The Healing of a Lay Saint:  
Evert Willemisz. Bogardus’s Conversion  
Between Personal Achievement and Social Legitimation

Willem Frijhoff

During the summer of 1622 and the winter of 1622/1623 the town of Woerden in the province of Holland was a hive of rumors.¹ The subject was the authenticity of the spiritual experience of a fifteen-year-old boy, a native of the town. Having lost his father, mother, and stepfather, the boy lived at the local orphanage with his older brother Pieter and two younger half-brothers who shared his bed. Cornelis, the eldest brother, over twenty years old, lived nearby in town and later went on to Leiden, then the second city of the Dutch Republic. The boy’s name was Evert Willemisz. [Evert or Everhardus, son of William]. His family name appears in later years as Bogaert, a common name in the Netherlands. But he used its Latin form, “Bogardus,” at Leiden University, where he matriculated in 1627, and since 1633 as a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church on the island of Manhattan in New Netherland.²

We know nothing for certain about Evert Willemisz.’s parents.³ As no account of family property appears in the administration of the Woerden orphan chamber, his father Bogaert, stepfather Muyssevoet, and mother should have been without any means.⁴ Other members of his stepfather’s family are known as small artisans, mostly shoemakers. In 1622 a putative uncle Muyssevoet at Leiden is called a clog-maker, but he is very poor and has to care for a sister and five children. Evert’s (step)father might have been involved in one of the wooden trades too as a carpenter, a cabinetmaker, or a cooper; that was the branch of industry in which

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¹ The basic sources of the 1622/23 events at Woerden are two pamphlets edited by Lucas Zas [Zasch, Zasius], principal of the local Latin school: Waerachtige ende waerachtige geschiedenisse van de wonder-werckheydt aen een secker Wees-kindt genaen Evert Willemisz.... (Utrecht, 1623), 4 p.; Waerachtige geschiedenisse Hoe dat Seker Wees-Kindt binnen Woerden ou antrent xv. jaren tot twee maenene toe vanden Heere met stormigheyt derheydt somitjes oock met blydenheyt bezocht ende van het geheuyt van syns verseat berooyt zijnde... (Amsterdam, 1623), 36 p. [The Hague, Royal Library, Pt. Knuttel 3500-3501; copies exist also in the University Library of Amsterdam.] Both pamphlets have been reprinted at least once. In this article the pamphlets will be quoted in the text as A (Utrecht) and B (Amsterdam), followed by the number of the page.

² His life from the Leiden matriculation in 1627 until his death in a shipwreck off the coast of Wales is well known. He died in 1647 at the age of forty, leaving a widow (Annetgen or Anneke Jans) with nine children, five of whom came from Anneke’s first marriage to Roelof Janz. As the second Reformed minister of New Amsterdam and a central figure in the 1643/45 Indian wars, violently opposed to the disastrous policy of West India Company governor Kieft, he is one of the main characters of New Netherland history. However, the appreciation of his ministry and personality differs greatly among authors. The most reliable English version of his life is in Quirinus Breen, “Domine Everhardus Bogardus,” Church History, vol. 2 (1933), 78-90; on his New Netherland family: George Olin Zabriskie, “The founding families of New Netherland. Nos. 5 and 6: The Roelfs and Bogardus families,” de Halve Maen, 47, 3 (1972) to 48, 3 (1973), passim; also as “Anneke Jans in fact and fiction,” New York Genealogical and Biographical Record, 104 (1973), 65-72, 157-164. Because his family name never occurs in the Woerden sources, the story of his youthful experience has only recently been recognized as pertaining to the same person.


⁴ Evert must have lost his natural father Willem [Bogaert] when he was very young. He was probably educated by his stepfather N.N. Muyssevoet, who must have died in his turn, just like Evert’s mother, some years before Evert’s spiritual experience, perhaps in the plague year 1617/18. The (half-brothers (at least four, not including the eldest son, Cornelis, who perhaps was already an autonomous craftsman) were then placed in the burghers’ orphanage of Woerden. There is no question of any sister. Since two brothers were named Pieter — Pieter Bogaert (who died young) and Pieter Muyssevoet (who became a schoolmaster) — their maternal grandfather’s name may well have been Pieter, that of the paternal grandfather Bogaert being most likely Cornelis. All four sons of Dr. Everhardus Bogardus (Willem, Cornelis, Jonas, and Pieter) were clearly named after their (great-)grandfathers, as was the Dutch custom. The Muyssevoet connection is known from Cornelis Bogaert’s 1636 will and is confirmed by repeated relations between the two sections of the family in later years.

