The Antwerp Martyrs and Luther's First Song

by Robert J. Christman

If you asked modern Lutherans to name the first Luther hymn that came to mind, few, I wager, would propose "A New Song Here Shall be Begun," the Reformer's first musical work.[1] Not a hymn *per se*, "A New Song" is a ballad, a song that narrates a story, often of a contemporary event. Such works were a popular way to spread information quickly and broadly in pre-modern Europe.[2] Although, as we shall see, Luther's ballad finds its inspiration in the Psalms, unlike most of his other compositions it is not the musical transposition of a passage of scripture or section of the Catechism, nor is it the translation into German of a medieval Latin antecedent. Rather its overt subject matter is the arrest, interrogation, divestment, and executions of Hendrik Vos and Johann van den Esschen, two friars from the Augustinian cloister in Antwerp burned at the stake in Brussels on July 1, 1523, the first executions of the Reformation. That this event inspired Luther to song for the first time suggests that it was deeply significant to him, and to the Wittenberg Reformation. Five hundred years on, it seems fitting to ask why.[3]

One reason for Luther's reaction was his proximity to these men, not geographically speaking, but institutionally, and via personal connections. Like him, they belonged to the Congregation of German Reformed Augustinian Hermits, a reform movement within the larger Augustinian Order calling for renewed and rigorous adherence to the Rule of St. Augustine. With its heartlands in Saxony and Thuringia, by the early sixteenth century the Congregation comprised about thirty cloisters with about five hundred members total. Until his decision to remove his monastic cowl in 1524, Luther was deeply embedded its structure and ethos. At its apex stood the Vicar General, Johann von Staupitz, Luther's mentor. Beneath him were two District Vicars (eventually three, as we shall see), each charged with one of the Congregation's Districts, Saxony/Thuringia and Upper Germany. Between 1515 and 1518, Luther served as District Vicar for the former.

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But more important for his integration into this group were the ties he had to its members, a network facilitated by the fact that Staupitz had designated the University of Wittenberg the preferred location of education for the Congregation's most gifted recruits. As a result, between 1502 and 1522, about 160 young men from the Congregation's cloisters studied in Wittenberg, many matriculating first in that cloister's *studium generale*, a preparatory school for university, and then at the University itself.[4] From 1512 on Luther was not only a professor at the University, he was also director the *studium generale*. Thus he came into close contact with the Congregation's best and brightest, and via them, what was happening in each of its cloisters.

As to the situation in the Low Countries in particular, a pair of colleagues more his contemporaries certainly kept him appraised. Jacob Probst (c. 1495–1562) hailed from the Low Countries, came to Wittenberg to study in 1505, and was prior of Luther's house there from 1515 to 1518.[5] Thereafter, Probst returned to his homeland to take up the priorship of the Congregation's recently founded Antwerp house, a position he held until 1522. When he returned briefly to Wittenberg in summer of 1521 to continue his education, Luther, ensconced in the Wartburg, wrote to Philip Melanchthon asking him to greet a number of colleagues, but not "the fat little Flemish guy [=Probst]" because, noted Luther, he was going to write to Probst directly.[6] This off-hand comment suggests that not only were the two men in close contact, they may have even enjoyed some good-natured ribbing.

Hendrik van Zutphen (1488–1524), a second contemporary of Luther, likewise hailed from the Low Countries and matriculated at the University of Wittenberg in 1508, where he remained until 1515. Sent to the Congregation's cloister in Cologne, after a short stay there, he moved on to the house in Dordrecht in the Low Countries, where he took part in bringing that cloister into the Congregation's membership, and became its prior. In 1520, van Zutphen relinquished his post and returned to Wittenberg to continue his education. In 1522, he succeeded Probst as prior of the Congregation's Antwerp cloister. The point is that between his students and these two priors of the Antwerp Augustinians, the

situation in the Low Countries was not some far off abstraction for Luther, but immediate to his mental world.

But it was not only such personal connections that inspired Luther to compose his first song. A second reason was the reaction of the authorities in the Low Countries to Reformation stirrings, one that convinced him that demonic powers were at work there. In the summer of 1522, he wrote, "Satan rages powerfully everywhere, but especially in the Low Countries where power is given to the sophists to rule over us."[7] To understand why he thought this, it is necessary to recount briefly the history of the German Reformed Augustinians in the Low Countries, with a special emphasis on the cloister in Antwerp.

