

THE LETTERS OF BURCHARD DE VOLDER TO PHILIPP VAN LIMBORCH

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In these notes I provide the transcription and annotated edition of the only four extant letters of the Dutch Cartesian-inspired philosopher and mathematician Burchard de Volder (1643–1709), professor at Leiden from 1670 to 1705, to the Remonstrant theologian Philipp van Limborch (1633–1712), professor of theology in the Amsterdam Remonstrant seminary from 1668 to 1712. As the reader can find detailed reconstructions both of De Volder's and Van Limborch's lives and intellectual paths in a variety of secondary sources,¹ it is enough to give here some insights into their direct connections only, before turning to the correspondence itself.

Burchard de Volder, born in Amsterdam in 1643 son of Joost de Volder, Mennonite landscape painter and translator of Hugo Grotius's *De veritate religionis Christianae* (1627) into Dutch,² received his master's degree at Utrecht in 1660 (under Johannes de Bruyn), and his medical doctorate at Leiden on 3

1 As to De Volder, see KLEVER 1988; WIESENFELDT 2002, 54–64, 99–132; WIESENFELDT 2003; LODGE 2005; NYDEN 2013; NYDEN 2014; VAN BUNGE 2013; VAN BUNGE 2017. As to Van Limborch, see BARNOUW 1963; SIMONUTTI 1984; SIMONUTTI 1990; SIMONUTTI 2002; HICKS 1985; VAN ROODEN, WESSELIUS 1987; DE SCHEPPER 1993; VAN BUNGE 2003; LANDUCCI 2015; DAUGIRDAS 2017.

2 Cf. GROTIUS 1653. On Joost de Volder, see BECK 1972–1991, volume 4, 422–427; WELLER 2009, 216–219; LAMBOUR 2012.

July 1664 (under Franciscus Sylvius). Having come back to his hometown, until 1670 – when he became professor of philosophy at Leiden thanks to the recommendation of Johannes Hudde, one of the mayors of Amsterdam, a director of the Dutch East India Company, Cartesian sympathizer, mathematician and correspondent of Spinoza³ – De Volder worked as a physician in the Remonstrant Church, besides continuing his ‘private’ meditations on Cartesian philosophy, and participating in the lectures of Alexander de Bie at the Amsterdam *Athenaeum Illustre* as polemical opponent (i.e. *antisophista*), and making his name widely known.⁴ It was in these years most probably that De Volder was directly acquainted, not only with Hudde and possibly Spinoza (amongst others),⁵ but also with Van Limborch. Born in Amsterdam ten years before De Volder, Van Limborch studied theology in his native city at the Remonstrant Seminary. In 1657 he was appointed minister at the Gouda Remonstrant Brotherhood, while in 1667 he became minister at Amsterdam and lecturer and professor of theology at the Remonstrant Seminary. Together with Jean Le Clerc (from 1684 professor of philosophy and Hebrew at the Seminary), Van Limborch was certainly De Volder’s most important acquaintance amongst the Amsterdam Remonstrants. De Volder being a Mennonite, and in particular a *protégé* of

3 On him, see DE WAARD 1911–1937; VERMIJ, ATZEMA 1995; KLEVER 1997, chapter 3; VAN BERKEL 1999b; DE JONG, ZUIDERVAART 2018.

4 See GRONOVIVS 1709, 17–18; LE CLERC 1709, 350.

5 A connection between Hudde, Spinoza and De Volder in the 1660s can be established on the grounds of a letter by Pieter Baert to Christiaan Huygens, where Baert reported having contact with all of them from 1665 onwards: “sedert den jaere 1665 als wanneer ick tot Amsterdam ginck woonen, alwaer ick in veel heerlijcke vergaderingen, als ook int bysonder, van dhr. Johannes Hudde, Benedictus de Spinoza ende dr. Voldere professor der hoogeschole in philos. tot leyden; menigmael loffelyck hebbe ooren spreken, van uE overtreffelijckheyt in de konsten der philosophie en mathematique,” Baert to Huygens, 5 February 1676, in HUYGENS 1888–1950, volume 18, 3–4 (letter 2085).

Galenus Abrahamsz. de Haan⁶ (physician and minister to the Mennonite Church congregation at the Amsterdam church Bij 't Lam (i.e. Singelkerk) – attended by De Volder's father),⁷ and certainly acquainted with Grotius's Remonstrant theology, it was somehow natural for him to come in contact with Van Limborch and with Le Clerc. Indeed, as reconstructed by Andrew Cooper Fix, Abrahamsz. de Haan had a markedly 'liberal' approach to the articles of faith, considering as necessary to faith only those articles aiming at salvation.⁸ This idea was shared by both Van Limborch and Le Clerc,⁹ as well as by the 'Cartesio-Cocceian' faction in the Dutch Universities, and had its foremost expounders in Abraham Heidanus, Christoph Wittich and Johannes de Raey, for whom theology and philosophy are different in aims and methods, theology being a practical discipline, aimed at the salvation of man and relying on the study of Revelation only (which has to be interpreted through itself), while philosophy concerns the discovery of truth by natural means only.¹⁰ De Volder belonged to this faction in practice, as he cooperated with Heidanus and Wittich in the defence of Cartesianism at Leiden in the mid-1670s,¹¹ and whose views also inspired his private study of the Bible.¹²

To date, the first documented contact between De Volder and Van

6 He was the dedicatee of a disputation defended by De Volder at the Amsterdam *Athenaeum Illustre*: see DE BIE, DE VOLDER 1658.

7 See MEIHUIZEN 1956; LAMBOUR 2012. Notably, in the pamphlet *Het compromis tusschen Dr. Galenus Abramsz, nevens sijne medestanders, en Tobias Govertz van den Wyngaert* (1665), Joost de Volder is cited as siding with Galen: see ABRAHAMSZ. DE HAAN 1665, 7 and 13.

8 See FIX 1990.

9 See MARSHALL 2006, 481.

10 See VAN DER WALL 1996; STRAZZONI 2019, chapter 4.

11 See HEIDANUS, DE VOLDER, WITTICH 1676.

12 Among De Volder's papers, indeed, his colleague Jacob Gronovius found a *Collectio eorum quae aperto sensu in SS. commendantur ut omnino necessaria scitu vel factu ad salutem, sequentibus numeris ad denotanda illa loca*: see GRONOVIVS 1709, 28–29. This paper is now lost.