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Master Zas to Utrecht on Friday, January 20, 1623, during Evert’s second spiritual experience, when he was still waiting for his redemption. The second manuscript was first checked with Evert’s own handwritten notes by the Woerden town council and the church consistory and then ordered to be brought to a zealous Calvinist bookseller at Amsterdam, Marten Jansz. Brandt, who published it immediately. Both pamphlets were reprinted at least once, an indication of the public attention which the young man enjoyed for a while. The decisions taken by the Woerden town council on Evert’s behalf demonstrate that we are not dealing with a religious hoax. In fact, the town council never ceased to favor him above other pupils. Especially the orphan master and scholarch (inspector of the schools) Gerrit Gijbesztsz. Vergeer, a wealthy clothier-merchant, who from the very beginning had been one of the leaders of Calvinist orthodoxy in Woerden, appears as Evert’s stronghold on the council. In 1622 Evert is admitted to the Latin school, four years later the new town organist is ordered to teach him music, in 1627 he is authorized to leave for Leiden University, and in 1629 the Woerden scholarship in the States’ theological college at Leiden is granted to him.

Apparently, the events of 1622/23 are strewn with the classical commonplace of adolescent conversion, the straightest course to a successful identity achievement, to use the terms of Erik Erikson. Evert follows the psychosomatic patterns of what some psychiatrists since Freud call a conversion hysteria. But the pamphlets have not been hatched as the exemplary story of a youthful hero with a pious superiority complex who himself remains above the event and his calling, as we see in the accounts of many other young Protestant religious enthusiasts, some of which go back before Evert’s time. The boy’s resistance to his recuperation as a model by whatever authority, either religious or political, may also be the reason why the story of Evert Willimensz, was not later used in edifying literature. It has remained the life story of a real, particular young man, limited to the time


period in which it happened.

In the spring of 1622 young Evert had gone through his elementary education and, while living in the orphanage, was working as a tailor’s apprentice with Master Gijsbert Aelbertsz., who had a workshop on the Rhine, a few streets away. Orphanage and workshop were two separate places but appear as complementary atmospheres. In fact, Evert had virtually completed his two-year apprenticeship with this master. Although he loved him very much — as we shall see — his very companionship with him might well have opened his eyes for his true vocation: not as a tailor, but as a minister of God’s Word.

According to the story in the pamphlet, Evert had for some time been seriously ill. He recovered when other physical phenomena appeared. From June 21 to June 30, for nine days, he neither ate nor drank (see diagram, page 5). In fact, he isolated himself from the community. Sensational events in this small, densely populated orphanage of some thirty children, in which all deviations from the everyday routine were welcome. Evert’s refusal of the daily aggregation ritual of meals taken was the most efficient way to signal him to the attention of both orphans and trustees. The pamphlets clearly show how concerned the matron of the orphanage was about his well-being, not to speak of the disorders in the group caused by Evert’s dealings with heaven.

This first phase of physical isolation was followed by a second, which lasted seventy days, throughout the whole summer from June 30 to September 8. Evert was stricken deaf and dumb. He could neither speak nor hear, and occasionally he lost his sight “as also for a long time the proper use of his reason” (B6). The phase of physical paralysis, of the privation of almost all use of the senses, serves as a climax, having a transitional nature. It suggests a slowly intensifying struggle which naturally leads to a new, crucial moment of transition. It prepares Evert for a third, ecstatic phase, which again lasts for nine days from Thursday, September 8, to Saturday, September 17. Evert returns to fasting and still can neither hear nor speak, but this last phase is circumscribed by the double apparition of an angel of the Lord, which points to its true meaning: communication with heaven. The angel delivers to him a message from the Father (his Father): he must convert people and admonish them to repent, to deliver themselves from their sins. The heavenly origin of the message and the veracity of Evert’s encounter with the angel will be proven and legitimated by his deliverance from the physical disabilities with which God had stricken him and his return to his previous health. Incidentally, the angel brings a second message of social conversion. We will return to it soon.