The Context

By the early 1500s, the Congregation had ceased to expand in Saxony/Thuringia, and had even lost houses in Upper Germany. But in Lower Germany, an area that included the Low Countries and a sliver of Germany west of the Rhine, there was opportunity. A populous, cosmopolitan corner of Europe, Staupitz must have sensed the possibilities. Until 1509, the Congregation had only three houses there, at Haarlem, Enkhuizen, and Enghien which, despite their locations, for administrative purposes had been part of the Congregation's District of Upper Germany. But under Staupitz's guidance, the Congregation added four more houses, Cologne (1509), Antwerp (1513), Ghent (sometime around 1515), and Dordrecht (1516). With the exception of Antwerp, in each case these additions came when patrons of extant Augustinian houses were convinced that reform was necessary. Staupitz then went himself or sent a senior member of the Congregation, who executed the reform and then incorporated the house into the Congregation. With the addition of these houses, it became necessary to reorganize the Congregation's structure. Lower Germany became the Congregation's third district in 1514, with six of its seven cloisters located in the Low Countries, the patrimonial lands of Charles V, soon to be elected emperor (1519). The seventh, Cologne, had close connections to the Low Countries. Located in his backyard, the Emperor would have

greater influence over these cloisters than those in the Congregation's other districts.

This expansion did not come without tensions, nowhere more evident than in Antwerp, the Congregation's house that stands out in a variety of ways. It was not an existing house reformed by the Congregation, nor was it founded at the behest of a noble patron. Rather, the impetus for establishing that cloister came solely from within the Congregation. And it was located in one of Europe's largest, most prosperous metropoles, a city with its own ecclesiastical hierarchy, not necessarily open to new competition. It was the Congregation's most audacious attempt at expansion.

As the story has been told, Johann van Mechelen, prior of the Congregation's house in nearby Enkhuizen, simply forged a plan to establish a house in Antwerp.[8] He sent a small group of Augustinians from Enkhuizen to execute the project, and they quickly erected a chapel that, in 1513, began to host services. But religious life in Antwerp was dominated by the powerful canons of the Church of Our Lady, the city's main church, and no one had asked their permission to establish a new cloister, a move that would cost them income by reduction in attendees, penitents, and donations.

The canons contacted their legal representative, Adrian Floriszoon, professor of theology at the nearby University of Leuven, dean of the chapter of the Church of Our Lady in Antwerp, and future pope Adrian VI (1522–1523) during whose pontificate Vos and van den Esschen would be burned. Floriszoon sent the Augustinians a "cease and desist" letter, and demanded that they remit any profits earned thus far. The Augustinians appealed their case to the Council of Brabant, Charles V's provincial government. When the Council sided with the Augustinians, Floriszoon and the canons appealed to the Antwerp city council. Ultimately the city council concurred with the Council of Brabant, promising the canons that if they were to drop their case, the city would find ways to remunerate them. Floriszoon went to the Church of Our Lady to obtain the canons' acquiescence to the agreement, then to the Augustinians' house to obtain that community's approval. On the list of the cloister's founding members and undoubtedly in attendance that day was Johann van den Esschen.[9] When, less than a decade later Vos and van den Esschen

were executed, the latter, at least, was no mere abstraction for Pope Adrian. The two had met face to face.

In 1514, van Mechelen became the Antwerp cloister's first prior and the Congregation's first District Vicar of Lower Germany. With the support of Staupitz, who visited in 1514 and 1516, the cloister blossomed, soon reaching c. 20 members. But it was under Probst, the cloister's second prior (1518–1522) that many of the critiques coming out of Wittenberg as well as Luther's understanding of justification by faith alone began to reverberate in Antwerp. By 1519, the Dutch humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam, himself living in the Low Countries, would write to Luther about Probst, "There is a man in Antwerp, prior of the monastery, a genuine Christian, who is most devoted to you and was once your pupil, or so he says. He is almost the only one who preaches Christ; the others, as a rule, preach the inventions of men or their own profit."[10] The Antwerp Augustinians were especially vocal in their criticism of indulgences, a message that resonated with the populace so that they were compelled to add balconies in their church, and crowds stood outside the windows to hear them preach.[11]

