other forces for conformity, such as family, neighbors, and communion participants.³⁰ One could even go to a small claims court to defend one's honor. Dutch men protected their honor regarding financial affairs, while women guarded their sexual reputation. Lysbet Scheltes defended her honor from gossip floating about the city's crowded alleyways and chided the board of elders for believing every rumor they heard.³¹ Others risked aggravating their offense and refused to appear before the congregation because the public shame was too overwhelming.³² In a pluralistic context, honor and shame were critical to the functioning of

²⁹ SAA 565 nr. 779. This 1666 document of the Waterlander congregation *bij den Toren* records their church order as practiced from 1568 to 1651. The practice at the Flemish congregation *bij't Lam* was to proceed straight to the congregation with the announcement of censure.

³⁰ Lotte C. van de Pol, "Prostitutie en de Amsterdamse Burgerij: Eerbegripen in een vroegmoderne stedelijke samenleving," in *Cultuur en maatschappij in Nederland 1500-1850: Een historische-antropologisch perspectief*, ed. Peter te Boekhorst, Peter Burke, and Willem Frijhoff (Meppel and Amsterdam; Heerlen: Boom; Open Universiteit, 1992), 180-81; Herman Roodenburg, *Onder Censuur: De kerkelijke tucht in de gereformeerde gemeente van Amsterdam, 1578-1700* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1990), 244-54, and "Reformierte Kirchenzucht und Ehrenhandel: Das Amsterdamer Nachbarschaftsleben in 17. Jahrhundert," in *Kirchenzucht und Sozialdisziplinierung im frühneuzeitlichen Europa (mit einer Auswahlbibliographie)*, ed. Heinz Schilling (Berlin: Dunker & Humblot, 1994), 134-37. In addition to church discipline, Amsterdam residents wishing to defend their honor or to settle disagreements with neighbors could appeal to the *Banken van kleine zaken* (Small Claims Court), which worked to settle disputes between parties, the *buurtmeesters*, who supervised streets or neighborhoods, and the notaries, who also worked as middlemen in settling disputes. For a summary of the functioning of honor in the cities of the Republic, see Frijhoff and Spies, *1650: Bevochten eendracht*, 185-88.

³¹ SAA 1120 nr. 116, 46^R and nr. 125, 12^R [October 17, 1658].

³² Hans Houdtwercker, for example, claimed he was unable to face the board because of the great shame of his offense: SAA 1120 nr. 117, 47^R [August 27, 1623].

discipline. Without them, the spiritual care of the church would have had no teeth.

The church board believed it was especially important to reprimand dishonorable behavior done in public, lest it tarnish the reputation and honor of the entire congregation. Just as individuals could lose their honor in the eyes of their neighbors, ministers and elders were convinced they had to monitor the behavior of their members, lest notorious sins ruin the honor of the congregation in the eyes of the city. For example, the church had to step in when Gerret Fuiques and his wife Lysbet Scheltes grew so scandalously unpeaceful that the neighbors complained. Lysbet's struggle to control her temper threatened the congregation's collective honor, and she was commanded to refrain from communion because of the public shame.³³ In the Dutch Golden Age, one's moral reputation was valued almost the same as one's financial credit. The board maintained the solvency of the Waterlander congregation's honor by disciplining its members.

The wording of discipline records reinforces the importance of the concept of honor. In addition to transgressing against Christian notions of sin, many of the spots and blemishes for which the board disciplined members would have been offensive to nearly all upright Amsterdammers concerned with protecting their honor. Because the board was charged with overseeing the body of Christ on earth, it is not surprising that it objected to members behaving in a manner that was unchristian (*onchristelyck*). In addition, the board accused members of behavior that was improper (*onbetamelyk*) or unedifying (*onstichtelyck*). Ministers and elders chastised Isaak Vlaming, an elderly man who had dishonored a widow, for behavior that fell into all three categories.³⁴ Members were also commonly brought before the church for dishonorable (*oneerlyk*) behavior, like that of Annetie, who had an affair with another woman's husband;³⁵ using dishonorable words, such as those Arien Keescoper spoke to a deaconess who found him vomiting drunkenly on a Sunday;³⁶ or, like Jan Jacobsen Metselaer, for visiting dishonorable

³³ SAA 1120 nr. 116, 46^R and nr. 125: 122 [October 17, 1658].

³⁴ SAA 1120 nr. 125, 14^V [August 8, 1661].

³⁵ SAA 1120 nr. 117, 21^{R-V} [July 31, 1616].

³⁶ SAA 1120 nr. 117, 47^V and 50^R [August 27, 1623 and September 8, 1624].

places (i.e., taverns or brothels).³⁷ Overall, ministers disciplined members for offenses that combined notions of sin with societal norms of honor and shame.

Whether the sinners appeared before the ministers or were admonished in private, they were confronted with their reported transgression and given an opportunity to respond to the admonition. They often attempted to clear themselves of the charge by denying it outright, or by offering explanations to mitigate the offense.³⁸ If the accused showed great remorse, usually accompanied by tears and great sorrow, the church dealt more gently with them. For example, when the ministers admonished Jacob Jansen Modderman for an extramarital affair leading to a pregnancy, “The sorrow and grief that he showed there on his knees and with tears was great. He humbly begged God and the brethren for forgiveness and promised whole-hearted improvement.”³⁹ His penitence convinced the elders that God had already received him into his mercy. They pronounced the lesser ban, barring him from communion and reducing his financial support. In many other instances, the board apparently decided that the admonition and repentance sufficed. They allowed the individual to proceed without either the greater or lesser ban, but warned that they would closely watch the course of that person’s life in future.

After a sufficient length of time, separated members could appeal to the board (ideally with tears as a sign of truly repentant heart) to rejoin the congregation, and if their remorse appeared genuine, they could once again approach the communion table. Four years after her exclusion from the table for her extra-marital pregnancy, Anneke Wouters was admitted to the table, since nothing negative regarding her life had arisen during that period and she had demonstrated her repentance with many tears. Like all censured members, the final step to her admittance was her own self-examination (*eigen proeve*); if her conscience was clear, she could rejoin the congregation.⁴⁰

³⁷ SAA 1120 nr. 117, 16^V [August 30, 1615].

³⁸ See the case of Jan de Jager and his wife at SAA 1120 nr. 116, 42^R [December 9, 1654].

³⁹ SAA 1120 nr. 117, 36^R [November 17, 1619].

⁴⁰ SAA 1120 nr. 123, 15^R [1644]; nr. 116, 32^V; nr. 125, 3^V [November 19, 1648]. For signs of repentance in Reformed discipline, see Roodenburg, *Onder Censuur*, 126-28. While tears and heartfelt repentance were originally the necessary signs of a converted heart, by the 1650s and

Given the multi-confessional nature of the Dutch Republic, one might ask whether the threat of discipline would have had any teeth, given that an exiled member could simply have joined another church.⁴¹ However, members usually wanted to have access to communion, both for its importance as a religious symbol and to have their honor reinstated. As Charles Parker describes it, a person's "right to take communion established their innocence, and hence their moral honor."⁴² Since so much business in Amsterdam happened on a personal, face-to-face basis, public loss of honor had drastic economic consequences. One's honor was his or her credit, and Amsterdammers needed credit to survive.⁴³

For the poor of the congregation, it was particularly important to be in good favor with the church; falling under censure could result in the loss of alms or a room in one of the *hofjes* (small residential courtyards) run by the church.⁴⁴ In Amsterdam, care of the poor was divided along confessional lines, with each community caring for their own.⁴⁵ In addition to suffering the shame of censure, poor members had to find a new source of financial support or residence.⁴⁶ For example, when Hendrick Burgers and Maritge Speldesteckster committed adultery, they had to leave the church housing

1660s, the records mention less frequently whether admittance was accompanied by these outward indications. This change suggests either a different recording secretary or a more pragmatic approach to disciplining, one that was less interested in the inner transformation of the heart than in eliciting new outward patterns of behavior.

⁴¹ Benjamin J. Kaplan, "Confessionalism and Its Limits: Religion in Utrecht, 1600-1650," in *Masters of Light: Dutch Painters in Utrecht during the Golden Age*, ed. Joaneath A. Spicer and Lynn Federle Orr (New Haven; London: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 60-71.