After the angel’s first apparition, Evert goes into something like a trance, a long period of ecstatic writing. For whole days he writes his heavenly messages down on little slips of paper, mostly simple messages of a repetitious nature:

Spread the word, spread the word, for God is sore displeased that word of his wondrous works is not spread. Oh spread the word, oh my dear friends. I beg you, spread the word, for God is displeased that his godly things are not communicated throughout the whole world. Spread the word, then, oh spread the word (A3).

The message is just as simple as the knowledge of the world which the young tailor’s apprentice has acquired and which is repeated throughout the pamphlets: there are good men and bad; God wants the good to repent; therefore, his word must be spread, and the signs must be read. In the background of this message may be detected a very simplified form of belief in the double predestination, as defended by orthodox Calvinism and confirmed in 1618-1619 by the Synod of Dordrecht. It is quite similar to the grassroots form of everyday theological discussion at Woerden which appears in the documents around the confessional struggles of the 1610s and 1620s: the bad are damned, and the good are elected. But God will punish even the good if they do not publicly behave as his perfect faithful.10

The signs of God’s wrath are easy to detect: the repeated plagues, the comet of 1618, famine, and war (A2-4, B24-

During Evert’s first spiritual experience, everything remained enclosed within the boundaries of the orphanage’s community. But his activities draw attention in Woerden, all the more so since the young man had found in the meantime not just an enthusiastic supporter, but a real impresario in the rector of the Latin school, Master Lucas Zas (c. 1591-1636). Zas, then thirty-one years old and the son of a schoolmaster, came from a Gouda family with a strong literary background. Before his appointment as a headmaster and precentor at Woerden, he had worked as a teacher of Latin and French at Utrecht and nearby Montfoort. In addition to the two pamphlets, he published in 1628 at Rotterdam a pious (school?) play on parents’ responsibility for their children’s education and choice of a profession, *Borgerlijke Huyshouddingh*, including a panegyric of the sacred ministry, from which young Evert might have borrowed some traits of his ecclesiastical calling. In 1631 Zas edited a rhymed translation of Juan Luis Vives’ life rules, the *Introductio ad veram sapientiam*. In the introductory poems to this edition, he overtly criticized the hypocrisy of the new Calvinist elites. In his person, Stoa and Bible met each other. Humanistic concern went together with orthodox belief. Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the Synod of Dordrecht, this orthodox Calvinist kept his distance from ecclesiastical authority and, indeed, from theocrasy by publicly claiming time for a thorough examination of the Synod’s documents before officially adhering to them. He was Woerden’s independent intellectual, the ideal partner for an independent believer.

Zas comes running as soon as Evert has him called, collects the slips with the messages, and has them printed. He understands what happens. Evert had good reason to choose Master Zas, for besides his call to repentence, meant for outsiders, he also had a personal message to share. So on September 17, just before his first deliverance:

I hope that God will release me this night so that I may again hear and again speak: I do not know this by myself, but through the Spirit of God, which will enlighten me. I have always had complete trust in God from all that He has given it to me. If He has the power to inflict things upon me, He also has the power to deliver me again: for do we not read in God’s word that He made the dead hear, the blind see, the crippled walk, the dumb speak [Matthew 11:5; 15:30]? God made the world and the sea with everything that is in the world and the sea [Acts 14:15]. Does He not then have the power to give back two of my five senses? Oh yes, I have had that trust and I still have it. But when I have recovered my speech and my hearing, it pleases God and the Spirit of God that I go to school until the time has come for me to do the work by which I shall be blessed. I intend then to become a minister and nothing else. Then you shall see what the Spirit of God shall work through me. I must no longer sew, when I have finished my clothes; for it pleases God and the Spirit of God that such shall no longer be my work. I must fear the Lord, as the angel of the Lord has commanded me, and I must do that too.

26. This is the traditional triad: “a peste, fame et bello,” preceded by the comet as their presage. But the most important sign of all is God’s wondrous work in his faithful Evert Willemsz.: having first stricken him with sickness and deprived him of the use of his bodily functions, He will sovereignly deliver him at the moment chosen by Himself and announced through the angel’s intervention. To believe in the truth of Evert’s spiritual experience is therefore to believe in God’s work with all his elected people. Evert has no doubt whatsoever about his own election. The affliction which God has put upon him is the very proof of his election. God visits the one He loves. Evert feels like Christ: he suffers for his Father but finally reconciles his will with God’s will (Luke 22:42; B7, B10). He knows for sure that he is one of the 144,000 elected who will sing the hymn of the Lamb (Apoc. 14:1-5, 15:3; B17-18). But he does not take Christ’s place: although he might have been tempted by the role of a godly mediator, he finally remains at his human place, as a messenger and a minister of God.