It did not take long for these developments to come to the attention of the authorities, ecclesiastical and temporal, who took a keen interest in what they saw as dangerous anti-authoritarian impulses. Leading their response was the papal legate, Jerome Aleander, who had been sent to the Low Countries by Pope Leo X to publicize the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* (June 15, 1520) threatening Luther with excommunication. Making common cause with theologians from the University of Leuven, who in 1519 had condemned Luther's teachings, and local members of the mendicant orders, Aleander convinced Charles V to burn Luther's books in Leuven. The promulgation of the *Edict of Worms* (May 25, 1521) emboldened these forces. Aleander placed blame for the unrest in the Low Countries at the feet of two men: Erasmus and Probst, the latter of whom he referred to as "of that type of demons who requires a stick."[12] Rome responded that he should make common cause with the other local powers in order to discipline "the damned Lutheran prior in Antwerp."[13]

Aleander enlisted the support of Charles, but the Emperor was also eager to confront the growing threat of Lutheran heresy in his

homelands himself. In spring of 1522, he took the unprecedented step of establishing his own secular inquisition, a function traditionally left to the episcopate. Heading Charles's inquisition was the layman, Frans van der Hulst, a jurist from Leuven and former student of Adrian Floriszoon. As a layman, van der Hulst was required to employ spirituals, and he hired two former members of the local episcopal inquisition, thereby appeasing the local bishop for infringing on his authority.[14] At this point, then, the papacy represented by Aleander, the emperor represented by van der Hulst, and the episcopate whose former inquisitors played a key role, were all working together.

Van der Hulst's first step was to invite Probst to Brussels for a "friendly conversation" only to arrest him upon his arrival. Held for eight weeks, repeatedly interrogated, and under the constant threat to the stake, on February 9, 1522, he recanted in front of an overflowing crowd at St. Gudula's church in Brussels, concluding with the statement,

> And I damn all errors and heresies, especially the Lutheran ones. And I embrace the Catholic faith as held and preached by the Holy Roman Church. And I promise to submit myself in faith to all that it teaches. And I now declare, just as I have promised and declared, to adhere [to it] and to cast Luther and his dogmas far away from me.[15]

Having been recalled to Rome upon Pope Leo X's death (December 1, 1521), Aleander remained in the Low Countries long enough to witness Probst's humiliation, after which responsibility for the prosecution of heresy there fell wholly to van der Hulst. Watching these events with great interest, Luther and his comrades were devastated by Probst's recantation and Luther prognosticated, "this is no longer a joke or a game, but it will now become serious, and it will exact life and blood."[16]

Probst was freed and sent to a nearby Augustinian cloister unaffiliated with the Congregation, where he resumed preaching "Lutheran doctrines." In May of 1522, he was summoned once more by van der Hulst, but fled to Wittenberg, where he published an account of his interactions with the inquisition.[17] Meanwhile, van der Hulst pressed forward his campaign against the Reformed Augustinians in

the Low Countries, questioning the prior of the cloister in Ghent and interrogating each of the Antwerp Augustinians, before allowing them to return to their cloister.[18]

Efforts were also made to sever connections between the Reformed Augustinians in the Low Countries and the Congregation's administration in Saxony. In the summer of 1522, the emperor's queen regent, Margaret of Austria (Charles had left for Spain that spring), ordered representatives of Lower Germany's seven cloisters to meet in Dordrecht. On July 27, 1522, four cloisters voted to break with the German Reformed Congregation and establish their own Congregation; the other three abstained. A few months later, the newly elected Pope Adrian VI confirmed these results.

That same summer, Hendrik van Zutphen returned from Wittenberg to the Low Countries, where he succeeded Propst as prior of the Antwerp cloister. Initially he seems to have kept a low profile, but when indulgence salesmen entered the city, Zutphen began to preach publicly, first from the pulpit, then in the streets. On September 29, 1522, under the pretext of being called to minister to an ailing Christian, he was enticed from the cloister, arrested, and held overnight for transport to an inquisitorial interview in Brussels. But that night, a crowd of enraged supporters, mostly women we are told, broke down the doors of his cell and freed him. He made for Wittenberg, stopping in the North German city of Bremen, where he was asked to preach and where he would remain for the next two years, working to reform that city.