⁴² Charles H. Parker, *The Reformation of Community: Social Welfare and Calvinist Charity in Holland, 1572-1620* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), 132.

⁴³ Roodenburg, "Reformierte Kirchengzucht und Ehrenhandel," 144-46; Frijhoff and Spies, *1650: Bevochten eendracht*, 178.

⁴⁴ Martin Dinges, "Frühneuzeitliche Armenfürsorge als Sozialdisziplinierung? Probleme mit einem Konzept," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 17, vol. 1 (1991): 5-29. Dinges argues against poor relief as social discipline since authorities were never able to implement the policy and Early Modern Europe was a self-help society. But since his conclusions are based upon his study of one city, Bordeaux, they are likely too broad. For one critique of Dinges's conclusions, see Robert Jütte, "Prolegomen zu einer Sozialgeschichte der Armenfürsorge," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 17, vol.1 (1991): 94-95.

⁴⁵ Parker, *The Reformation of Community*, 156-57, 174-75.

⁴⁶ Sprunger, "Rich Mennonites, Poor Mennonites," 230-31.

and lost their congregational charity until their deeds matched their promises of repentance.⁴⁷ While discipline was an especially high stakes matter for the poor, the church disciplined members from all social strata.

MENNONITES AND THE BOTTLE

For many Dutch moralists, drinking was the “mother sin” (*moedersonde*), because alcohol abuse led to many more grievous sins, such as violence, stealing, or bankruptcy. At the same time, alcohol was an essential element of Dutch culture. Drinking was a sign of friendship—a toast celebrated the birth of a child, and merchants often sealed a deal with a drink.⁴⁸ To demonstrate their masculinity, men were expected to consume large amounts of alcohol without overindulging and losing control. Although men had a duty to drink, women protected their honor by maintaining their sobriety.⁴⁹ Despite constant moralizing against the danger of immoderate drinking, the 17th-century cliché of the drunken Dutchman likely contained more than a drop of truth.⁵⁰

In a city known for the stench of its canals, people drank water only when beer and wine ran out. By 1613, a thirsty Amsterdammer could choose to slake his thirst in 513 tap-rooms (1 for every 200 residents) ranging from inns and taverns to side rooms in cellars and apothecaries.⁵¹ Beer, the

⁴⁷ SAA 1120 nr. 117, 53^v [February 8, 1626]. Deacons were not heartless in the removal of charity from censured members. They often made sure that the children of offenders did not suffer because of parental misdeeds. For example, deacons continued to support the children of Rebecca Nitters, daughter of Waterlander elder Nittert Obbes, even though her husband had died after sailing to the East Indies, and she had repeatedly appeared before the *collegie* for drunkenness. SAA 1120 nr. 123, 17^r [December 17, 1645]; nr. 116, 31^v and nr. 125, 3 [December 12, 1647 and December 3, 1648].

⁴⁸ B. Ann Tlusty, *Bacchus and Civic Order: The Culture of Drink in Early Modern Germany* (Charlottesville, VA: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2001), 103-14; Benjamin B. Roberts, *Sex and Drugs before Rock 'n' Roll: Youth Culture and Masculinity during Holland's Golden Age* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2012), 93.2001

⁴⁹ Roberts, *Sex and Drugs before Rock 'n' Roll*, 76; Benjamin Roberts, “Drinking Like a Man: The Paradox of Excessive Drinking for Seventeenth-Century Dutch Youths,” *Journal of Family History* 29, no. 3 (2004): 237-52; A. Lynn Martin, *Alcohol, Violence, and Disorder in Traditional Europe* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State Univ. Press, 2009), 134.

⁵⁰ Roberts, “Drinking Like a Man,” 238.

⁵¹ A. Th. van Deursen, *Plain Lives in a Golden Age: Popular Culture, Religion and Society in*

standard drink of the lower classes, ranged in quality from watered-down (low alcohol content) to thick, high-quality brews. Statistics suggest that the average person drank between 300 and 670 liters of beer in 1625. Although there were no vineyards in the Republic, Dutch merchants imported large amounts of wine, the preferred drink of the upper classes. The lower classes preferred beer, but as brandy, wine, and gin grew more affordable over the course of the century, the more potent drinks became more popular; the average drinker of hard liquor consumed 17 to 23 liters of brandy or gin per year.⁵²

To avoid excessive drinking and the sin of gluttony, an axiom advised drinking three glasses a day: the first for health, the second for taste, and the third for a good night's rest.⁵³ In a society in which everyone drank, Reformed and Mennonite discipline records made a distinction between private drinking and public and continual drunkenness.⁵⁴ Mennonites who engaged in obnoxious drunken behavior such as vomiting, breaking glasses, or urinating in beer mugs landed clearly outside broad social norms.⁵⁵ Drunkenness resulting from stronger alcohol, such as brandy or "anise-water," resulted in the elders banning Hartmen Jansen's wife in 1618, in 1619, and again in 1620.⁵⁶ The board disciplined other members for frequenting inns, even though one prominent Waterlander owned an inn that was an Amsterdam tourist attraction famous for its entertaining waterworks.⁵⁷ Most of the members, however, were confronted simply for rumors that they drank to the point of drunkenness (*dronken drinken*).

Seventeenth-Century Holland, trans. Maarten Ultee (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 101-102.

⁵² Roberts, *Sex and Drugs before Rock 'n' Roll*, 79-81.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵⁴ Roodenburg, *Onder Censuur*, 340.

⁵⁵ Arien Keescoper, SAA 1120, nr. 117, 47^V [August 27, 1623]; Aggtes Sjouwer a.k.a. Agge Eelkes, nr. 116, 41^R and nr. 125, 9^R [December 12, 1652], and Hans Houdtwercker, nr. 117, 47^R [August 27, 1623].

⁵⁶ Hartmen Jansen and his wife Ottie, SAA 1120 nr. 116, 21^V; 23^R; 25^V [September 13 and 20, 1618; December 12, 1619] nr. 117, 37^V-38^R [March 1, 1620].

⁵⁷ H.F. Wijnman, *Jan Theunisz alias Joannes Antonides (1569-1637) Boekverkooper en waard in het muziekhuis "D'Os in de Bruyloft" te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam: J.H. de Bussy, 1928), 30-31, and K.L. Sprunger, "Jan Theunisz of Amsterdam (1569-1638): Mennonite Printer, Pamphleteer, Renaissance Man," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 68 (1994): 439-40 and 443-44.

In addition to fulfilling social roles and quenching thirst, there were socially unacceptable ways to drink. The largest number of cases coming before the elders dealt with drunkenness, and alcohol played a contributing role in many other cases. Normally, the ministers passed the lesser ban only on members who occasionally became drunk. However, if members were repeatedly found inebriated, especially to the point they became violent or could no longer keep an orderly house, the board excommunicated them because of the New Testament's warning that a drunkard could not inherit the kingdom of heaven.⁵⁸ More than a third of all excommunications were for continual drunkenness, making it the most common offense to merit the Greater Ban. The Waterlander congregation intensified its struggle against drunk drinking in the 1640s and 1650s, but does not seem to have been winning the war by the time it merged with the Flemish congregation.⁵⁹

In the records of congregations from the second half of the 17th century, the most common offenses dealt with by the Lamist and Zonnist boards continued to involve alcohol, similar to the Waterlanders' pattern from before. Of a total of 793 cases, 182 (around one-quarter) described in the combined Waterlander and Lamist records mentioned abusive drinking. Nineteen of the 117 Zonist cases involved drinking as well.⁶⁰ In the worst incidents, the drinking was so severe that one member had sold the feathers for their bed and the clothing for their children to pay for her alcohol,⁶¹

⁵⁸ Joost Sijbrantsen, SAA 1120 nr. 117, 24^v [March 19, 1617]. The entry cites 1 Corinthians 6:10: "thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God," and Galatians 5:21: "envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." to support his excommunication.

⁵⁹ Emden's Reformed consistory also failed to curb drunkenness. Schilling attributes this to the city's economic decline following the return of the Dutch refugees to the Republic. Heinz Schilling, *Civic Calvinism in Northwestern Germany and the Netherlands: Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992), 55-58.