Limborch can be traced back to 1674. In the Summer break of that year, De Volder notoriously travelled to England, where he certainly met Isaac Newton (as revealed by De Volder's letter to Newton of 14/24 November 1684, reporting their meeting 10 years before),¹³ and probably acquired the plans for the construction of the air pump from Robert Hooke, whose second model of an air pump was the basis for De Volder's model, built by Samuel van Musschenbroek after De Volder's return to the Netherlands.¹⁴ As reported by Abraham des Amorie van der Hoeven jr.'s *De Philippo a Limborch, theologo, dissertatio historico-theologica* (1843), De Volder travelled together with George Konrad Crusius (professor of law at Leiden) and Christian Melder (professor of mathematics), after having requested letters of introduction to Van Limborch, who at that time was in contact with Henry More and Ralph Cudworth.¹⁵ Unfortunately, at the time of writing these notes the exact source for Van der Hoeven as to this point could not be ascertained.¹⁶

Further traces of the contacts between De Volder and Van Limborch consist of the mention of two letters by De Volder to Van Limborch, dated 1676 and 1688, in the catalogue of an auction organized in 1862 by Martinus Nijhoff. According to Nijhoff, who provided an extract from them, the letters

13 See HALL 1982.

14 See VAN HELDEN 1991.

15 "Tanti Limborchium faciebant viri docti in Anglia ut viri clarissimi Crusius Juris, Volde-
rus Philosophiae, Melderus Mathematices in Academia nostra primaria Lugduno-Bata-
va professores, cum anno 1674 per ferias caniculares in Angliam excurrere statuissent,
ab illo literas commendatitias sibi efflagitandas censuerint," DES AMORIE VAN DER
HOEVEN 1843, *De Philippo a Limborch, theologo, dissertatio historico-theologica*, 39. On Van
Limborch's correspondence network, see SIMONUTTI 1984; SIMONUTTI 1990; VAN ROODEN,
WESSELIUS 1987; WALSH 2018.

16 Des Amorie van der Hoeven he refers to "Manuscripta varii generis quae servantur in
Bibliothecis Remonstrantium Amstelodamensi et Roterodamensi," DES AMORIE VAN DER
HOEVEN 1843, *De Philippo a Limborch, theologo, dissertatio historico-theologica*, 39. These ma-
nuscripts are now extant at the Amsterdam University Library and at the municipal lib-
rary of Rotterdam.

dealt with theological matters :

Volder, B. De, Prof. de philos. à Leide, cartésien célèbre. 2 Ltt. aut. sig. en Holl. à S. [sic] v. Limborch. 1676, 88. Avec cachet. Lettres spirituelles. 'Hoe souw ik int goudt gaan als men met dadelycke proeven kon toonen dat onse leerwijse soude dienst doen aan de vrienden'.¹⁷

These two letters have not been retrieved. The aforementioned contents can be translated as follows: “how would I go for gold if it could be demonstrated by direct proofs that our teaching would be of service to friends.”

Eventually, De Volder played a part in the famous debate at a distance between John Locke and Hudde on the numerical uniqueness of God, which took place in 1697–1699 and in which Van Limborch acted as mediator between the two, given the extremely delicate nature of the issue, on which Hudde had already corresponded in 1666 with Spinoza, who could not convince him with his arguments.¹⁸ Hudde asked Locke for a solution to the problem of the uniqueness of God after having read his *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), as testified to by the letter of Van Limborch to Locke of 28 August/8 September 1697.¹⁹ Locke, in turn, provided his argument to Van Limborch in a letter of 21 February 1698 – an argument not meant to be sent to Hudde, but for the use of Van Limborch and for that of Jean Le Clerc.²⁰ Once he read Locke’s argument, based on the idea of the idea of the omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence of God, entailed by His perfection,²¹

¹⁷ NIJHOFF 1862, 85.

¹⁸ See MONTUORI 1983; KLEVER 1989; DI BIASE 2014.

¹⁹ This is letter 2318 of Locke’s correspondence (LOCKE 1976–1989).

²⁰ Letter 2395 of Locke’s correspondence. Locke agreed to provide an answer to Hudde’s question in letter 2340 (29 October 1697).

²¹ The argument is given in letter 2395, Locke to Van Limborch, 21 February 1698. See also letter 2400, Van Limborch to Locke, 1/11 March 1698.

Van Limborch wrote back to Locke pointing out how such an argument would not convince Hudde, as far as Locke's argument relied on the idea of divine omnipresence - a decidedly non-Cartesian idea.²² Thus, in his subsequent reply of 2-4 April 1698, Locke provided a slightly modified version of his argument.²³ As testified to by Van Limborch's letter to Locke of 6/16 May 1698, this was the argument eventually read by Hudde, who in turn communicated to Locke (*via* Van Limborch) that he would rather prefer a demonstration not based on the assumed definition of God as perfect being, but rather a demonstration by which one can provide the very definition of God. Moreover, Hudde presented to Locke his own 'method' to demonstrate the uniqueness of God, encompassed in three propositions:

- 1) "There is given an eternal being, independent, existing by the necessity of its own nature, and sufficient to itself."
- 2) "Such a being is only one, and there cannot be more than one being of the same sort."
- 3) "That being, because it is unique, embraces all perfections in itself; and this being is God."

Hudde claimed to have a demonstration for proposition 2 (which he labelled as just assumed, but not demonstrated, by Descartes), from which proposition 3 should follow, while proposition 1 could be found in the *Essay concerning Human Understanding* of Locke, from whom Hudde asked for a comment-

²² Van Limborch answered Locke's argument, expounded in letter 2395, in two letters: 2406 (11/21 March 1698) and 2410 (1 April 1698).