Zutphen's escape was the last straw for the queen-regent, Margaret. On October 6, 1522, she again arrested the friars in the Antwerp cloister, then led a procession of the Eucharist out of their cloister church to the Church of Our Lady. Those brothers who were citizens of Antwerp were allowed to stay confined in the city; the remainder were loaded into carts and transported to various prisons. The cloister was disbanded and, with the imprimatur of Charles V and Pope Adrian, Margaret had it razed, its church converted into a parish church. The captive Augustinians were questioned, and those who recanted were released. Three refused, Lambert Thorn, Hendrik Vos, and Johann van den Esschen. Following the situation closely, in late 1522 Luther recounted these events

precisely, evidence that the plight of the Antwerp Augustinians was in the forefront of his mind.[19] It was this multi-pronged campaign against his Low Countries brethren that convinced Luther that the devil was exceptionally active there.

The Executions

But the most influential factor in Luther's decision to take to song was the executions themselves, the victims, and their actions. These convinced him that not only Satan, but God himself was at work in these events in a very immediate way—a claim that requires some explanation. It was not until the papacy officially threw its support behind the emperor's anti-heresy efforts in the Low Countries that the executions occurred. On June 1, 1523, the pope raised van der Hulst to the position of papal inquisitor, adding this title to his role as Charles's state inquisitor. This development was important because Charles did not make heresy a capital crime until 1529. Until then, only a church inquisition could condemn a heretic to death. Thus it was under the papal banner that one month later, on July 1, 1523, Hendrik Vos and Johann van den Esschen were burned on the Grand Plaza of Brussels.

Two anonymous pamphlets purporting to be eyewitness accounts were quickly published. A brief four pages in length, the most popular quickly went through sixteen editions in cities across Germany. I have translated it in full.

An Account of the Divestment and Burning of the three Christian Knights and Martyrs of the Augustinian Order, which occurred in Brussels on July 1, 1523. How the three Christian knights and martyrs of the Augustinian Order lamentably but joyfully and willingly (with outpourings of thanksgiving) rendered up their spirits to God for the sake of the Evangelical truth.

Three of the Augustinian monks driven out of Antwerp were held in different locations on account of the Christian truth they had professed. They were reproached for certain opinions, and told to recant, but they refused. Then other monks and ecclesiastics secretly bribed the temporal authorities and the pope as well, so that an edict arrived from Rome in which the pope condemned all who held such opinions to the stake. On the authority of this mandate, the emperor's court in Brussels began judicial proceedings against the monks, demanding that they recant certain articles. Among them, two in

particular touched a nerve: that God alone and not the pope had the power to forgive sins, to bind and loose; and that the pope was just as sinful a human being as any other priest. In addition, they were commanded to recant other Evangelical articles. There they stood and replied, no, they would not deny God's word, but would much rather die for the sake of their Christian faith. In response to this assertion they were told that they must burn. They were entirely willing to do so and declared themselves happy that God had been so gracious as to allow them to die on account of their Christian faith. One of the three monks [Lambert Thorn] requested a four-day reprieve to ponder whether to recant, and was led back to prison.

The other two [Vos and van den Esschen] were taken and dressed in the attire of priests about to hold mass, and an altar was erected. The bishop and other ecclesiastics who were present then removed [their] gowns of ordination and had them attired in different clothes; the younger monk in a yellow robe, and the older in a black one. They were then handed over to the court in Brussels, then to Lady Margaret's council, and finally, bound, to the executioner. Four father confessors accompanied them, the Dominican inquisitor from Cologne, a Carmelite monk from Brussels, and two other monks. These four walked along with the men, constantly urging them to recant. But the men praised God and rejoiced that he had given them the grace to die for his word. When they arrived at the pyre the four father confessors began to weep. But the two Augustinians told them that they should not cry on their account, but rather over their own sins; and they should weep at the great injustice being done, namely the persecution of godly righteousness. And with this they went to the fire joyfully smiling. As their robes were taken off, the one consoled the other, and they went to their deaths together. Then the father confessors asked them once more if they remained hardened in their denial of the faith. They replied, 'We believe in God, and in a Christian church. But we do not believe in your church.' And there they stood on the firewood for half an hour before it was finally lit, the whole while continually repeating that they desired to die in the name of Christ. Finally the four father confessors shrieked at them to recant, or they would go to the devil, dying in the devil's name. But the two men responded that they would die for the sake of Evangelical truth, as pious Christians. Thereafter the fires were lit, and from then on they cried nothing but, 'Lord, Lord, O Son of David, have mercy on us.' When the ropes binding them burned before they suffocated, one fell to his knees in the fire, folded his hands, and cried, 'Lord, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us.' Thereafter they both passed away and were burned to dust. The episode lasted almost four hours.