Evert’s texts certainly reveal a form of youthful radicalism that links with the firm positions of the predestinarians and is more easily satisfied by the pious and straightforward intolerance of orthodox Calvinism than by the political accommodations of Arminian latitudinarianism and humanist toleration. He does not worry about subtleties such as the why, the when, or the how. In his perception, there is no clear distinction between heaven and earth nor between time and eternity. The present day and the Last Judgment overlap. The sins are great, and punishment is near. He is, however, not naive. He follows the apocalyptic mainstream of orthodox Protestantism but keeps his eyes fixed upon his own destiny. He willingly uses church and civil authority for his divine goal but refuses to become a will-less victim of these powers.

In a rather poorly rhymed message Evert resumes his position and tells us which are the evil ones’ sins:

O woe that ever we were born,
So angry is the Lord,
That people will not live
According to God’s word.
Because God’s word is surely true
And that too will be clear,
All that will come to pass,
The time is very near.
For people now are very full
Of excess and of pride
They give themselves to drunkenness
And adultery besides.
People commit so many sins
That God cannot abide.
Oh people, turn away from sin
To God who is your Lord.
He will not tolerate
Your shameful mocking words,
The Lord will soon come down to us
To punish all the bad.
That is the meaning of the rod [i.e. the comet]
So frightfully sad.
That I have seen all this
Is true and righteous.
I have seen it myself
with the angels mighty. Amen.
Live in peace, Oh brothers (A3).

Times, rhythms, and modalities of Evert’s spiritual experience

Day | date       | fasting  | deaf and dumb | loses senses | sees an angel | writes messages |
--- | ---------- | -------- |---------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|
1622 Tuesday 21 June after recovery from illness 9 days
Thursday 30 June intermittent (a long time) 70
Thursday 8 September 9 days
Saturday 17 September first deliverance
       4 months (123 days)
goes to school

1623 Tuesday 17 January
Wednesday 18 January headache
       morning
       afternoon
Thursday 19 January predicts
       evening
Friday 20 January 3 days
       afternoon
Saturday 21 January
       3/4 p.m.
       6 p.m.
       8 p.m.
drinks sings consciousness
       eats  
second deliverance
Sunday 22 January afternoon speaks in church
Monday 23 January goes to school
Tuesday 24 January 6 a.m.
speaks in his sleep, dreams aloud
Thursday 26 January public recognition
Evert’s corporal and spiritual experiences made him aware of his real calling, the ministry. He used the impact that the event made on the local community to achieve this calling and to turn his life and career in another direction. Hence it had to be legitimized by higher authority. This legitimation, announced by an angel of the Lord, was to occur by a ritual of deliverance that would restate the boy to his social group, because it adopted the symbolic language of the community. Sickness and health are therefore not only metaphors of a spiritual destiny but also instruments of social approval. The process of healing is the supernatural calling made visible to man. Healing was not simply a personal benefit but could be a sign of heaven meant to change the course of individual and social life.

On one of the notes Evert predicted the exact moment of his redemption:

Oh, my dear Brethren and Sisters, I beseech you from the bottom of my heart, yet with a closed mouth, that you fervently deign to pray and wake with me for a little while [Mathew 26:40]; for almighty God has a wondrous work planned for me; therefore, let us pray and watch and wait for the coming of our all-powerful Lord above. Such as you have seen me to be until this hour, you shall not see me in such state for long [cf. Mathew 23:39]; for I shall again recover my power of speech and hearing from God: ... for I shall recover my speech singing a Psalm. Fear not, for this shall come from the Holy Ghost through God’s power (B9).

Evert’s first deliverance takes place nine days after the beginning of his ecstatic experience. Is this a spiritual metaphor for the nine months of pregnancy, previous to his rebirth as a converted Christian, in the pietistic and Puritan spiritual tradition? Evert speaks of his “laying down the old Adam, in order to begin a new life, in all virtue and godliness” (B8). Since he adopts here the very terms of the pietistic idiom, we may certainly conclude that he was also acquainted with the central themes of its spirituality and in particular with the spiritual symbolism of illness and recovery; illness was closely linked to sin, recovery to conversion from a sinful life, to the regeneration of the old Adam as a true Christian, under the exclusive impulsion of the Holy Ghost. No magic, no demonology, Evert’s devil is not more than God’s biblical opponent in hell.