²³ This is letter 2413 of Locke's correspondence.

ary upon his method.²⁴ Subsequently, Locke agreed with the order of the propositions set forth by Hudde, and proposed an *a priori* argument for the uniqueness of God (namely, for Locke there exists an eternal being which is infinite, and thus it cannot be but numerically one, as there is nothing outside it),²⁵ which was however rejected by Hudde as presupposing proposition 3 itself.²⁶ Then, the communications between Hudde and Locke were interrupted.²⁷ Van Limborch had no occasion to meet Hudde in the coming weeks; however, he met De Volder during the Summer holiday of the same year, with whom he discussed Hudde's 'method'. De Volder, as reported by Van Limborch in his letter to Locke of 2/12 September 1698, had already discussed the issue with Hudde, without coming to a solution. De Volder disagreed with Hudde's main tenet, namely, the idea of an 'absolute dualism'

24 "Probat argumenta tua, supposita illa quam adhibes Dei definitione: Ens enim undique perfectum, seu, quod eodem redit, omnes in se complectens perfectiones, non nisi unum esse posse, manifestum est. Verum ille quaerit argumentum, non ex definitione Dei desumptum, sed ex ipsa ratione naturali, et per quod in definitionem Dei deducamur. Hac nempe methodo instituit demonstrationem suam. I. Datur ens aeternum, independens, necessitate naturae suae existens, et sibi ipsi sufficiens. II. Ens tale est tantum unum, et plura istiusmodi entia esse nequeunt. III. Illud ens, quia est tantum unicum, omnes in se complectitur perfectiones: atque hoc ens est Deus. Primam propositionem Vir Magnificus ait te in tractatu tuo de intellectu humano egregie adstruxisse, iisdem plane argumentis, quibus ipse in sua demonstratione usus est, adeo ut suas cogitationes in argumentatione tua expressas viderit. Tanto enixius secundam propositionem a te probatam videre desiderat; qua solide probata, tertia nullo negotio ex duabus prioribus deduci potest. Secundam, ait, omnes theologos ac philosophos, quin et ipsum Cartesium, praesupponere, non probare. Non dubito, quin mihi omnem suam argumentationem communicaturus sit: credo autem non id facturum, antequam tua argumenta viderit; ut tuas cogitationes, quas ipse es meditatus, cum suis conferre possit," LOCKE 1976–1989, volume 6, 386–387. Translation from page 386. This is letter 2432 of Locke's correspondence. Cf. Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, book 4, chapter 10, §§ 3–6.

25 This is letter 2443 of Locke's correspondence, dated 21 May 1698.

26 This is letter 2460 of Locke's correspondence, dated 21 June/1 July 1698.

27 The matter is not discussed in the letter by Van Limborch to Locke of 8/18 August 1698 (letter 2482), where it is reported that Van Limborch did not meet Hudde after his last letter.

between extension and thought, according to which these two substances have nothing in common. De Volder rejects this idea for two reasons: 1) if this were true, extension could not be the object of thought (which is manifestly absurd); 2) insofar as thought is infinite, namely, it is not limited by anything else of its kind, it must have knowledge of extension. Accordingly, De Volder seemed to accept the idea that extension and thought have something in common, *à la* Spinoza – even if he did not go so far as to explicitly maintain that they are two attributes of one substance. Moreover, it is on the ground of the idea that a being “existing *per se* and sufficient to itself” is infinite in its nature or kind, that De Volder justified, to Van Limborch, the uniqueness of God, thus rejecting Hudde’s method, and agreeing with Van Limborch that proposition 2 follows proposition 3. Or, in Van Limborch’s own words:

Since my last conversation with the Magnifico [Hudde] there has been no opportunity of meeting him; he has for some time been suffering from a slight fever. But although I may meet him at various times I do not hope to elicit anything further from him. During these last August holidays Mr. de Volder, professor of philosophy in the University of Leyden, was with us for some days. I told him about my talks with the Magnifico; I added that I want to hear with what arguments the Magnifico will establish the unity of a being existing of itself and sufficient to itself before it is proved that that being is unique, he [de Volder] replied that it ought necessarily to be affirmed of such a being that it is infinite, infinite, that is, in its own nature; that it ought to be affirmed that thought is of infinite knowledge, matter of infinite extension, inasmuch as they exist of themselves. But I [Van Limborch] inferred that it follows thence that other attributes also can be proved; for infinity having been proved other attributes, without which infinity cannot be conceived, can also be proved to appertain to that being. Which he [de Volder] did not deny. He therefore seemed to think with me that the unity of a being of that kind would be sought in vain by such a way, but that the second proposition ought to be the third.²⁸

28 Translation from LOCKE 1976–1989, volume 6, 464–465. This is letter 2485 of Locke’s correspondence.

As late as 4 October 1698, Van Limborch had still not met Hudde. Van Limborch, actually, suspected that Hudde had no arguments by which he could justify his 'method', and was just eager to know Locke's solution.²⁹ This is confirmed by the following letters, as Hudde did not summon Van Limborch anymore.³⁰ Moreover, after Locke had asked Van Limborch to approach Hudde and to give him a letter for him, asking for Hudde's argument,³¹ Van Limborch would eventually meet Hudde at a friend's house at the beginning of June 1699, together with De Volder and the Amsterdam lawyer Abraham vanden Ende. There, they could not talk openly, as other people were present. However, Van Limborch managed to hand Hudde Locke's letter. Hudde, in turn, postponed its discussion to another time – and Vanden Ende and De Volder suggested Van Limborch not to press Hudde further. The day after, De Volder and Vanden Ende met Hudde again, but he avoided any discussion, leading De Volder to agree with Van Limborch that Hudde simply had no arguments.³² After two further letters by Van Limborch in

29 See the letter by Van Limborch to Locke of 4/14 October 1698 (letter 2494 of Locke's correspondence).

30 See the letter by Van Limborch to Locke of 29 November/9 December 1698 (letter 2516), answering Locke's letter of 4–18 October 1698 (letter 2498).