Three days later, they also burned the monk who had asked for time to reconsider, treating him as they had the others. He was a relatively learned man, who preached a long sermon at the execution spot, and thereafter he was martyred. And when they lit the pyre he continued to preach until the fire and flames swept over him. He, too, passed away, blessed in God.[20]

In fact, the third friar who requested time to reconsider was not burned. Lambert Thorn, the oldest of the three and a man of some stature among the Antwerp Augustinians (Luther referred to him as

Probst's successor "in words")[21] spent the rest of his life in prison, dying in 1528, but not before Luther wrote him a letter of consolation.[22] This pamphlet, composed to raise maximum hostility toward the ecclesiastical authorities, was the means by which most people heard the details of the executions, Luther undoubtedly among them.

The Ballad

His use of this account, coupled with the fact that he chose to write a genre of song designed to spread news quickly, have caused some historians to put his ballad down to his keen understanding of its potential for propaganda.[23] Such an interpretation is, at best, only partially correct. What impressed Luther most was not the event's potential for publicity, or that the pope and emperor were willing to execute these men for their adherence to the evangelical faith, or that some of the Antwerp Augustinians were willing to die for the Gospel. It was, rather, who remained steadfast, and how they went to their deaths.

From Luther's perspective, the events in the Low Countries represented a prodigious struggle. Pope, emperor, episcopal authorities, university theologians, and leaders of the mendicant orders, a constellation of the highest and mightiest political, ecclesiastical, and intellectual powers in Europe, had allied themselves against the Antwerp Augustinians. Who could stand against such forces? Not those in leadership positions. Probst had recanted. Van Zutphen had fled. At the last moment, even Thorn had asked for time to reconsider. And perhaps Luther even pondered his own ordeal at Worms in which he, too, had asked for time to contemplate. But two young, otherwise unknown and unremarkable friars had not only remained steadfast, they had gone to their deaths with extraordinary conviction, joy, and as the other eyewitness pamphlet claims, singing. For Luther, this was something new; this was a miracle; this was the hand of God; this was the Lord of history working in the Reformation, for that is how God worked, not via the machinations of the rich and powerful, the learned and the wise, but through the faithfulness and lowliness of the simple and the meek.[24]

How should one react when one observes the mighty hand of God moving so clearly? Looking to the Scriptures, Luther was inspired by the Psalms, particularly Psalms 96 and 98, both of which begin "O sing unto the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous [or miraculous] things." A close reading of Luther's ballad demonstrates that the framework and key elements of Psalm 98 in particular are in evidence in the text. Put another way, the ballad is a direct response to the urgings of the Psalmist. For Luther, the events in Brussels were one of God's marvelous deeds that required song, a new song. Thus Luther's ballad is not about the execution of Vos and van den Esschen *per se*, it is about "what our God himself hath done" and what he has done is to have "showed the wonders [or miracle] of his hands," as he writes in the first stanza. For what looked to the world like a stunning defeat was just the opposite. Vos and van den Esschen had won the crown of martyrs. The authorities, whom Luther conflates with the devil, had been bested. God had showed his power. Such a realization was not cause for despair, but for hope; not for sorrow, but for joy.[25] Luther ends his ballad with God himself in full action, bringing the Reformation movement to his own desired end.[26]

Even at the door is summer nigh,
The winter now is ended,
The tender flowers come out and spy;
His hand when once extended
Withdraws not till he's finished.

The executions of Vos and van den Esschen would have far-reaching consequences, not least of all due to "A New Song," which achieved immediate popularity. In later years, individuals in the Low Countries would refer to the courage displayed by the Augustinians as they faced the flames as motivation for their own turn toward Protestantism. In the German-speaking world, the pamphlets would also broadly impact popular opinion.[27] But with regard to Luther himself, it is difficult to imagine that the success of his ballad did not inspire his further attempts to use music to express his understanding of Christian truths.

A New Song Here Shall be Begun[28]

1. A new song here shall be begun—
The Lord God help our singing!
Of what our God himself hath done,
Praise, honour to him bringing.
At Brussels in the Netherlands
By two boys, martyrs youthful
He showed the wonders of his hands,
Whom he with favour truthful
So richly hath adorned.

2. The first right fitly John was named,
So rich he in God's favour;
His brother, Henry—one unblamed,
Whose salt lost not its savor.
From this world they are gone away,
The diadem they've gained;
Honest, like God's good children, they
For his word life disdained,
And have become his martyrs.