At any rate, Evert is spiritually born in an accelerated process just as he was physically born fifteen years earlier. In the almighty God, who makes him reborn, he recognizes his new father. The place of his rebirth is the orphanage, where the orphans, the rector, and the matron — who Evert affectionately addresses with the name “my mommy,” and who indeed appears as a new mother to him — are standing around him and praying. They sustain his spiritual birth pains in singing together Psalm 100, as he had predicted. All of a sudden Evert is singing with them. He has recovered.


Map of Woerden from Marcus Zuierius Boxhornius, Toncel van Hollant (Amsterdam, 1634), 310. Cross in the center of town marks the site of the orphanage.
his ability to hear and to speak and is now completely his old self, but reborn. Three days later, the magistracy of Woerden, convinced by God’s own support of Evert’s words, decides that he may leave the tailor’s shop and, without having to earn his own living, may attend the Latin school, following his self-chosen adviser, Lucas Zas.

Thus, although his messages had from the very first moment a universal goal, Evert’s first deliverance served above all his own personal achievement: it was God’s legitimation of a career turn that otherwise would have been virtually unthinkable for a poor orphan without any fortune or family. Evert needed protection on the right spot. His heavenly recovery from a godly affliction procured him two powerful friends: on the one hand the rector of Woerden’s Latin school, Lucas Zas, who from that moment really acts as his spiritual mentor; on the other hand the councillor Gerrit Gijsbertsz. Vergeer, who as an orphan master and a school inspector was in charge of the orphan’s material well-being and education. Both men gave him their firm support over the years.

In and of itself, Evert’s message was of course not sufficient to win the unconditional trust of all the people around him, especially since, at that time, three years after the Synod of Dordrecht had established Calvinist orthodoxy, few cities in Holland were torn apart by religious conflict as much as Woerden. As a matter of fact, Evert’s spiritual dealings provoked skepticism and resistance in town. As the boy himself remembers, critics grumbled that they would beat the deaf-and-dumbness out of him:

They have called out with pride,
And still cry noisily
That they might punish me,
And beat me terribly
So that to me again
Speech and hearing be given.
Oh woe, oh woe such people,
For God knows up in heaven! (B34)

Woerden certainly was not in all respects an average Dutch town. For centuries, its frontier position on the Rhine, at the entrance to the province of Holland, had made it a strategic place, provided with a strong castle and a garrison. Apart from its market function in one of the most prosperous rural areas of Holland, Woerden possessed many tile and brick yards along its two rivers, the small Linschoten and the Old Rhine, in which most of the town population of about 3,500 was employed. Its religious position too was exceptional. In 1525, Jan de Bakker, or Pistorius, a critical priest from Woerden, disciple of the reformist Utrecht headmaster Hinne Rode, had been executed at The Hague as the first Dutch martyr of the Reformation. Later historiography has made of him a Lutheran and the symbol of the failed Lutheran Reformation in the Netherlands. That might well be an exaggeratedly confessionalist view. But probe inventories drafted by Woerden notaries show that by the mid-seventeenth century a picture of Pistorius’ martyrdom had become the distinguishing mark of a local Lutheran household, just like pictures of Oldenbarnevelt, Arminius, and Episcopius were typical for Remonstrant sympathies.13

At that time, Woerden was indeed an utterly divided town, torn apart by three competing confessions. Lutheranism had invested the Land of Woerden almost by accident. In 1558, King Philip II, who owed a large amount of money to his commander Duke Eric of Brunswick, had pledged to him the seignory of the town and the surrounding Land of Woerden, including the small market town of Bodegraven. Since the seignory’s high jurisdiction was now withdrawn from the king and the duke was always far away, the Woerden magistracy was in fact at liberty to impose the Reformation after its own taste. Lutheran refugees from Antwerp were welcomed, and, when in 1572 Woerden joined the rebels under the prince of Orange, it was under the express condition that the free exercise of the Augsburg confession be guaranteed, and that only Lutheran services be celebrated in what was obstinately called the “town church” stadskerk. From that moment Woerden and Bodegraven were the two only Dutch towns where the Lutheran confession was officially established.