⁶⁰ The offense is usually called "*verloopen in dronkschap*" or "*dronken drinken*." See, for example, the cases of Tonis Albertsz: SAA 1120, nr. 175, 8 [14 October 1683] and Gerrit Meijnderts the shoemaker, SAA 1120, nr. 174, 123 [August 18, 1678]. There are many more cases where alcohol abuse was linked to another offense, such as violent beatings, but I have classified those under the more serious offense. See, for example, the many appearances of Pieter Melisz, SAA 1120 nr. 174, 193 [August 1, 1680], 231 [October 2, 1681]; nr. 175, 18 [September 14, 1684], 51 [December 14, 1687], 53 [February 19, 1688].

⁶¹ See the case of Marritie Slicher, SAA 1120, nr. 175, 129 [February 21, 1697].

while another was so inebriated that they had to be carried home by someone else.⁶² As was the case for all Dutchmen, the problem with excessive drinking was that it was continual, public, and usually led to other types of offenses.⁶³

Perhaps because drinking was an everyday occurrence, it is understandable that church members called before the board defended their drinking—the line between acceptable and excessive drinking was unclear. Little Hansie, for example, argued that he could not have been drunk because he always drank on a full stomach.⁶⁴ Similarly, the types of drink permitted also changed during the 17th century. Anthony Proot protested that drinking brandy was no longer uncommon or offensive, since many Waterlanders and Flemish Mennonites did so.⁶⁵ The records also contain more accounts and more detailed records of women being drunk. This is similar to what Herman Roodenburg found in the records of the Reformed churches. It may be that drinking was less of a masculine domain by that time. However, Roodenburg suggests that the records simply did not bother to record all the accounts of drunken men and focused instead on the details of drunken women, which would have been more scandalous.⁶⁶

After 1730, the Lamist and Zonist records grow silent about alcohol. Roodenburg found the same pattern in Reformed consistory records. Perhaps church moralizing and discipline succeeded in shaping a sober congregation. Alternatively, members whose drinking endangered their church charity may have just stopped seeking assistance from a congregation that had become a gathering of middle-class, respectable Amsterdammers. Perhaps, in light of shrinking membership, elders did not bother disciplining or recording drunkenness any more, lest they offend remaining members. Nonetheless, when comparing Waterlander records from the early 1600s, one might tentatively conclude that drinking patterns among Mennonites had become more respectable.

⁶² See the case of Trijntie, the wife of Roelof Soeton, SAA 1120, nr. 175, 188 [February 10, 1701].

⁶³ The offense of drunkenness had the largest number of excommunications (22 out of 72). Of the 89 cases of drunkenness, the majority (53) were men.

⁶⁴ SAA 1120 nr. 116, 25^v [December 5, 1619].

⁶⁵ SAA 1120 nr. 116, 31^r [December 6, 1647].

⁶⁶ Roodenburg, *Onder censuur*, 342-43.

MENNONITES AND THE DAGGER

On September 13, 1618, the Waterlander board summoned Reyer Jansen and his wife Annetie on account of their recent fight with Marten Joost and his wife. According to the elders' records, a quarrel between the two women escalated to the point that they pulled each other's caps off and hit one another. As the fight continued, Joost tried to pull the women apart, but Jansen encouraged his wife, yelling, "Hit, Annetie, Hit." When questioned by the elders, Jansen admitted that he had once struck a baker with tongs until he bled, and that he and his brother hit each other. He also confessed that he and his wife fought as well; he once bruised her arms so badly that she became bedridden. The elders' examination and admonition appear not to have succeeded on him. Later, he and his brother armed themselves with a hammer and went to Joost's house, where they pounded on the window and doors, trying to break in. When the brothers came upon Joost's servant, they sliced his jerkin and trousers.⁶⁷ Subsequently, the congregation found Reyer's and Annetie's misdeeds considerable and their contrition unsatisfactory, so they excommunicated the couple and encouraged them to repent.

Clearly, Jansen's violent, disruptive lifestyle shocked and offended his fellow Mennonites. Despite a general acceptance of low-level interpersonal violence in early modern Amsterdam, both Reformed and Mennonite churches would have condemned his actions as unchristian. Mennonites shared a cross-confessional consensus that condemned private violence while simultaneously respecting, and even endorsing, the state's monopoly of violence.⁶⁸ Mennonite attitudes towards interpersonal violence did not differ from those of other Dutch Christians, even though defenselessness was a key emphasis of Anabaptist identity.

Collective Violence—Disciplining a Core Conviction

Mennonites most clearly differentiated themselves from their Reformed neighbors in how they handled members who joined the military or militia, and members who sailed on armed ships. Dutch authorities had granted

⁶⁷ SAA 1120 nr. 116 [September 13, 1618]; SAA 1120 nr. 117 [September 23, 1618]: "Slae Annetie, Slae."

⁶⁸ Pieter Spierenburg, "Protestant Attitudes to Violence: The Early Dutch Republic," *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* 10 (January 2007), 15-16.

Mennonites exemptions from serving in the city guard or military, so there was no legal requirement for them to seek those roles. It was usually poorer Mennonite men, desperate for any type of work, who joined the army or signed up to serve on armed ships, either with the navy, privateers, or the East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-indische Compagnie, or VOC).⁶⁹ The elders understood that economic need compelled desperate young men to take any available job.⁷⁰ For example, Ide Klaes and Gilles Cornelesz admitted to sailing to war against the English in 1665, but explained that they only did so because of their great poverty. The Waterlander ministers informed Klaes that, if this was actually the case, he could acquire a secret loan rather than sail to war.⁷¹ However, it was more than just poverty that drove the men to enlist; they were also at the fringes of congregational life in other areas. Many who were disciplined for sailing to war were also often admonished for their drinking and for abandoning their families while they were away, not simply for going to war.⁷²

Men who returned from war usually received only the lesser ban.⁷³ Although the rejection of the Sword was a core Mennonite tenet, elders usually preferred to keep members from the fellowship of the communion table instead of cutting them off entirely from the congregation. Of the 39

⁶⁹ Mary S. Sprunger, "The Limits of Faith in a Maritime Empire: Mennonites, Trade and Politics in the Dutch Golden Age," in *The Limits of Empire: European Imperial Formations in Early Modern World History*, ed. Tonio Andrade and William Reger (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 59-77.

⁷⁰ Not everyone who joined forsook his Mennonite convictions. In 1612, one governor general of the East Indies complained that the Mennonites did not fight against the Spanish and Portuguese. A. Th. van Deursen, *Honni soit qui mal y pense? De Republiek Tussen de Mogendheden (1610-1612)*, Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen 28:1 (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1965), 29.

⁷¹ SAA 1120 nr. 125, Ide Klaes [December 19, 1665] and Gilles Cornelesz [December 21, 1665]. Klaes sailed on a warship again in 1667.

⁷² Adriaan Joosten Isol, SAA 1120 nr. 125 [May 6, 1672]; Theunes Floresz Turfdrager [December 4, 1670, May 1673, August 8, 1675]; Ousger Evertsz [June 9, 1675]; and Jan Sjouckes SAA 1120 nr. 174 [April 27, 1679]. This is also true for the case of Gerrit Keijser, who had been behaving badly even before sailing to war in 1692: SAA 1120 nr. 175 [March 20, 1692].

⁷³ The greater ban cut the offender entirely out of the congregation. For a Waterlander treatise about the lesser ban, see SAA 1120 nr.131 by Reynier Wybrantsz, "Wat reden dat men ymandt vermaent van de tafel des Heeren te blyven."

men who sailed on armed ships, there were only six cases when the offender was excommunicated specifically for that offense, as Pieter de Jager was in 1615, when he refused to repent. While in a Turkish prison, he fought and killed three other prisoners in self-defence. Either before or after his time in prison, he had sailed on a ship that had thrown 88 Turkish prisoners overboard. He explained that he was at the rudder at the time and could have done nothing to stop the slaughter. Nonetheless, the scale of the killings and his refusal to repent had moved him beyond Waterlander principles.⁷⁴ Apart from clear cases like de Jager's, where military participation was the primary offense, the elders banned deviant offenders from the communion table. Violating a core Mennonite tenet did not completely sever the men's relationship with the community.