3. The old arch-fiend did them immure
With terrors did enwrap them.
He bade them God's dear Word abjure,
with cunning he would trap them:
From Louvain many sophists came,
In their curst nets to take them,
By him are gathered to the game:
The Spirit fools doth make them—
They could get nothing by it.

4. Oh! they sang sweet, and they sang sour;
Oh! they tried every double;
The boys they stood firm as a tower,
And mocked the sophists' trouble.
The ancient foe it filled with hate
That he was thus defeated
By two such youngsters—he, so great!
His wrath grew sevenfold heated,
He laid his plans to burn them.

5. Their cloister garments off they tore,
Took off their consecrations;
All this the boys were ready for,
They said Amen with patience.
To God their Father they gave thanks
That they would soon be rescued
From Satan's scoffs and mumming pranks,
With which, in falsehood masked,
The world he so befooleth.

6. Then gracious God did grant to them
To pass true priesthood's border,
And offer up themselves to him,
And enter Christ's own order,
Unto the world to die outright,
With falsehood made a schism,
And come to heaven all pure and white,
To monkery be the besom,
And leave men's toys behind them.

7. They wrote for them a paper small,
And made them read it over;
The parts they showed them therein all
Which their belief did cover.
Their greatest fault was saying this:
'In God we should trust solely;
For man is always full of lies,
We should distrust him wholly:'
So they must burn to ashes.

8. Two huge great fires they kindled then,
The boys they carried to them;
Great wonder seized on every man,
For with contempt they view them.
To all with joy they yielded quite,
With singing and God-praising;
The sophs had little appetite
For these new things so dazing.
Which God was thus revealing.

9. *They now repent the deed of blame,*[29]
Would gladly gloze it over;
They dare not glory in their shame,
The facts almost they cover.
In their hearts gnaweth infamy—
They to their friends deplore it;
The Spirit cannot silent be:
Good Abel's blood out-poured
Must still besmear Cain's forehead.

10. *Leave off their ashes never will;*
Into all lands they scatter;
Stream, hole, ditch, grave—nought keeps them still
With shame the foe they spatter.
Those whom in life with bloody hand
He drove to silence triple,
When dead, he them in every land,
In tongues of every people,
Must hear go gladly singing.

11. But yet their lies they will not leave,
To trim and dress the murther;
The fable false which out they gave,
Shows conscience grinds them further.
God's holy ones, e'en after death,
They still go on belying;
They say that with their latest breath,
The boys, in act of dying,
Repented and recanted.

12. Let them lie on for evermore—
No refuge so is reared;
For us, we thank our God therefore,
His word has reappeared.
Even at the door is summer nigh,
The winter now is ended,
The tender flowers come out and spy;
His hand when once extended
Withdraws not till he's finished.

NOTES

1. Martin Luther, 'A New Song Here Shall Be Begun,' ed. by Ulrich Leupold in: *Luther's Works, Luther's Works, American Edition*, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann vols. 1–55, Christopher Boyd Brown vols. 56–80 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1955ff.) 53:211–216. (Hereafter cited as LW.) Or see the text provided above.

2. For discussions of the song's form see Martin Rössler, "Ein neues Lied wir heben an: Ein Protestsong Martin Luthers," in *Reformation und Praktische Theologie: Festschrift für Werner Jetter zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, eds. Hans Müller and Dietrich Rössler (Göttingen: Vandehoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 216–232. esp. 217–221; and Paul F. Casey, "' Start Spreading the News' Martin Luther's First Published Song," in *Renaissance and Reformation Studies: In Laudem Caroli for Charles G. Nauert*, ed. by James V. Mehl, Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies 49 (Kirksville: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1998), 75–94.

3. The executions of Hendrik Vos and Johann van den Esschen have been addressed by historians from a variety of perspectives and with regard to various themes. As to their local significance see, for example, Alistair Duke, "The Netherlands," in *The Early Reformation in Europe*, ed. Andrew Pettegree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 142–165.; Paul Kalkoff, *Die Anfänge der Gegenreformation in den Niederlanden*, 2 vols (Halle: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1903 & 1904).; and Otto Clemen, "Die Erster Märtyrer des evangelischen Glaubens," *Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte* 1 (1900): 40–52.