The rebellious States-General, however, tried to ignore King Philip’s pledge and claimed the high jurisdiction on the Land of Woerden. Soon they started an active policy of Calvinization, under the military supervision of the commander of the garrison. Lutheran ministers were repeatedly banished, the use of the church had to be shared with the few Calvinists, and from 1590 Lutherans (and, of course, Catholics) were no longer admitted to the town council. Lutheranism was already divided between a liberal wing and the much stricter Flacian orthodoxy. It is quite imaginable (though impossible to prove) that the continuous struggle in Woerden between a liberal and an orthodox version of the successive confessions reveals a basic opposition within the local society. Anyway, by 1602 Calvinism had become the official religion in a still mainly Lutheran town. Soon Calvinism was torn into two bitterly opposite factions: from 1617 the Arminians, who dominated the town council, having by now the sole use of the church, had to face public opposition from a dissenting Contraremonstrant consistory supported by a steadily increasing number of town councillors and by one of the two burgomasters. By the end of September 1618, the stadtholder Prince Maurice dismissed the Arminian members of the magistracy and replaced them with orthodox Calvinists. They took over the church too. The following year, the National Synod of Dordrecht formally condemned the Arminians and cut off the languishing dialogue with the Lutherans.

The Arminians offered an active resistance. Due to immigration and to the silent conversion of the undecided and indifferent to the official religion, they formed by now a considerable part of the town population. They were particularly numerous among the laborers in the brick and tile yards, rough customers who inspired the magistracy with terror. The fear of a popular insurrection brought the town council to a radical repression, with the active help of the Estates of Holland. But whereas in other Dutch towns the orthodox Calvinists only faced the Arminians, in Woerden at least three parties were at stake: the Lutherans still formed about one third of the population; the Arminians accounted certainly for more than 40 percent, but the poorer half; the Calvinists assembled approximately one quarter of the population, but they were in a leading position in town and countryside, many of them probably being social climbers. Small numbers of Catholics and Mennonites subsisted too, but they played no visible role in the public events of that moment.

By 1622/1623, opposition between the three main religious

13 Streekarchief Rijnstreek, Notarial records of Woerden, 8531-8547 (notary Gerard van Gorcum).
Title page of second printing of Waerachtige ende sekere gheschiedenisse (Utrecht, 1623).

factions was sharper than ever before. The Arminians were heavily fined for their conventicles, the Lutherans for their refusal to baptize and wed in the church and for their funeral sermons. Whereas the two Arminian ministers were forced to leave the town, one of the new Calvinist ministers, Henricus Alarius, assaulted the Lutherans in 1623 with a theological treatise proving that Luther had been a true Calvinist and that his successors had perverted the true (i.e. Calvinist) meaning of the confession of Augsburg. Two years earlier, he had already published a small Reformed catechism for the education of the local youth in an orthodox sense. Confronted with the two oppositional groups, who both claimed their priority in time and their good faith, the Calvinists badly needed a justification of their rights.

In this context Evert’s religious experience acquired a particular meaning. It is therefore important to give him his rightful place in the religious landscape of Woerden. This is, however, a two-sided question: where did he stand himself? and which religious party took him as an emblem? The two questions and the answers given to them are, of course, interrelated, but there is room for maneuver, and we shall see that Evert did not hesitate to seize it. Although we do not know for sure if his parents were orthodox Calvinists, there is ample reason to believe so. At any rate, the Woerden orphanage, founded just after the beginnings of Calvinist penetration, functioned as one of the main agencies of Calvinization in the town. There is no doubt whatsoever as far as the Bogaert children’s position is concerned. Evert’s elder brother Cornelis Bogaert (d. 1669) lived at Leiden in orthodox circles and married the sister of a radical young Calvinist, Cornelis Paludanus, who in his youth had actively combated Arminianism at Woerden. Though a self-taught theologian (a Duysche clerck, not educated in Latin), Cornelis Paludanus was in 1622/1623 admitted as a proponent (a

candidate for the ministry) and became a minister at the village of Noorden near Woerden. Both Dominie Everhardus Bogardus and Dominie Cornelis Paludanus were in 1636 guardians to the children to be born in the household of Cornelis Bogaert, respectively, their brother and brother-in-law.14 Paludanus’s fervor may have inspired young Evert, who was clever enough to reject at the same time the difficult way of a self-taught theologian and, therefore, claimed his access to the Latin school. Evert’s younger half-brother Pieter Muysveot (d. circa 1653) became a highly orthodox schoolmaster at the nearby village of Linschoten, and Evert himself got his ministry at New Amsterdam as a favorite of the orthodox faction among the directors of the West India Company and of the orthodox party within the Amsterdam consistory (in particular Dominie Otto Badius), which in those years decided on appointments for the overseas churches.