31 See the letter by Locke of 4–5 October 1698 (letter 2557).

32 See the letter by Van Limborch of 13/23 June 1699 (letter 2596): "[q]uaesivi occasionem Viro Magnifico [i.e. Hudde] eas ostendendi, quam commodissimam mihi praebuit D. Volderi Professoris Leidensis adventus: itaque ipso et D. van den Ende iurisconsulto comite conveni in aedes, in quas constitutum fuerat Virum Magnificum ad confabulandum venturum, ut ita inter sermones amicos uberius de tua epistola eiusque argumento institueretur collatio. Verum aderant aliqui, quorum sermonibus propositum meum turbabatur. Tandem de valetudine tua quaesivit: Ego hanc arripiens occasionem ipsi epistolam tuam tradidi; quam ubi legit, dixit, alias se de illius argumento locuturum. Cum ab ipso discederemus, modeste a se amoliebatur quas ipsi tribuis laudes, repetiitque se alias de epistola tua locuturum. Sic nos dimisit. Duo illi viri iudicabant, ulterius eum non urgendum, me enim frustra fore; et per dilationem illam responsum honeste declinari. Postridie illis adfuit, verum de epistola tua nullum verbum. Credo iam, Volderum rem acu tetigisse, cum mihi dixit, credere se, Virum Magnificum omnes suas rationes iam aperuisse, aliudque nihil habere quod nobis suggerat; verum id dissimulare," *ibid.*, 638–639.

which the affair is not mentioned,³³ Locke eventually agreed with Van Limborch on De Volder's judgment on Hudde's behaviour, and the topic did not resurface anymore.³⁴

This is, to date, all the evidence on the direct contacts between De Volder and Van Limborch – besides that given in their available correspondence. As to this, four letters by De Volder to Van Limborch are extant at the Special Collections department of the Library of the University of Amsterdam (with signature OTM: hs. J 83:a-d), probably coming from the collections of the Remonstrant Church of Amsterdam (transferred to the University in the 19th century), as no detailed information is provided in the catalogue. The letters are dated 18 July 1687, 3 November 1687, 16 November 1694 and 6 May 1699, and as De Volder's papers were dispersed after his death, no replies or letters by Van Limborch to De Volder have been found so far. In what follows, I provide an introduction for each letter, together with its transcription.

1. De Volder to Van Limborch, 18 July 1687

In this letter, De Volder answers a letter by Van Limborch in which the theologian probably asked him for information about the subscription to the Dordrecht Confession of Faith by professors of Hebrew: most probably on behalf of Étienne Morin, appointed in 1686 as professor of Hebrew at the Amsterdam *Athenaeum Illustré* – attended by Remonstrant seminarists as well.³⁵ According to De Volder, this subscription was not required of such professors at Leiden (even if he was not completely sure of this: the only professor of

33 These are letters 2605 and 2606, of July and August 1699.

34 See the letter by Locke of 5–12 September 1699 (letter 2616).

35 See VAN MIERT 2009, 331–334.

Hebrew at Leiden, Allard Uchtmann, appointed just before De Volder in 1670, died in 1680),³⁶ nor of those of philosophy and Greek, but only of the *proregens* of the Leiden *Collegium Theologicum*, or *Statencollege* (where holders of stipends from the States of Holland studied theology),³⁷ and of *promovendi* in theology. Even so, Theodoor Craanen (*proregens* of the *Statencollege* in 1670–1673, before quarrelling with Friedrich Spanheim)³⁸ repeatedly asserted not having ever subscribed to the Confession. Étienne Le Moine, professor of theology at Leiden from 1677 to 1689,³⁹ was asked to subscribe to the Confession only after 4 years of teaching, when Spanheim accidentally discovered that he had not yet done so. The letter is concluded by De Volder's remarks on the 'state of religious orthodoxy' at Leiden. (Notably, De Volder – a Mennonite – was asked by the University Curators that he be baptised before assuming his post in 1670; he was, joining the Walloon Church).

Conventions adopted in the transcriptions: 1) text deleted by the author has been put between brackets thus < >; whenever possible, I have provided the deleted text; otherwise, I have used dots to indicate the illegible letters; 2) text in the margin or between the lines is put between symbols thus “\ /”; 3) doubtful text is put between brackets { }; whenever possible, I have provided the text; otherwise, I have used dots instead of the illegible letters; 4) my additions are put between brackets [].

Vir Amplissime,

36 See MOLHUYSEN 1913–1924, volume 3, 235 and 344.

37 See SLUIJTER 2003, chapter 3.

38 See EBERHARDT 2018, 345–346.

39 On him, see KNIPSCHEER 1911–1937.

Recte quidem existimasti subscriptionem, de qua agitur non exigi a Philosophiae aut Graecae Linguae professoribus; Nec credo illum exigi ab eo qui Hebraeam Linguam profitetur. Certo tamen asserere non possum. Quamdiu enim hic fui, nullum Hebraicae linguae habuimus Professore praeter Uchtmannum, qui me aliquot mensibus praecessit. Cur tamen non credam causae hae sunt; In statutis Collegii ordinum expresse id exigitur ut Proregens et Confessioni et Catechismo, et Canonibus Dodracenis subscribat, quod tamen D[.] Crane nunquam fecisse saepius ex ipso audivi [text covered by a spot of ink]. Nec memini ullius subscriptionis nequidem a Theologo factae, quanquam novi Doctores Theologiae ubi creantur, ad illam subscriptionem ante promotionem compelli; Verum hac in re ne quid forte esset quod me quia inter Theologos res perageretur fugeret, adii D. Le Moyné; et inter alios sermones quid hujus rei esset quaesivi. Respondet se non putare quempiam subscribere illis sive Confessioni et Catechismo, sive Canonibus praeter Theologiae Professores, imo se jam per quadriennium Professoratu suo functum, antequam subscripsisset, nec tunc temporis subscripturum fuisse nisi forte in conventu Facultatis Theologicae, non recordabatur autem qua de causa convenissent, ille liber in quo haec sacra continentur incidisset in manibus Spanhemii. illeque non inveniens manum D. Le Moyné monuisset de subscriptione facienda, quam ille lubens agnovisset.

Vides quam negligenter haec orthodoxiae conservandae fundamenta nunc tractentur. Sic solet ubi aestus animorum deferbuit. Putem itaque illi erudito viro nihil periculi fore, si in aliis Academiis harum provinciarum res eodem ac apud nos peragatur modo; Accurate enim quae [text covered by a spot of ink] apud vicinos fieri soleat non novi. Vale et ama.