In light of Martin Luther's response to the deaths, see Dick Akerboom and Marcel Gielis, "' A New Song Shall Begin Here . . .' The Martyrdom of Luther's Followers among Antwerp's Augustinians on July 1, 1523 and Luther's Response," in *More than a Memory: The Discourse of Martyrdom and the Construction of Christian Identity in the History of Christianity*, ed. Johan Leemans (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 243–270; Rebecca Oettinger, *Music as Propaganda in the German Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001); Casey, "Start Spreading the News," and Rössler, "Ein neues Lied wir heben."

For the content and influence of the pamphlets about the executions on notions of martyrdom and the creation of martyr literature of the period see Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Bernd Moeller, "Inquisition und Martyrium in Flugschriften der frühen Reformation in Deutschland," in *Ketzerverfolgung im 16. und frühen 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. S. Seidel Menchi (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1992), 21–48; and Hildegard Hebenstreit-Wilfert, "Märtyrerflugschriften der Reformationszeit," in *Flugschriften als Massenmedium der Reformationszeit: Beiträge zum Tübinger Symposion 1980*, ed. Hans-Joachim Köhler (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1981), 397–44.

For the theological issues separating Luther (and by association, the Antwerp Augustinians) from the theologians responsible for prosecuting these friars see Marcel Gielis, "Augustijnergeloof en Predikherengeloof: Het conflict tussen de reformatorische verkondiging van de Antwerpse augustijnen en de scholastieke leer van de Leuvense theologen (ca. 1520)," *Luther-Bulletin: Tijdschift voor interconfessioneel Lutheronderzoek* 6 (1997): 46–57.

4. Hans Schneider, "Johannes von Staupitz' Amtsverszicht und Ordenswechsel," *Augustiniana* 66 (2016): 185–231, here at 187.

5. The prior during that period is referred to in the sources only by his first name, Jacob. Of the three Jacobs who were members of the cloister during this period only Probst

had the appropriate education to hold the position of prior. Fritz Bünger and Gottfried Wentz, "Das Augustinereremitenkloster in Wittenberg," in *Das Bistum Brandenburg*, Part II, *Germania Sacra*, ed. Gustav Abb and Gottfried Wentz, 2. Vols (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1929–1941), 1.3, 440–499, here at 468.

6. "das fette Flemmichen," Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke,* Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Briefwechsel*, 18 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930–1985), 2:349, May 26, 1521. (Hereafter cited as WABr.)

7. "Satanas enim ubique irascitur fortiter nimis, praesertim in inferioribus partibus terrae, ubi sophistis datum est regnum super nos." June 11, 1522, WABr. 2:559.

8. Elsewhere I have argued that this was done under the auspices of Staupitz. See Robert J. Christman, *The Dynamics of the Early Reformation in their Reformed Augustinian Context* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 48.

9. Otto Clemen, "Das Antwerper Augustiner-Kloster bei Beginn der Reformation (1513–1515)," *Monatshefte der Comenius-Gesellschaft* 10 (1901), 306–313, here at 306.

10. "Est Antuerpiae Prior eius monasterii, vir pure Christianus, qui te unice deamat, tuus olim discipulus, ut predicat. Is omnium pene solus Christum praedicat: caeteri fere aut hominum fabulas aut suum quaestum praedicant." Desiderius Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami denuo recognitum et auctum*, eds. Percy Stafford Allen and H. M. Allen, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906–1958), 3:607.

11. *Corpus documentorum inquisitionis haereticae pravitats Neerlandicae*, ed. Paul Fredericq, 5 vols (Gent: J. Vuylsteke, 1889–1902), 4:36. (Hereafter cited as CD.)

12. "est ex eo genere Demonum che ha bisogno di baston." *Monumenta Reformationis Lutheranae ex tabularis s. sedis, 1521–1525,* ed. Petrus Balan (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1883), 289.

13. "Quel maledicto Lutherano priore di Augustiniani . . ." *Monumenta Reformationis*, 292.

14. For a fuller description of Charles V's "secular Inquisition" see Gert Gielis and Violet Soen, "The Inquisitorial Office in the Sixteenth-Century Habsburg Low Countries: A Dynamic Perspective," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 66 (2015): 47–66.

15. "et damno omnem errorem et haeresim, potissimum Lutherianam, et amplector fidem catholicam, quam tenet et predicat sancta Romana ecclesia, et ei me in fide et omnibus que docet, submitto et eidem promitto et jam juro, sicut jam promisi et juravi, adherere et Lutherum cum suo dogmate procul a me abjicere." *Anathematizatio et revocation*, CD 4:94.