Whereas ministers showed some forbearance with poorer men who joined the military, they were less sympathetic with respectable members who armed their ships. The relatively short entries for sailors in the records contrast noticeably with entries for ship-owners and captains, which are much more expansive about the violation and the efforts to dissuade the men from arming their ships. When Anske Fockes was pressed into service as a captain on an armed ship in 1665, the preacher and elder Denijs van der Schuere⁷⁵ recorded his attempts to convince Fockes that sailing to war was against their religion. Van der Schuere wrote that, because Mennonites considered themselves defenseless Christians who took the gospel to say that only God could seek revenge, they were to turn the other cheek to their enemies. If Fockes understood the faith, the preacher continued, he should have understood that he could not become a man of war, much less a captain on a warship. Doing so engendered scandalous talk about the congregation and disturbed the simpler members. When Fockes, who seemed surprised

⁷⁴ SAA 1120 nr. 117 [August 30, 1615]; SAA 1120 nr. 116 [June 4, 1615]. The latter states that de Jager's shipmate threw only 85 prisoners overboard. De Jager may have been imprisoned by North African corsairs, who had released Dutch captives following the capitulation of 1612. Alexander H. de Groot, "Ottoman North Africa and the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Revue de l'Occident Musulman et de La Méditerranée* 39, no. 1 (1985): 131-47.

⁷⁵ N. van der Zijpp, "Schuere, Denys van der (d. 1673)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1959, [http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Schuere, Denys_van_der_\(d. 1673\)](http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Schuere,_Denys_van_der_(d._1673)), accessed April 21, 2015.

to learn of the Waterlander position, asked how he could hold his head up before other people (outside the Waterlander church), Van der Schuere retorted that he should be more concerned with how he could hold his head up before God. Because Fockes planned to continue with his voyage into war, the ministers banned him from the Lord's Table until he returned and the congregation could observe his life much more closely.⁷⁶

By the end of the century, elders no longer banned or publicly admonished members who joined the military or navy. In early 1696, the Lamist church asked Haye Heemstra to refrain from the Lord's Table because he had not only armed his ships, he was sailing under commission from the navy, which, they said, was sure to cause great offense in the congregation. When Heemstra asked permission to take communion, the board said it could not tolerate his behavior, especially sailing under commission. They did say, however, that it was only a "provisional" separation and that they would not notify the rest of the brothers, unless he continued.⁷⁷ The board appears to have had granted some leniency to members who sailed on armed ships, if they did not sail under commission. The decision to refrain from publicly censuring Heemstra also suggests a shift in the congregation's attitude.⁷⁸

Although the ministers took a relatively firm line with Heemstra, they began to leave decisions about military participation up to the conscience of individual members. In 1699, when Fredrik Jacobs, a sailor (*matroos*) on an admiralty ship (*jagt*), asked to take communion with the congregation,

⁷⁶ SAA 1120 nr. 25 [August 7, 1665].

⁷⁷ SAA 1120 nr. 175 [January 26, 1696, February 2, 1696, February 6, 1698]. In 1698, Heemstra asked the board for a letter of attestation so that he could take communion with the Remonstrants. The board said they could not provide such a witness for him. However, if the Remonstrants asked for a reference, they would say they had nothing negative to offer against him other than he disagreed with them about defenselessness.

⁷⁸ Mary Sprunger's work suggests that the attitude towards arming ships was complicated. Some Mennonites withdrew from the VOC, but others continued to invest in the company. She concludes that discipline against sailing armed ships was successful, since Mennonites avoided trade in regions where one had to arm ships to do business. Although Mennonites could not own armed ships, it is not clear whether they could charter ships to sail for them. Others criticized the Mennonite position on arming ships; although Mennonites may not have had guns on their decks, they stored plenty below. See Mary S. Sprunger, "Waterlanders and the Dutch Golden Age," in *From Martyr to Muppy*, 138-40.

the board informed him that he could do so upon his self-examination—in other words, if his conscience allowed him to do so.⁷⁹ After 1695, the records of all three congregations contain no further accounts of discipline for joining the military, and the last discipline of a member for sailing with the VOC occurred in 1712. While the church may have stopped treating armed service as a sin, it is more likely that the wealthy congregation no longer had members who were so poor that they joined the military out of economic necessity.

Interpersonal Violence: The Violence of Daily Life

In addition to enforcing the prohibition on armed service, the church boards worked to reduce interpersonal violence among members. Between 1612 and 1741, there were 39 cases of interpersonal violence, ranging from street fights to domestic violence. Most of these cases involved members living in church housing or from the lowest classes. The congregations had more success in disciplining members who relied on the church charity for their homes and food and, at the other end of the social scale, those whose honor and standing were important enough that they worked to reconcile with each other and the community. It was more difficult appealing to members who were marginal at best. Pieter Evertsz Schrote's case in 1678 serves as a typical example: When the board tried to summon him for assaulting another church member in the street, he refused to appear and indicated that he was planning to leave the congregation anyway.⁸⁰

Many of the violent acts occurred between two spouses. Usually, but not always, men assaulted their wives. While attitudes to war and the military were gendered exclusively to men, domestic violence or neighbor-to-neighbor violence involved nearly as many women as men. Like authorities in the Reformed church, Mennonites generally concentrated on reconciling quarreling married couples.⁸¹ Because one had to be reconciled

⁷⁹ SA 1120, nr.175 [July 23, 1699]. Perhaps he was not a member of the congregation, and thus did not need to adhere so strictly to its practices.

⁸⁰ SAA 1120 nr. 174 [August 18, 1678, September 5, 1678].

⁸¹ Manon van der Heijden, "Punishment versus Reconciliation: Marriage Control in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Holland," in *Social Control in Europe, Volume 1, 1500-1800*, ed. Herman Roodenburg and Pieter Spierenburg (Columbus, OH: Ohio State Univ. Press, 2004), 69-71.

with fellow members in order to take part in the Lord's Table, elders banned the quarreling couple or just the offending spouse from communion until they learned the couple's domestic life had improved.

Many marital quarrels often involved heavy drinking by one or both partners. Records describe numerous cases of individuals summoned before the board because they were drunk or were rumored to "keep bad house" (*slecht huishouden*).⁸² Most of the cases concerned members living in church housing for the poor, where the deacons could keep a close eye on residents' behavior. The close quarters of these houses (*hofjes*) made it hard to keep marital fighting quiet from neighbors' alert ears.⁸³ In the narrow, bustling alleys and homes of Dutch cities, a violation of marital tranquility brought shame on the entire neighborhood, which might have compelled the Mennonite neighbors to bring the case to the congregation's attention.⁸⁴ Typically, ministers tried to reconcile sparring spouses; they never advised quarreling couples to divorce or temporarily separate in order to diminish the violence between them. In the Reformed congregation, the only acceptable reasons for divorce were adultery and malicious abandonment. However, the Reformed did grant irreconcilable couples an informal separation from "bed and board."⁸⁵ Mennonites, by contrast, always banned couples who would not reconcile and never suggested separation.

There was apparently no fixed policy in dealing with men who beat

⁸² For one interpretation of the importance of an orderly domestic life in the Dutch Republic, see Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York: Vintage, 1987), 375-480, especially 388-400. For the discipline of 'poor housekeeping' (*Übelhausen*) in Augsburg neighborhoods, see Carl A. Hoffmann, "Social Control and the Neighborhood in European Cities," in *Social Control in Europe: 1500-1800*, 317.

⁸³ For an example, see the case of Jan de Jager and his wife, SAA 1120 nr. 117 [December 9, 1654].

⁸⁴ Manon van der Heijden, *Huwelijk in Holland: stedelijke rechtspraak en kerkelijke tucht, 1550-1700* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 1998), 259-60.