In fact, the three brothers must have been closely akin to a zealous Calvinist minister named Vincent Muysveot, Muesevoet, or Dutchified as Meusevoet (1560-1624). This minister was the son of a Flemish shoemaker from Eeklo near Ghent who as a convinced Calvinist had moved to Breda (Brabant), been imprisoned, and then in 1568 fled overseas to Norwich, England. Vincent returned to Holland in 1586 with the new Calvinist governor, the earl of Leicester. After his study at Leiden, he served first as a divine at Zevenhoven near Woerden and then at Schagen near Alkmaar, where he terrorized the Arminians. He has received some fame in the history of Dutch Calvinism because of his work as a cultural broker. Between 1598 and his death in 1624 he translated more than thirty Puritan and Pietistic treatises from English into Dutch, among which are virtually all the works of the famous Puritan divinity William Perkins (1558-1602) and some of King James I.15 He acted in fact as the main introducer of Puritan pietism in the Netherlands. The second marriage of Evert’s mother with a Muysveot must have made him Evert’s uncle, thus his acquaintance with the pietistic idiom and the Puritan doctrine of regeneration.

With this spiritual genealogy in mind, the second phase of Evert’s spiritual experience and his messages may receive a new interpretation. Spiritual experience is of course embedded in social traditions of bodily control and physical constraint. Prayer, fasting, visions, celestial messages, and miraculous healings adopt traditional forms of communication between heaven and man.16 Such forms, stored in what we may call the “social memory,” are not only prerequisites for the production of spiritual experience but make it also recognizable for the target group, which shares with the subject of the experience a network of traditions and meanings, and form with him or her what S. Fish has called an “interpretive community.” In outlining the basic features of such traditions, the theatrical expression of spiritual experience is a guarantee for its appropriate transmission, not only to the target group but also to others. The latter might recognize the tradition, at any rate, without giving it immediately the same meaning.

14 Municipal archives of Leiden, Notarial records 265, deed nr. 63 (12 Sept. 1636).
16 These traditions and the way Evert Willemisz. uses them are analyzed in chapters 8-11 of my book.
as the one prevailing in the target group.

In the second phase of his spiritual experience, Evert tends to overaccentuate its theatrical expressions, because his aim is no longer his self-promotion as an agent of God but the adhesion of as many social groups as possible to his message: the target group of the elected, of course, but also the other religious groups in town. Whereas the spiritual traditions were easily recognized by all, Evert’s major concern was now the transmission of their true meaning. Even apart from God’s commission, there was a good reason for his obstinacy. A significant part of passing from youth into the next phase of life is the entrance into public life with an individual life project that must also be acknowledged and if possible supported by the community. One cannot escape the evident parallel with the appearance in the temple of the young Jesus who at the age of twelve explained the Bible to the scribes (Luke 2:46-47). Now, as was said above, many in Woerden still remained rather skeptical about what had happened to Evert. Again, this is not without its parallel with Jesus who, when he revealed the truth in the synagogue in Nazareth, was received with disbelief and barely escaped a violent death (Luke 4:16-30). For Evert Willemzsz, too, it was impossible to leave his public task half finished. Hence the second stage of his experience.

Four months after his spiritual regeneration, on a Wednesday morning, January 18, 1623, Evert gets up with a severe headache. Again, he isolates himself in the particular way the close community of the orphanage permits. He refuses to eat or drink and predicts that he will again lose the ability to hear and to speak. And, indeed, that happens about noon. This time it lasts only three days. Perhaps Evert’s experience was now more intense and more exhausting (as minister Altorius suggested in one of his answers to the boy); perhaps the passing of his message didn’t need more time. Anyway, Evert now behaves in a completely different way. He is still surrounded by the group of orphans, who find this break in the daily routine extremely interesting, want to miss no minute of it, and perhaps share collectively unto a certain point or even intensify his spiritual excitement. Instead of a target group as in the first phase, the orphans are now made Evert’s assistants. With their help as public testimonies, Evert now orchestrates a public recognition of his career turn and his mission. One by one he calls the representatives of the various institutions which make up his social horizon to his chair or his bedside in the room which has been put at his disposal. Together, they can legitimize the totality of his actions.