Tuum

B. De Volder.

Lugd. Batav. 18 Iulii. 1687

Aan den Heer.

Myn Heer, Philippus van Limborch, Professor der H. Theologie onder de Remonstranten

Tot

Amsterdam.

2. De Volder to Van Limborch, 3 November 1687

In this letter De Volder comments upon Van Limborch's *De veritate religionis Christianae: amica collatio cum erudito Iudaeo*, published in 1687 and consisting of the texts exchanged between Van Limborch and Isaac Orobio de Castro.⁴⁰ This short letter is interesting as it provides insights into De Volder's views on religion and theology (topics on which he was silent in his public writings, both handwritten or printed). First of all, De Volder agrees with Van Limborch's comparison of Moses and Christ, expounded throughout the whole *Collatio*, by which Van Limborch availed himself of the Spinozist idea of a 'priestly imposture' by Moses (as Sergio Landucci has put it),⁴¹ namely the idea that the miracles of Moses could be doubted, and that the tradition on them was merely a way to secure respect for the law by the Jews.⁴² An idea

40 See VAN ROODEN, WESSELIUS 1987.

41 See LANDUCCI 2015.

42 See VAN LIMBORCH 1687, *Responsio ad secundum scriptum Iudaei*, chapter 6 (see especially

which – as reconstructed by Landucci – De Castro rejected as it would imply that an entire population would agree on something which they knew not to be true.⁴³ To this, Van Limborch replied that 1) only Moses and the ‘fathers’ of the Jews knew that the laws of Israel were not of divine origin, and 2) that whereas the miracles of Moses were performed by a man instructed in all the arts and political doctrines of the Egyptians, and before a people he had freed from captivity, Christ – regarded as the son of a *faber*, and persecuted together with the Apostles – performed miracles witnessed by people who had no reason to believe them. According to Van Limborch, this makes our belief in the miracles of Christ more reasonable than in those of Moses.⁴⁴ Such a comparison, according to De Volder, was the best way to convince De Castro (who died four days after De Volder’s letter was written): unless, as he puts it, one would instead prefer to rely on arguments based on pure reason, as the Franeker theologians do. De Volder was certainly referring to the use of Cartesian philosophy in revealed theology by Hermann Alexander Roëll, who opened his professoriate with an *Oratio inauguralis de Religione rationali* (1686), and by his nephew Gysbert Wessel Duker, who graduated in theology with a *Disputatio philosophica inauguralis de recta ratiocinatione* in the same year, being attacked for his use of philosophy in theology by the professor of law Hulrik Huber, and provoking a quarrel which lasted two years.⁴⁵ Moreover, De Volder refers to the Cocceians, who according to him would certainly feel they were being attacked by Van Limborch, as they maintained that the Old Testament has plenty of references to the coming of Christ (thereby legitimising Christianity itself). This idea was rejected by Van Limborch, who

pages 42–45).

43 See *ibid.*, *Tertium scriptum Iudaei*, numerum 5 (see especially page 138).

44 See *ibid.*, *Responsio ad tertium scriptum Iudaei*, chapter 4 (see especially pages 172–174).

45 See BORDOLI 2009.

stood rather for the 'reasonableness' of the Christian faith, and who would attack the *theologia prophetica* of Johannes Cocceius in his *Commentarius in Acta Apostolorum et in Epistolas ad Romanos et Hebraeos* (1711).⁴⁶ At the time of De Volder's letter, this hermeneutic approach was typical of Cocceians such as Salomon van Til (pastor and professor of philology and Church history at Dordrecht), Campegius Vitranga (professor of theology at Leiden),⁴⁷ Johannes van der Waeyen (professor of Hebrew at Franeker), Henricus Groenewegen (pastor in Enkhuizen) – and, *pace* De Volder, would also be embraced by his own students in philosophy Frans Burman jr. and Taco Hajo van den Honert.⁴⁸ It is amongst this group of professors and pastors that the two Cocceians mentioned in the letters must be found, even if a more exact identification is still impossible.

Amplissime Vir,

Quod jamdudum factum oportuit, id nunc demum ago, gratias quas debeo, tibi ut agam maximas pro libro, quem ad me misisti. Fuit profecto ille mihi et dignitate, quam tractas, rei, et quod te Auctorem agnoscit gratissimus. Illa quidem, quam instituis comparatio inter <q>causas propter quas Iudaei Mosi, nos Christo credamus, mihi admodum placuit. Neq[ue] enim alia ratione arctius constringi Iudaeus potuit; Nisi forte Franequerani nostri aliam meliorem viam ex sola ratione invenerint. Sed quidquid hujus rei sit, nullu<d>s dubito, quin ingenua tua confessione nullum talem, qualem Iudaeus \ille/ quaerebat locum extare, offenderis publicae Religionis Theologos, et praesertim Coccejanos, quos vocant, qui, ut nosti, quam clarissime se ubiq[ue] in ve-

46 See VAN BUNGE 2003.

47 See WITTEVEEN 1993; VAN DER WALL 1994; EIJNATTEN 2003, chapter 3; DAUGIRDAS 2017.

48 See VAN DER WALL 1993.

teri testamento Christum invenire depraedicant. In qua opinione confirmor ex eo, quod ante biduum duos ex eo genere, quorum tamen neutri perlectus erat liber tuus, ratiocinantes inter se audivi de locis <P>quibusdam e Psalmis et Ieremia, ex quibus evidentissime Iudaeos convinci posse asserebant. Sed hactenus de tuo libro nihil, quod et in causa est, cur te hisce tam tarde compellarim. Sperabam enim aliquid fore, quo nimiam hanc<a>ce meam moram compensarem. Nunc cum spes haec frustranea fuerit, ad tuam ut confugiam aequitatem necesse est, quae facile huic meae negligentiae ignoscet. Vale et ama

Tuum ex asse,

B. De Volder.

Lugd. Batav.

a.d. III Nonas Novembr.

CICICLXXXVII.

Myn Heer.

De Heer, Philippus van Limborch,

Professor der H. Theologie onder de Remonstranten

Tot

Amsterdam,

Par amy.