⁸⁵ See Donald Haks, *Huwelijk en gezin in Holland in de 17de en 18de eeuw: Processtukken en moralisten over aspecten van het laat 17de- en 18de-eeuwse gezinsleven* (Utrecht: Hes uitgevers, 1985), 196-214. In Rotterdam and Delft, the Reformed consistory also preferred to reconcile the couple rather than punish the offender. See Heijden, "Punishment versus Reconciliation," 71-72. For a Waterlander example of a couple separating, see the case of Abraham Gerritsz and his wife Hillete, SAA 1120 nr. 117 [February 6, 1633].

their wives. Elders assessed each case independently. Whenever rumors of married couples arguing came to the board's attention, they counseled the couples to strive to live peacefully with one another. Some offenders repented and received only the lesser ban for their violence. Lourens Pietersz Keescooper, on the contrary, was told he could not be considered a brother of the congregation as long as he hit and shoved his wife so hard that he bruised her.⁸⁶ Thus, the board does seem to have assessed the degree of violence and public knowledge, and visible bruising crossed a tolerable line. It is unclear whether the board condemned Pietersz because he violated the specific Mennonite prohibition against revenge and violence, or violated broader social disapproval of tyrannical behavior by husbands.

In some cases, the lack of domestic tranquility and push for reconciliation seems to have been more important than the fact that the husband hit his wife, or that the wife hit her husband. In 1646, Lubbert Pieters's wife left him because they could not live peacefully together, and he hit her 'black and blue.' Because Pieters was repentant and asked for forgiveness, the elders decided simply to watch his life a bit more closely. After his wife left him again five years later and refused to reconcile with him, the elders asked both of them to refrain from the communion table. The problem was that they were unreconciled, not that Pieters beat her.⁸⁷

If domestic discord became notoriously violent, it was publically known, and therefore a scandal and sin that had to be publicly addressed and publicly punished. Mennonite records reveal no cases in which husbands justified their violence as part of their duty to discipline their wife, children, or servants, examples of which Roodenburg found in Reformed records.⁸⁸ The few attempts at justification were similar to Adam Janssen Verver's unconvincing defense on October 31, 1675. When admonished for beating his wife with a stick, he admitted it, but said he was compelled to do so because she had hit him seven or eight times first. The elders were

⁸⁶ SAA 1120 nr. 117 [February 18, 1636]. Other members who did not appear when summoned were also excommunicated, but it is unclear whether the excommunication resulted from the abuse or for not heeding the summons.

⁸⁷ SAA 1120 nr. 123 [September 2, 1646]; SAA 1120 nr. 116 [August 27, 1646, August 23, 1648, April 15, 1651].

⁸⁸ Roodenburg, *Onder censuur*, 366.

not moved.⁸⁹ When Mennonite churches disciplined domestic violence, the men (and women) who hit their spouses were usually also known for being notorious drunks, bankrupt, or lazy. This can obscure whether elders were more concerned about the violence or the other offenses.⁹⁰

Mennonite and Reformed leaders dealt with violent husbands in similar ways. Both boards admonished couples to reconcile and live peacefully together. However, when appearing in front of the board, Mennonite men never defended their violence with appeals to their patriarchal duty. Also, Mennonite boards never turned to the secular authorities for help when the woman feared for her life. But Roodenburg's study of Reformed discipline describes several occasions when the consistory advised a family to lock up a notorious abuser in the public rasp or spinning house because "we live under a Christian government, who is ordained to bring such people to reason and order."⁹¹ Mennonite elders, by contrast, preferred to take care of their own offenders rather than turn them over to secular authorities. The most severe threat they leveled was to withhold someone's charity or to evict them from church housing.

Outside the domestic sphere, episodes of Mennonites physically assaulting someone reflect the same types of incidents as found in Reformed records. Twenty-three cases concerned men in public places like taverns and streets, or in workplaces. There were also twelve reports of Mennonite women living in church housing who were violent towards neighbors or co-workers. In at least five incidents of assault, the members (all men) threatened someone with a knife, considered a much more serious offense than simple fisticuffs and punishable in secular courts. At the time, knife fighting or carrying a dagger for protection was usually associated with the semi-respectable lower classes, since the respectable lower-middle classes fought with staffs or fists.⁹² This class division is reinforced by the fact that Mennonite knife fighters came before the board for multiple offenses, such

⁸⁹ SAA 1120 nr. 125 [October 31, 1675]

⁹⁰ For one example, see the case of Leendert Corneliss and Mettie Jans, SAA 1120 nr. 175 [July 10, 1687, June 15, 1690, March 1, 1691, June 23, 1695, September 1, 1695].

⁹¹ Roodenburg, *Onder censuur*, 367.

⁹² Pieter Spierenburg, "Knife Fighting and Popular Codes of Honor in Early Modern Amsterdam," in *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America*, ed. Pieter Spierenburg (Columbus, OH: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1998), 103-27.

as fraud, bankruptcy, frequenting dishonorable houses, or drunkenness.

When members fought with each other or with someone outside the congregation, they had to refrain from the communion table until they resolved their differences. In most of these cases, the board's aim in enforcing the lesser ban was not to punish the parties for physical violence, but to enforce the unity of the table and to encourage members to reconcile with each other. In 1660, Agge Aelkes pulled his knife on someone and was wounded along with his opponent. The Waterlander board informed him that he must refrain from the unity of the table, which he agreed to do. Two years later, after Aelkes was reconciled with his opponent and people heard that he behaved himself, he repented of his sins and promised an improvement in his life. The elders readmitted him to the communion table, if his conscience allowed it.⁹³ Arming one's ship was grounds for excommunication; however, a repeatedly violent personal life did not automatically end one's membership in the church.

On August 1, 1680, Mary Jans van de Heule and Pieter Melisz, whom we have met before, appeared before the Lamist board, which admonished them for their domestic discord [*slechte huishouden*], especially Pieter, who stayed out late at night. A year later, the elders summoned him again about his drunkenness and domestic disturbances with his wife, whom he had threatened with a knife and then chased out of the house. He offered very little in his defense, and the elders asked him to stay away from the communion table, warning him that his financial support might stop. If he did not improve, they threatened to tell the entire congregation about his behavior and to treat him as unworthy of membership. In 17th-century Amsterdam, the public shame could have been worse than the removal of charity.⁹⁴ Three years later, the board summoned Melisz for smashing Michel Symons's head with a mug, an action that he admitted. Because he already had a bad record, his case went before the brethren. However, following his confession, he was once again forgiven. In 1687, the elders informed the

⁹³ SAA 1120 nr. 125 [December 14, 1660; May 19, 1662]. In 1652, the board had summoned Aelkes for smashing glasses in an inn. At that time, they resolved to keep a closer watch on his behavior. SAA 1120 nr. 116 [December 12, 1652].

⁹⁴ Herman Roodenburg, "Reformierte Kirchengzucht und Ehrenhandel," 130-31; Pollmann, "Off the Record," 432.

congregation that Pieter had continued to misbehave, and was repeatedly warned and punished. The elders had learned that he still frequented taverns and wasted his time. They tried to summon him to appear. This time he denied everything, so they resolved to gather evidence and show it to him and the congregation. In 1688, records report that he threatened to cut his wife's throat. It is likely at this point that the church excommunicated him, although it is not recorded. Seven years later, he tried joining again, but the reports of his behavior were still not good enough. So, although the board eventually excommunicated him, it took him many years and multiple infractions to use up his second chances.⁹⁵

The Decline of Violence and End of Church Discipline

Although the elders attempted to adhere to the tradition of Mennonite defenselessness, it is unclear what Mennonite identity meant for their violent, marginal members, many of whom lived in church housing. If Mennonites believed the congregation should be a community of believers who voluntarily committed themselves to a life of discipleship, what did that commitment mean to this underclass? Perhaps they were simply legacy members whose parents had once been devout Mennonites and chose to remain and identify as Mennonite, even though they could have left the church. Was the financial support from the congregation so important that they were glad to assent to a minimal understanding of Mennonite identity? By the 18th century, this minimal understanding seems to have taken hold, because the amount of disciplining declined more significantly than the simultaneous decline in church membership.⁹⁶ This reflects Roodenburg's findings, and also confirms Norbert Elias's and Pieter Spierenburg's description of a "civilizing process" to the internalization of restraint and social control among in the elites, which then trickled down through the manners and morals of lower social divisions.

⁹⁵ SAA 1120 nr. 174 [August 1, 1680, October 2, 1681]. SAA 1120 nr. 175 [September 14, 1684, December 14, 1687, February 19, 1688, December 15, 1695].

⁹⁶ From 1700, there were 117 discipline cases recorded in the *Lam* and *Toren* congregation and 70 cases in the *Zon*, mostly for drunkenness and bankruptcy. From 1742 until 1800, there were only a handful of cases recorded in both churches.