16. "Res iam non amplius iocus aut ludus, sed serium erit, et vitam exiget et sanguinem." April 12, 1522, WABr 2:494.

17. Jacob Probst, *Fratris Jacobi Praepositi historia utriusque captivitatis* in *Bonae Literae et Lutherus: Texte und Untersuchungen zu den Anfängen der Theologie des Bremer Reformators Jakob Probst*, ed. Ortwin Rudloff, Hospitium Ecclesiae: Forschungen zur Bremischen Kirchengeschichte 14 (Bremen: Verlag M. Hauschild, 1985), 42–59.

18. Due to a lack of clarity in the sources, my claim that the Antwerp Augustinians were interviewed and recanted in the summer of 1522 is based upon somewhat circumstantial evidence. For a full explanation, see Christman, *The Dynamics*, 62–66.

19. "Monasterio expulsi fratres, alii aliis locis captivi, alii negato Christo dimissi, alii adhuc stant fortes, qui autem filii civitatis sunt, in domum Beghardorum sunt detrusi; vendita omnia vasa monasterii, et ecclesia cum monasterio clausa et obstructa, tandem demolienda. Sacramentum cum pompa in Ecclesiam beatae Virginis translatum, tanquam e loco haeretico, susceptum honorifice a Domina Margareta. Cives aliquot et mulieres vexatae et punitae." December 19, 1522, WABr 2:632.

20. Anonymous, *Der Actus und handlung der degradation und verprennung der Christlichen dreyer Ritter und Merterer, Augustiner ordens geschehen zu Brüssel*, Various locations and various publishers, 1523. This pamphlet is accessible online via google books at https://books.google.com/books/about/Der_Actus_vnd_handlung_der_Degradation_v.html?id=PFRpAAAAcAAJ (accessed 7/25/2022).

21. July 22 or 23, 1523, WABr 3:115.

22. January 19, 1524, WABr 3:238.

23. Such impressions are found widely in the literature. For example, Paul Casey writes, "Luther constructed his ballad as an argument aimed directly at advancing the evangelical cause." And "[Luther] could use this unanticipated event to broadcast the joyous message that people were willing to die for their faith in the Word." And , "Luther seized the opportunity presented by the events in Brussels to exploit this sign of success of his interpretation of the Word." Casey, "Start Spreading the News'," 83, 90, 90, 90; Rebecca Oettinger writes of Luther, "He wished to discredit [the Catholic Church's] version of the events and spread the news about the executions and the brave conduct of the Augustinians as quickly as possible." Oettinger, *Music as Propaganda*, 64. And Martin Brecht surmises, "It was a gripping ballad, which was undoubtedly intended to serve a propagandistic purpose." Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521–1532*, trans. James Schaaf (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990 [1986]), 103.

24. I am not the first to make this point. Robert Kolb has argued convincingly that Luther's key realization in this and other martrydoms was that in such an asymmetrical power relationship, God reveals himself when the seemingly weaker and defeated party comes out the winner. Kolb attributes this observation of Luther to the Reformer's broader "theology of the cross," a theology of paradox which equates God's wisdom with what seems like foolishness and God's power with what seems like impotence. Robert Kolb, "God's Gift of Martyrdom: The Early Reformation Understanding of Dying for the Faith," *Church History* 64 (1995): 399–441, 401. And Martin Rössler has put what most impressed Luther about the case succinctly: "In der offensichtlichen Ohnmacht der Bekenner zeigt Gott seine Macht (In the obvious impotence of the confessors, God reveals his power)." Rössler, "Ein neues Lied," 221.

25. Luther emphasizes this point in his letter of consolation to the Christians in the Low Countries. *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–1993), 12:77–79. (Hereafter cited as WA.)

26. For a complete analysis of the elements of the Psalm that exhibit themselves in the text of the ballad, see Christman, *The Dynamics*, Chapter 7.

27. For a discussion of the broad impact of the executions, see Gregory, *Salvation at Stake*; and Christman, *The Dynamics*, especially chapters 8–10.

28. Martin Luther, "A New Song Here Shall Be Begun," LW 53: 211–216. For discussion of translation choices, which are basically sound, see Christman, *The Dynamics,* chapter 7.

29. The broadsheet version, as well as the Erfurt *Enchiridion* version, do not include stanzas 9 and 10. They were probably a later addition, meant as an alternate ending to the original ending in verses 11 and 12 here. See WA 35:94.