3. De Volder to Van Limborch, 16 November 1694

This letter served as a cover letter for De Volder's sending to Van Limborch a copy of the *honestum testimonium* on Jacobus Arminius that was requested by the Leiden majors Isaac Claesz. van Swanenburg and Nicolaas Paulusz. Stochius on behalf of Arminius's widow, Lijsbet Reael, on 25 April 1611. One day earlier, another *testimonium* had been requested for himself by Franciscus Gomarus, who was controversially going to leave his post after Conrad Vors-tius, a Remonstrant, was appointed as replacement for Arminius as professor of theology.⁴⁹ Both the *testimonia* were conceded by the Senate.⁵⁰ Van Limborch, who was to reconstruct the story of the Remonstrance and Counter-Remonstrance, asked for De Volder's help in locating the *testimonium* of Arminius (which De Volder found with the help of the secretary of the Senate, that year Wolferd Senguerd,⁵¹ and which was then printed, in its full form, in the 1704 edition of the *Epistolae praestantium ac eruditorum virorum, ecclesiasticae et theologicae varii argumenti* (as epistle 5), edited by Van Limborch and Christiaan Hartsoeker.⁵² De Volder, in his letter, noted that the Academic Senate used slightly different formulas in referring to the Senate's neutrality in the quarrel in their *testimonia*. Such formulas were then going to be reported by Van Limborch in his posthumously published *Relatio historica de origine et progressu controversiarum in foederato Belgio de praedestinatione* (1715):

Gomarus professionem suam resignavit Academiae Curatoribus, et in eius locum vocatus est Joannes Polyander. Testimonium Gomaro perhibitum est a Cu-

49 See STANGLIN 2007, chapter 2.

50 See MOLHUYSEN 1913–1924, volume 2, 18–19.

51 See *ibid.*, volume 4, 110.

52 See VAN LIMBORCH, HARTSOEKER 1704, 5. The originals of the *testimonia* are still to be located.

ratoribus, perinde atque Arminio defuncto; nisi quod, cum in Arminii Testimonio legeretur, nam de controversiis non iudicamus, idem in Gomari verbis paululum immutatis expressum sit: controversias enim aliis relinquimus.⁵³

In the rest of the letter, De Volder refers to the appointment of Frederick Dekkers as professor of medicine (without the presence of Jacob II van Wassenaer Obdam, one of the Curators of the University) and to the increase in Govert Bidloo's salary – both decided by the Academic body of governors on 15 November.⁵⁴ In commenting upon this news, De Volder notes a change in the tendency of University policy. The reason for this comment is unclear; probably, he referred to the fact that these decisions meant an improvement in the teaching of medicine at Leiden. At that time, it was taught by Bidloo (as professor of anatomy) and Paulus Herman (professor of medicine and botany).⁵⁵ Dekkers succeeded De Volder's friend Archibald Pitcairne, who left the Netherlands in 1693,⁵⁶ as professor of practical medicine.

Vir Reverende,

Commodum accepi tuas eo ipso tempore, quo mihi adeundus esset Senatus Acad. Quare statim quaesivi ex eo, qui Senatui est a Secretis hunc illumve Actorum librum, quorum jam binos <s>frustra pervolveram, cum incidit, reperi- tum in forte hoc testimonium inter acta quae diu dispersa jacuerunt, et nunc demum ante paucos annos sine ulla temporis ratione in unum volumen<{e}> erant compacta; Adii itaq[ue] et illud, et cum jam de successu desperarem <{pand}> obtulit sese tandem hoc ut opinor, quod quaerebam, cujus apogra-

53 VAN LIMBORCH 1730, volume 1, 16.

54 See MOLHUYSEN 1913–1924, volume 4, 122.

55 See *ibid.*, 45*.

56 See KROP 2003.

phum hic ad te mitto. Aderat simul et testimonium ab eodeo Senatu Goma-
ro datum adhuc vi<d>venti, et <d...d>stationem suam relinquere meditati.
In hoc loco ejus, quod in Arm. testimonio est, (nam de controversiis non
judicamus) habetur (controversias enim aliis relinquimus). Quod eam ob cau-
sam addo, ne forte existimes hanc clausulam Arminio peculiarem esse. Sigil-
lum erat numus Acad. quo in litteris et testimoniis utitur Senatus.

H<eca>odie novus hic, absente licet Obdamio, creatus est Medicinae Profes-
sor Dekkers, Auctum simul est salarium D. Bidloo ad 600 flor. annuos; Ex
quibus facile vides, aliis ex oris jam apud nos spirare ventum, quam solebat.
Quid inde mutationis futurum sit dies doceb<a>it. Nil mediocri<s>ter ex-
specto si<a>ve boni, sive mali. Vale, et si quid porro sit, in qui tibi inservire
queam, imp<ra>era

Tuo

B. de Volder.

Lugd. Batav.

a.d. XVI Novemb. 169<6>4.

Myn Heer.

Myn Heer, Philippus van Limborch, Professor der H. Theologie onder de Re-
mostranten

Tot

Amsterdam,

4. De Volder to Van Limborch, 6 May 1699

In this letter, De Volder comments upon the visit that Pieter Burman, son of Frans Burman and in 1699 professor of history and rhetoric at Utrecht,⁵⁷ had paid him. The visit was an episode in the quarrel between Pieter Burman, his brother Frans Burman jr. (in 1699 pastor in Brielle), Van Limborch, Le Clerc and Johannes van der Waeyen, caused by Van Limborch's remark, in his *Theologia Christiana* (1686), that Frans Burman sr. had used Spinoza's words from part 2, chapter 9 (*De potentia Dei*) of the *Cogitata metaphysica* while treating the issue of divine omnipotence in his *Synopsis theologiae* (1671–1672), book 1, chapter 25. In particular, in § 9 of this chapter Burman sr. used Spinoza's phrase that "all things depend absolutely upon the decrees of God, saying that He is really omnipotent,"⁵⁸ in order to argue that things are impossible not in themselves, but only as God cannot create them. This idea is criticized by Burman himself, as it implies that something is not impossible in itself, and that this notwithstanding God cannot create it.⁵⁹ Second (§ 10), Bur-