MENNONITES AND THE RING

The discipline of sexuality and marriage likewise reflects Mennonites' integration into broader Dutch society. Secular and religious authorities were united in restricting sexual activity to marriage. Despite Reformed leaders' efforts to weed out traditional sexual practices allowing some sexual contact between betrothal and marriage, there was some confusion among their members about the relation between engagement, betrothal, consummation, and marriage. Mennonite discipline cases attempted to control when and whom members could marry.

While the earlier Waterlander congregation disciplined roughly the same number of women as men, from 1650 on they handled 24 cases of women and only four cases of men for pre-marital sex. The disproportionate number of cases involving women is likely because it was difficult for women to hide their pregnancies. As was the case in the Reformed consistory, Mennonite elders dealt with more cases of pre-marital sexual activity during economic downturns, when there was a surplus of women. Roodenburg has suggested possible reasons for the rise in cases between 1660 and 1670: betrothed couples had to put off marriage until they could afford to establish a home, and women might have been more willing to risk binding themselves to a husband.⁹⁷

While there was some leniency in the discipline of pre-marital sex, the act of adultery was strongly condemned by all Dutch moralists. In addition to censure and loss of honor, adulterers faced prosecution in either the civil or the criminal courts, where they could theoretically receive fines or even a death sentence.⁹⁸ Given the serious nature of the sin, it is striking that, of the

⁹⁷ Roodenburg, *Onder Censuur*, 257-58. In 1683, Amsterdam's Reformed consistory remarked that the absence of so many warships resulted in larger numbers of poor, women, and orphans.

⁹⁸ Veronique Verhaar and Frits van den Brink, "De bemoeienissen van stad en kerk met overspel in het achttiende-eeuwse Amsterdam," in *Nieuwe Licht op oude justitie: misdaad en straf ten tijde van de republiek*, ed. Harold Faber (Muiderberg: Dick Coutinho, 1989), 65; Roodenburg, *Onder Censuur*, 286. For the connection between female honor and adultery as described by Dutch moralists, see Maria-Theresia Leuker and Herman Roodenburg, "'Die dan hare wyven laten afweyen': Overspel, eer en schande in de zeventiende eeuw," in *Soete minne en helsche boosheit. Seksuele voorstellingen in Nederland, 1300-1850*, ed. Gert Hekma and Herman Roodenburg (Nijmegen: SUN, 1988), 61-84.

11 cases of adultery, the board excommunicated only five of the offenders.⁹⁹ A woman named Annetie had refused to appear when summoned; Jonas Gysbertsz had earlier repented in front of the congregation for sailing to war, thereby already placing him on the margins of the membership, and Aeltge Scheltes was punished because her adultery had become publicly known.¹⁰⁰ The congregations punished the other six cases, but less harshly: one couple lost their church housing and food allowance, an elderly man was banned from the communion table and admonished for not knowing better, and a woman was banned for being seen out late with a man other than her husband.¹⁰¹ While the percentage of excommunications is relatively high compared to those for pre-marital sex, the boards still preferred to preserve excommunication for individuals who repeatedly sinned or refused to cooperate with the disciplining process.

Offenses of marital discord and extramarital sexual activity would have been frowned upon by moralists from all confessions. In fact, Mennonite attempts to discipline these offenses illustrate how similar their ideas of sin were to those of their fellow citizens. The discipline of mixed marriages shines a light on Mennonite efforts to mark their boundaries off from other confessions and to preserve a distinct identity. Marriage provided an easier, subtler route for sin to corrupt the church “without spot or wrinkle” by conjugally joining the fleshly world with the spiritual world.¹⁰² Records show that the even the moderate Waterlanders considered *buitentrouw* (marriage to someone from outside the congregation) a serious offence. With 64 occurrences, it was second only to drunkenness in the total number of cases handled by the board. Mennonites had condemned mixed marriages since at least since the 1550s and had reaffirmed this view in several confessions

⁹⁹ Roodenburg found a similarly low number of excommunications in the Reformed records. Roodenburg, *Onder Censuur*, 284.

¹⁰⁰ Annetie, SAA 1120, nr. 117, 21^{R-V} [July 31, 1616 and August 14, 1616]; Jonas Gysbertsz, SAA 1120, nr. 116, 40^V-41^R; 42^{R-V} and nr. 125, 5^V [October 24, 1652; May 14, 1653; December 12, 1654]; Aeltge Scheltes, SAA 1120, nr. 116, 38^V and nr. 125, 6^V [January 23, 1652 and May 12, 1652].

¹⁰¹ Hendrick Burgers and Maritge Speldesteckster, SAA 1120, nr. 117, 53^V [February 8, 1626]; Isaak Vlaming, nr. 125, 14^V [August 8, 1661]; Abigaël Ariaens, nr. 125, 17^R [March 20, 1662 and April 16, 1662].

¹⁰² This image is from Visser, *Broeders in de Geest*, 1: 94-96.

through the 17th century, including the Dordrecht Confession of 1632. Although the most conservative groups disciplined every case and even banned members who married Mennonites outside their particular branch, the more moderate Amsterdam congregations punished only members who married non-Mennonites, and reserved the right to judge each case on its own merits.¹⁰³

Most of the Mennonite discipline controlled members' behavior, but the struggle against *buitentrouw* focused on maintaining the integrity of the community's beliefs.¹⁰⁴ In the earliest period, the bans lasted for up to three years, but over time the discipline seems to have developed into a formality, especially in cases where a member promised to remain in the church and "be a good light and example" for their spouse.¹⁰⁵ Waterlander Hendrick Vasters even took it upon himself to refrain from communion; although he married an honorable woman who did not attend any church, he hoped eventually to win her over.¹⁰⁶

The more difficult cases of mixed marriage occurred when a member married a partner with a poor public reputation, or when someone married against the will of their parents or the ministers. Ijbeltien married a scoundrel against the advice of her mother, and then left the man after he came after the mother with a knife. (The Waterlanders kicked Ijbeltien out, but she had clearly moved herself outside the boundaries of the congregation. She had not attended a service for several years and refused to appear when summoned.)¹⁰⁷

Over the course of the century, a growing sense arose among those who married non-Mennonites that they would have to answer to the church board for their choice of spouse. But as long as they continued to attend the congregation, the punishment was temporary and not a significant loss of honor. Mary Sprunger has suggested that the church was more willing to

¹⁰³ Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden*, 182, 277, 391.

¹⁰⁴ Driedger, *Obedient Heretics*, 161. In a chapter on *buitentrouw* among Hamburg Mennonites, Driedger traces the process by which ordinary men and women forced the church board to moderate its position forbidding marriage outside the community, thus weakening its ability to enforce its will on the congregation's identity.

¹⁰⁵ Immetie Lamberts, SAA 1120, nr. 116, 21^R [October 5, 1617].

¹⁰⁶ SAA 1120, nr. 116, 33^R [December 3, 1647].

¹⁰⁷ See the case of Ijbeltien, SAA 1120, nr. 116, 7^V [July 7, 1613].

tolerate the mixed marriages of wealthier members. She looked at the example of Aeltie Pieters Buys, who married merchant Symon Willemsz Nooms. In addition to serving in the city militia, he was involved in the Atlantic trade, even arming his ships for defensive purposes. Pieters continued to be well respected among the Waterlanders, donating 50 guilders a year to the poor chest.¹⁰⁸

Perhaps the fear was justified that marriage to a non-Mennonite spouse might make it easier for Waterlanders to move away from the beliefs and practices that distinguished them from their neighbors. When, in 1657, delegates from the church board confronted Jacob Venkel about his clothing, he blamed the finery of his dress on his marriage to a Reformed woman.¹⁰⁹ He argued that his wife had forced him to conform to a dress code with less restrictive norms than those of the Waterlanders, thereby likely reaffirming the ministers' misgivings about *buitentrouw*.¹¹⁰

The question of marriage outside the congregation had fractured Mennonite unity in the previous century, but congregations punished it less strictly by the middle of the 17th century. Although the Lamists no longer viewed mixed marriage as a threat to the purity and unity of the congregation, they continued to discourage the practice, albeit for different reasons. After the city magistrates officially required churches to support their needy members, the board worried that marriage was a channel for outsiders to gain access to the poor chest of the wealthy congregation.

In 1690, after much "heartfelt sorrow," the board presented a new regulation regarding *buitentrouw* to the congregation. They created the policy to deal with members whose troublesome spouses were not members of any Mennonite congregation, drank, did not work or attend church, and yet lived off the congregation's charitable gifts. From that point on, all members married to someone whose behavior was a dangerous model for

¹⁰⁸ Mary S. Sprunger, "Deaconesses, Fishwives, Crooks and Prophetesses: Mennonite Image and Reality in Golden Age Amsterdam," in *Sisters: Myth and Reality of Anabaptist, Mennonite, and Doopsgezind Women Ca. 1525-1900*, ed. Mirjam G.K. van Veen et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 175-76.

¹⁰⁹ SAA 1120 nr. 125, 32^r [December 13, 1657].

¹¹⁰ Benjamin J. Kaplan, "For They Will Turn Away Thy Sons': the Practice and Perils of Mixed Marriage in the Dutch Golden Age," in *Piety and Family in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Marc R. Forster and Benjamin J. Kaplan (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), 115-33, especially 119-20.

the children would receive only one-half their support. Any future marriages in which members were “shackled to such inappropriate and unchristian” people would receive no food, money, or shelter.¹¹¹ By discouraging members from marrying undisciplined and unchurched outsiders, ministers found an additional way to make sure only upright Christians joined their congregation.

When Grietje Bouwer was to marry a Papist (*paapsman*) with five children in 1697, the ministers warned that doing so endangered both her soul and her body, since her husband was unable to support her. Since the Lamists could no longer assist her, they asked her to leave the church’s housing (*hoffe*).¹¹² In the proposal of 1690, ministers added the provision that, if the *buitentrouw* was between virtuous people who became unable to support themselves, a three-quarters vote by the entire board would allow the member to receive congregational charity.

Records of mixed marriages essentially stop after 1700. Perhaps, in order to protect the congregation’s considerable financial resources and its respectability, the board made it too financially risky for members to take up with marginal members of other congregations. However, historian Benjamin Kaplan has found that one-third of Mennonite marriages in 1760 were to a spouse of another faith.¹¹³ By that time, confessional differences were no longer significant barriers to mixed marriages, a trend that Simon Rues, a German traveller to Amsterdam, had already noted in 1743.¹¹⁴ In the mid-19th century, Steven Blaupot ten Cate suggested that mixed marriages

¹¹¹ The congregation had already expressed concerns about mixed marriages to disruptive spouses in 1687: SAA 1120 nr. 175, 41, 74-75 [March 13, 1687, January 3, 1690]. The board resolved to read the resolution to the congregation again in 1710, nr. 175, 284 [February 27, 1710]. In 1720, they also resolved to read the resolution to baptismal candidates along with a warning that, if members left without an attestation for longer than two years, they would never receive one from the board, nr. 175, 462 [March 7, 1720].

¹¹² SAA 1120 nr. 175, 131 [August 8, 1697].

¹¹³ Benjamin Kaplan, “Integration vs. Segregation: Religiously Mixed Marriage and the ‘verzuijing’ Model of Dutch Society,” in *Catholic Communities in Protestant States: Britain and the Netherlands c. 1570-1720*, ed. Benjamin Kaplan et al. (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2009), 60–61.

¹¹⁴ Simeon Friedrich Rues, *Aufrichtige Nachrichten von dem gegenwärtigen Zustande der Mennoniten oder Taufgesinnten, wie auch der Collegianten oder Reinsburger* (Jena: Joh. Rud. Crökers Wittwe, 1743), 107.

were to blame for the steep drop in Mennonite numbers in the previous century.¹¹⁵ Perhaps in an effort to climb socially, Mennonites who married Reformed spouses affiliated with their spouse's churches.¹¹⁶

Protecting the Bottom Line: Charity and Changes in Discipline

For the Lamists, membership in the congregation was based upon adherence to three core points of the identity of the church: defenselessness, adult baptism, and avoidance of the oath. Virtuous behavior and affirmation of these basic markers of Mennonite identity grew more important to the Lamists than earlier claims to be the exclusive body of Christ or agreement with a printed confession of faith. That they could take communion with those who agreed to the three principles and lived upright lives demonstrates a greater openness to the surrounding culture and a lack of interest in closely policing identity markers.¹¹⁷

If they were much more welcoming around the communion table, the Lamists were at the same time growing more careful about whom they allowed to become a member. In the second half of the 17th century, city magistrates reorganized poor relief by requiring each confession to care for their own needy members. During periods of economic downturn, the wealth of Amsterdam's shipyards, warehouses, and markets attracted men and women from poorer parts of the Republic. Therefore, the Lamists scrutinized potential members more carefully, making it more difficult for poor or ill-behaved individuals to join—and to burden the congregation with the responsibility of disciplining and supporting them. In addition to fulfilling a Christian and required civic duty, the Lamists' charity also functioned to shape the social make-up of the membership. In the process,

¹¹⁵ Steven Blaupot ten Cate, *Geschiedenis der Doopsgezinden in Friesland: Van Derzelver Ontstaan tot dezen Tijd, Uit Oorspronkelijke Stukken en Echte Berigten Opgemaakt* (Leeuwarden: Eekhoff, 1839), 248-49; Kaplan, "Integration vs. Segregation," 60.

¹¹⁶ For more on marriages between the elites and the regent class, see Mary Sprunger, "Iemand Burgemeester Maken. Doopsgezinden en Regenten Geslachten in de Gouden Eeuw Te Amsterdam," *Doopsgezind Bijdragen* 32 (2006): 75-121; Mary Sprunger, "Why the Rich Got Mennonite: Church Membership, Status and Wealth in Golden Age Amsterdam," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 27 (2009): 41-59.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, Isaak Arondeaux, who came from Rotterdam with proof of his adult baptism and upright life: SAA 1120, nr. 175, 23 [August 16, 1685].

however, discipline focused even more on the powerless members while granting the “better sort” more leeway.¹¹⁸

Prospective members had to present an attestation of good standing with their previous congregation in order to prevent potentially disreputable or censured individuals from fleeing a shamefully tarnished past for the anonymity and poor boxes of Amsterdam. As the Republic’s economy weakened and Mennonites from around the country sought their fortune in Amsterdam, the congregation added a requirement that residents had to live in the city for at least a year before they could join. This allowed current members to observe the behavior of the new residents. They could thereby establish whether they were committed to Mennonite principles and were financially sound.¹¹⁹ The board also hoped that it would discourage members from congregations elsewhere who were poor or on the edge of poverty from “overflowing” the wealthy Amsterdam congregation and becoming a burden.¹²⁰ In 1709, the board increased the waiting period to three years, further discouraging marginal Mennonites from coming to the city.¹²¹

From 1678 until 1731, the Lamist church board rejected the attestations of at least 66 individuals requesting membership. In several cases, the board was convinced that the inquirers were interested only in the deacons’ poor relief.¹²² Some of the seekers, like Jan Raets and Wilhelm Vos, did not know enough about church doctrine to justify their inclusion.¹²³ In a dramatic switch from Mennonite tradition, the board allowed Lijsbets Bongerts to take communion in 1703 but did not grant her membership, since it was

¹¹⁸ This pattern is a change from that of the Waterlanders in the first half of the century.

¹¹⁹ The task of observing potential members’ behavior was made easier when they lived in neighborhoods where many other Mennonites were living. When Dieuwertie Jans asked to be baptized into the congregation, she had trouble finding two witnesses to vouch for her. There had been rumors about bad behavior, but the ministers had difficulty locating anyone who could do so. The collegie told her she had to move to a part of the city where members of the congregation could have clear proof (*klare prevuen*) of her betterment. SAA 1120, nr. 174, 239, 247 [January 29, 1682 and August 20, 1682].

¹²⁰ SAA 1120, nr. 175, 204 [January 3, 1704].

¹²¹ SAA 1120, nr. 175, 280-81 [September 23, 1709].

¹²² See, for example, Jan Jans Roos, SAA 1120, nr. 175, 32 [August 1, 1686] or Aaltie Jacobs, SAA 1120, nr. 175, 188 [February 17, 1701].