57 On him, see DOKKUM 1911–1937.

58 SPINOZA 1974, 159; cf. SPINOZA 1663, 125.

59 "Mirari autem hic subit, Franciscum Burmannum, nuper in Academia Traiectina Theologiae Professore, in sua Synopsi Theologiae, lib. 1. cap. XXV. de Omnipotentia Dei, § 9. ipsis Benedicti de Spinoza verbis in Cogitatis Metaphysicis cap. IX ex quo pleraque hujus capituli ferme ad verbum descripsit, alios reprehendere, quod res quasdam citra decretum Dei possibles, alias impossibiles, alias necessarias faciant, cum iuxta ipsum omnia a decreto Dei absolute dependeant, non solum rerum existentia, sed et universa earum natura et essentia. Licet enim verissimum sit, nihil esse necessarium quod Deus non decreverit, et unaquaeque res eam habeat essentiam, in sese spectatam, ut a Deo potuerit decerni; aliarum vero esse eam ad existendum repugnantiam, ut a Deo decerni non potuerint; qualia sunt contradictoria. Unde et ipse nugari credendus est, cum immediate subiungit, cur aliquid impossibile sit, causa non est in ipsa re (cum impossibile mera sit negatio) sed in ipsa Dei potentia, quia Deus illud non potest velle aut facere. Quis enim subtilitatem istam capiat, quod causa non sit in ipsa re quod sit impossibilis, sed quia Deus eam non potest facere? Quasi nempe, quod Deus facere non potest, in se non sit impossibile: aut aliquid in se non impossibile, seu quod in natura sua spectatum tale est ut fieri possit, Deus facere non possit. At, inquit, impossibile est mera negatio. Fatemur, ideoque designat repugnantiam ad existendum. Quod itaque tale est, ut

man argued, following Spinoza, that if we could have a clear and distinct perception of anything, we would recognize the necessity of everything.⁶⁰ According to Van Limborch, this follows from the idea that all the essences – and not only existences – depend on the will of God, so that no contingency is possible. Thus far, Van Limborch notes that “Burman agrees with Spinoza.”⁶¹ Third (§ 15), Burman maintained that miracles are not above nature, “which is the very same impiety of Spinoza,” as Van Limborch puts it.⁶² At first, the association of Burman with Spinoza was attacked by Van der Waeyen in his

repugnantiam ad existendum habeat, simpliciter impossibile est, nec a Deo fieri, seu, quod idem est, id Deus facere non potest,” VAN LIMBORCH 1686, 99; cf. BURMAN 1671–1672, volume 1, 145.

60 “Verum totus illius discursus, quem hic ex Spinoza instituit, eo tendit, ut ostendendo, non tantum rerum existentia, sed et universum earum conceptum, omnemque essentiae earum a Dei decreto et voluntate dependere, simul omnem e rebus contingentiam tollat, omnibusque eventibus eandem respectu decreti divini doceat inesse necessitatem quae est in veritatibus mathematicis. Ita enim ipsis Spinozae verbis § sequente ratiocinationem suam continuat. Si homines clare totum naturae ordinem intelligerent, omnia aequae necessaria reperirent ac illa quae in mathesi tractantur; quia vero huc usque non penetramus, ideo quaedam a nobis possibilis, vel indifferentia, non vero necessaria iudicantur. Quocirca dicendum est, vel quod Deus nihil possit, quia omnia revera necessaria sunt, vel quod Deus omnia possit, et quod necessitas quam in rebus reperimus, a solo Dei decreto provenerit. Qua omnia eo unice tendunt, ut meram in rebus omnibus dominari evincat fatalitatem, omnesque qui sunt, etiam in rebus humanis, eventus omnipotentia divina determinari, ut aliter quam eveniunt evenire nequeant, non magis quam veritates mathematicae, posito hoc quem Deus instituit ordine, mutari in fatalitates queunt. Quod omnem evertere religione alibi clare ostensum est,” VAN LIMBORCH 1686, 100; cf. SPINOZA 1663, 125, and BURMAN 1671–1672, volume 1, 145–146.

61 “Burmannus cum Spinoza sentit,” VAN LIMBORCH 1686, 100.

62 “Nec haec dixisse contentus, Spinozam sine ullo iudicio etiam in illis secutus est, quibus Atheismi sui venenum, sed tectius paulo, insinuat; dum non tantum totam rerum naturam non nisi unicum ens esse affirmat, § XI, sed et § XV miracula, quae extraordinaria Dei potentia perfici ait, non nisi secundum naturae leges fieri scribit: Deus, inquit, ordinaria potentia operatur secundum leges naturae nobis notas; extraordinaria vero secundum eas quae nobis notae non sunt. Quod si verum est, miraculum non est opus vires naturae superans, nec supremum Dei in omnia regimen evincens; sed errore nostro, qui naturae leges ignoramus, pro tali solummodo habetur; revera autem fit iuxta leges semel naturae inditas. Quae ipsissima Spinozae impietas est,” *ibid.*, 100; cf. SPINOZA 1663, 126, and BURMAN 1671–1672, volume 1, 145–146.

Dissertatio de Aλόγω adversus Johannem Clericum (1698),⁶³ in which he criticized Le Clerc's XVIII *prima commata capituli primi evangelii S. Joannis paraphrasi et animadversionibus illustrata, ubi demonstratur, contra alogos, evangelium hoc esse foetum Joannis Apostoli; et evertitur sententia Fausti Socini, de sensu primorum eius commatum* (1695). Van der Waeyen aimed at showing that Burman was not a Spinozist, as he did not maintain that everything emanates from God – which is, for Van der Waeyen, the central tenet of Spinoza's philosophy – and also criticized the textual similarities between Burman's and Spinoza's texts.⁶⁴ In turn, Van Limborch – who wrote to Locke that he never labelled Burman a Spinozist, and who did not wish to provide an answer to his criticizer –⁶⁵ eventually replied to him with his *Defensio contra Joannis van der Waeyen Iniquam Criminationem* (1699), in which he remarked on textual evidence for Burman's use of Spinoza. In turn, Le Clerc defended Van Limborch in his *Parrhasiana* (1699),⁶⁶ while Van der Waeyen replied further with his *Limborgianae Responsionis discussio* (1699)⁶⁷ – to which Van Limborch did not reply further. Eventually, in 1700 the two sons of Frans Burman sr., i.e. Pieter and Frans Burman jr., published their *Burmannonum pietas, gratissimae beati parentis memoriae communi nomine exhibita*, to which an edition of the correspondence between their father and Van Limborch was appended (and which was left unreplied to by Van Limborch). In this text, Frans Burman jr. notes how his father had been following Descartes's philosophy as far as the

63 This text was premised on Van der Waeyen's edition of Johann Stephan Rittangel's *Libra veritatis et de Paschate tractatus* (RITTANGEL, VAN DER WAEYEN 1698).

64 See VAN DER WAEYEN 1698, 175 and 178.

65 See the letter to Locke of 2 September 1698 (letter 2485 in LOCKE 1976–1989). See also letters 2494, 2516, 2724, 2742.

66 See LE CLERC 1699, 408–416.

67 This text was premised on Van der Waeyen's edition of Rittangel's *Veritas religionis Christianae in articulis de Trinitate et Christo ex Scriptura, Rabbinis et Cabbala* (RITTANGEL, VAN DER WAEYEN 1699).

problem of Creation is concerned,⁶⁸ and remarks the difference between the Cartesian and the Spinozist schools in philosophy, where the Cartesian one – represented, as put by Frans Burman, by De Volder himself – held the tenet that only the existence of God is necessary, while the existence of any other thing is possible and depends on something else (viz. God) thus undermining the essence of Spinozism.⁶⁹

De Volder himself was involved in the quarrel through the visit of Pieter Burman, whom he compares to Publius Ventidius Bassus (who proved to be a sharper commander and negotiator than Mark Anthony, his triumvir).⁷⁰ Pieter asked for the help of De Volder, who however could not offer it as he clearly stood with Van Limborch in the dispute, as he notes in the letter that Van Limborch had “already freed Burman from the suspicion of

68 “Cap. IX. De Creatione plane enim consideratione dignissimum puto, cum ab gravissimas res, quas ibi tractat, tum ab modum etiam, quo nos omnes armat, qui veri et non fucati atheismi impugnatores volumus, non videri, sed esse. Quaedam ergo, quae maxime in oculos incurrunt, excerpisse opere pretium puto,” BURMAN 1700, 81.

69 “Quae omnia, quamvis tralatitia et vulgaria sint in schola Cartesii, et a Cl. Voldero, magno huius Philosophie lumine, tibi que non ingrato nomine, mihi vero Praeceptore, hisce olim auribus instillata, quum ad eum audiendum et mirandum Athenas Batavas essemus profecti, tamen hic repetere placuit: tum ut ostenderem, quam invicta adversus omnem atheismum sint illa arma, quibus illic Dei necessaria, omnium vero aliarum rerum possibilis et dependens existentia, hoc est, quibus illic discrimen inter Creatorem et ejus opera, propugnatur: tum ut simul pateret, quam implicabilis inimicitia et insociabile divortium inter duas istas scholas, Cartesii scilicet et Spinoza,” *ibid.*, 105. Moreover, he recalled De Volder’s clarity in exposition: “[v]ides enim viros in hac arte eximios, ita Matheseos hac manu formatos et quasi fictos esse, ut, quidquid mente attingunt, statim nescio quam longe prospiciant, quae alii, dum hi quasi oracula fundunt, non admirantur tantum, sed cum enarrant etiam, vix assequuntur. Quam me pernitem et vividissimam mentis aciem in Cl. Voldero meo, quoties ad eum accedo, mirari solere, te, ut credo, non refragante, nunc etiam recordari licet et lubet,” *ibid.*, 301.

70 Most probably, indeed, De Volder was referring to an episode which occurred during the war with the Parthians, and reported by Plutarch in his *Βίοι Παράλληλοι*, in the life of Mark Anthony, XXXIV. During the war Ventidius sieged Antiochus of Commagene at Samosata, who asked for peace with an offer of 1,000 talents. Ventidius rejected the deal, replying that he had to negotiate with Mark Anthony himself. Mark Anthony initially refused the deal, but in the end he agreed to peace against an offer of 300 talents only.

Spinozism.” The letter, moreover, alludes to the opinion on the quarrel of Johannes Georgius Graevius, friend of Frans Burman sr. and teacher and patron of Pieter Burman –⁷¹ which was the same as De Volder’s⁷².

Viro admodum Reverendo

Philippo a Limborch.

S.S. Theologiae Professore

S.P.

B. De Volder.

Parum interesse arbitror, sive <c>ea, quae nosti, acta <huc> per nautas, an vero alio modo hic deferantur. Mihi enim persuadeo, illos ut plurimum minus peccare, qui impun<{...}>e nequeunt, quidam qui possunt.

Cum Graevio sentio, quoad iudicium de Fratribus attinet. Habet enim Professor quid Ventidii, nec fortasse cum illo tam facile quam cum altero amice transiges. Ille tamen ipse, cum ante 3 menses mihi aderat, videbatur mihi animo commotiore quam expectaveram. Nec dubito tamen quin ubi prior ille aestus deferbuerit, modeste acturus sit causam suam, et rationi facile obsecuturus nisi quod fratres intercedant. Sed tua parum refert. Hoc <{a}>unum me male hac in causa habet, quod non videam, quid a te exigere queant. Burmannum enim jam in scripto tuo liberasti a suspitione Spinozismi. Ut illum Spinozae verbis usum ne<q>ges, neque illi jure exigere, nec tu concedere ullo modo possis. Sed ipsi viderint. Illorum enim res agitur. Tua in vado est. Vale.

Dabam, Lugd. Batav.

⁷¹ Graevius was a staunch opponent of Spinozism: see TOUBER 2018, chapter 2.

⁷² No direct evidence on Graevius’s opinion could be found so far.

Pridie Nonas Maii, CIOICXCIX.

Myn Heer,

Myn Heer Philippus a Limborch, der H. Theologiae Professor

Tot

Amsterdam.

ANDREA STRAZZONI

FORSCHUNGSZENTRUM GOTHA DER UNIVERSITÄT ERFURT

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