¹²³ SAA 1120, nr. 175, 98, 131 [May 5, 1678, December 1, 1678].

not apparent that she had ever been a sister in a Mennonite congregation.¹²⁴ Gerrit Smit, a member of the Zonist congregation for many years, asked to add his name to the Lamist membership rolls in 1717. Because he was known to have been a troublesome member for the Zon, the board told him that they would not take him on as a member. They would keep his case in mind, and in the meantime he could enjoy the freedom to take part in communion.¹²⁵ By the 1710s, individuals whose pasts had “spots” and “wrinkles” could take communion more easily than they could be added to the membership rolls and receive charity.

Lamist leaders grew frustrated when needy members took the money, food, shelter, or turf of the congregation while remaining on the margins of congregational life. On March 3, 1687, the ministers admonished the entire congregation to attend the Sunday services and charged the deacons of the poor to make sure that needy members also attended. During one of the services, deacons went the poor neighborhoods (*wijks*) to see who was going to church or not. When deacons Arend Bosch and Pieter van Beek reported that very few of the poor members attended services, either with their children or alone, the board decided to renew efforts to monitor attendance.¹²⁶ On January 22, 1688, they summoned most of the needy members and their children over eight years old to the church, where they chastised them for their absences from the sermons. They admonished them to make a greater effort to attend the services and sermons.¹²⁷ If the board was going to support needy members, they expected them to attend services and receive the edification of sermons, not just the nourishment of charity.

As the Golden Age lost its luster, marginal men and women may have needed help more than ever, yet it grew increasingly difficult for Amsterdam's down-and-outs to gain access to charity.¹²⁸ By linking charity with church

¹²⁴ SAA 1120, nr. 175, 204 [April 5, 1703].

¹²⁵ SAA 1120, nr. 175, 412 [August 26, 1717]. It is unclear what Gerrit Smit had done in the Zon congregation, but he had been admonished by their board during a visitation in 1710. See SAA 877, nr. 3 [September 3, 1710].

¹²⁶ SAA 1120, nr. 17, 40 [March 6, 1687].

¹²⁷ SAA 1120, nr. 175, 50 [January 22, 1688].

¹²⁸ Maarten Prak and Lidewij Hesselink, “Stad van gevestigden 1650-1730,” in *Geschiedenis van Amsterdam: Zelfbewuste Stadstaat 1650-1813*, ed. Willem Frijhoff, Maarten Prak, and Marijke Carasso-Kok (Amsterdam: SUN, 2005), II 2: 141.

membership, discipline, and participation, the Lamists thereby protected their collective reputation, helped the city nourish its weakest members (or cut them loose), and contributed to social discipline. Magistrates recognized the importance of all the city's churches and their responsibility to care for their needy, passing a law in 1719 that granted all the Protestant churches exemptions from new taxes, a privilege that previously only the Reformed had enjoyed.¹²⁹ When Dutch Mennonites appealed to authorities on behalf of Swiss or South German Mennonites, they always drew on their own reputation as upright, well-behaved subjects.¹³⁰

The discipline of violence shows how the boards adapted to the changing nature of their members. From the second half of the 17th century, there were two tiers of Mennonite members: Mennonites from the middling and elite classes, who were expected to behave and believe in a certain way; and members from the very lowest classes or those living in church housing, who were not held to the same expectations.¹³¹ The sources do not allow us to discern the faith commitments of the violent members, but there are a few hints. In the cases of the *Zon*, where 18th-century records list both date of birth and date of baptism, many marginal members had been baptized at around 14 years old and committed their infraction only a few years later. Many of the offenders would have been relatively immature in age and in their faith.

CONCLUSION

In the first decades of the 18th century, the number of discipline cases

¹²⁹ Ibid., 144. The Lamists had enjoyed some tax freedoms since 1676. They petitioned both Amsterdam and the States of Holland for the continuation of their freedom from the 100 and 200 penny taxes in the early 18th century. See, for example, SAA 1120 nr. 175, 204 [March 3 and 15, 1703]; 214 [September 20, 1704]; 214-16 [November 20, 1704 and January 1, 15, 22, 1705], 243 [November 18, 1706, June 21, 1714].

¹³⁰ Troy David Osborne, "Worthy of the Tolerance They'd Been Given: Dutch Mennonites, Reputation, and Political Persuasion in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Archiv Für Reformationsgeschichte* 99 (2008): 256-79.

¹³¹ The nature of the sources makes prosopographical work (studies that identify and relate a group of people within a historical context) in the Amsterdam Mennonites difficult. Mary Sprunger has found that two-thirds of the Waterlander congregation came from middling and poorer classes. Sprunger, "Being Mennonite," 167-68.

dropped sharply in all Mennonite congregations. Why did a group for whom discipline and purity of the gathered congregation had been a mark of the true church gradually stop disciplining members? The changing discipline of alcohol, violence, and marriage shows the degree to which Amsterdam Mennonites were already integrated into Dutch society at the start of the previous century and how the remaining vestiges of a separate identity disappeared in the new century. From the perspective of the 21st century, we think of discipline as a way to mark borders with the outside world. We instantly think of bishops banning women for wearing jewelry, as was the case with my Amish grandmother's sisters. However, with the exception of sailing in war, Mennonites were concerned about exactly the same things as the other faiths in Amsterdam. They disciplined, not because they were separate from the world but because they were fully part of it.

Although the data shows a clear change in discipline (or at least in the recording of discipline), we are left with some difficult questions about what those changes mean. Were the Mennonites assimilated to such a degree that it had become impossible to enforce an effective discipline? Or, had the congregation's discipline actually succeeded in shaping members into upright Christians, thereby making banning and shunning superfluous? Were Mennonites less willing to discipline or be disciplined?

Records indicate that members grew more willing to challenge the authority of the ministers to pass judgment over their lives. Jan Pieter Swaert, in 1677, wrote a letter to the board reminding them that everyone was a sinner and that only those without sin could cast the first stone.¹³² In 1708, Johannes Blauw, a long-term alcoholic, refused to appear in the chambers unless he learned the names of his accusers.¹³³ Walraven Slicher appeared in 1699 with two witnesses to make his case for reacceptance into the congregation after his excommunication 14 years earlier. The board decided that his witnesses could only testify to his general behavior, and that he needed more evidence of true repentance, since his sin had been so severe. Outraged, Slicher threatened to reveal the name of a minister

¹³² SAA 1120 nr. 374: Letter dated July 22, 1677.

¹³³ SAA 1120 nr. 374: Letter dated October 28, 1708. Based on the letter and his repeated drunkenness, Blauw was cut off from the congregation. SAA 1120 nr. 175, 231 [March 18, 1706], 270 [November 29, 1708].

or deacon present in the room who should also refrain from communion. When pressed to elaborate, he refused to identify who it was.¹³⁴ In 1710, still excommunicated, he threatened to take communion with or without the ministers' permission. He was warned that the deacons would pass him by,¹³⁵ thereby publicly reinforcing his exclusion.

Successful social discipline required vertical as well as horizontal pressure. Therefore, the congregations increasingly resisted their leaders' exposure of their moral failings, and the elders no longer preserved the purity of the congregation and communion table, which undercut the effectiveness of discipline. Congregations no longer added marginal individuals to their membership lists, shaping themselves into respectable gatherings of solid burghers with a few peculiar beliefs regarding the oath and the sword. As they gained in wealth and respectability, the Lamists shifted the emphasis of discipline from safeguarding their purity to defending their propriety. Mennonites raised the bar for admission into their congregations, founded orphanages, and punished indolence, thereby raising their collective reputation. The sectarian and ascetic practices of a church discipline intended to separate believers from the fallen world were no longer necessary to govern upright burghers used to rubbing shoulders with the economic and political elites of the Republic.¹³⁶

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¹³⁴ SAA 1120 nr. 175, 25 [November 8, 1685], 174 [August 20, 1699].

¹³⁵ SAA 1120 nr. 175, 309 [November 19, 1710].

¹³⁶ This article builds upon material used in Troy Osborne, "Mennonites and Violence in Early Modern Amsterdam," *Church History and Religious Culture* 95, no. 4 (2015): 477-94. The author delivered a version of this material as the 2016 Benjamin Eby Lecture at Conrad Grebel University College.