First comes the matron, representative of the household sphere; then his older brother, his next of kin, as a representative of his family; next the rector of the Latin school, the main agent of literate culture in the town; after that, his former employer, master tailor Gijsbert Aelbertsz; then the ruling mayor, contractor Jan Florisz. van Wijngaarden; finally the minister, Domine Henricus Altorius, in the name of the church council. The whole community, in all its ramifications, as far as they are significant for a young man’s world picture, lay as well as cleric, public and private, parades symbolically past the chair from which Evert sends his messages out into the world. And each in the process is assigned a task related to Evert’s mission. Thus master Gijsbert Aelbertsz:

[Gijsbert Aelbertsz:] I, Gijsbert Aelbertsz, your former boss, am very sympathetic with you since you were such a good servant for me. Just write it down if you need something from me.

[Evert:] I request from you that you make my case known, not to the mighty of this world but to God’s poor creatures, whom He has left in this world. Make it known, for such is God’s will, that it be known; and that alone so that they may see themselves reflected in me; for should people not see themselves reflected in me, God shall strike them with his rod, that is, such horrible sin that people shall not know how they can be rid of it. Therefore, see yourself in me: for God is not doing this to no purpose, but rather so that they shall all repent to Him, I mean God; for God would not mortify us if people did not make Him angry. But God shall come just as He came to Sodom and Gomorrah if we do not repent. Therefore, do not cast this message to the winds, but let everyone hear it from God (B23-24).

The tailor’s shop appears here as the world of the humble people, the place where the tailor may appropriately address the sinners among the simple folk. Though a world of sinners, it is however not an ungodly world in itself — a conviction that conforms perfectly to Calvinist orthodoxy. Evert’s discussion with his former employer gives us some insight into the religious atmosphere of the shop. We get a glimpse of the way in which Evert’s spiritual experience was subconsciously prepared months before the first phase:

[Gijsbert Aelbertsz:] Evert, how often have we spoken with each other from the Psalms of David. But as the Prophet David exclaims in Psalm 42: “As a hart panteth, O Lord, so doth your heart pant after God’s holy word.” Thus the Prophet in Isaiah 55 exclaims in particular: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye here.” That all
the people in world felt that, such is certainly my desire. [Evert:] The spirit led us to speak from the Psalm of David. The spirit was with us, like the two young men along the way, when God joined them [Luke 24:13-35]. Therefore the Lord Jesus said: wherever two are gathered in his Name, that He will be there too [Matthew 18:20]. That’s what it is: as a hart panteth after fresh water, so panteth my soul after the Lord who is my God [Psalm 42:2]. God Almighty tells us in the scriptures: Call me in time of need, I shall help you. He who seeks shall find me; he who thirsteth for me, to him shall I give the heavenly water from my Heavenly Father, which my Father has given to me [cf. John 4:10; 7:38, etc.].

[Gijsbert Aelbertsz.:] If you so wish, I shall come this evening to speak with each other from out of God’s word. [Evert:] I hope that my God shall grant that. I thank you, may God strengthen you with his Holy Ghost. Amen. Do as you have written (B 24).

For Evert and his former boss, the daily work is, as it were, spiced with the Bible. It takes on meaning through the continual meditation on God’s word. In this regard, the issue at stake is not so much the literal text of the Bible as its presence in reading, sermon, and conversation, transmitted orally, discussed continually in connection with current events, a complex of quotations from the Bible that we constantly find in more or less distorted form in Evert’s messages. For the tailor, the spiritual experience of his former apprentice is sufficiently legitimized by his double conclusion that, on the one hand, Evert still follows their customary procedures of dealing with God’s word and that, on the other hand, he acts in conformity with the scriptures as discussed in the micro-convencile of his workshop. The tailor’s religion, which appears in the pamphlets as the religion of the multitude, is a scriptural, ethical, and pietistic religion with no fixed reference to a particular confession. It is the emotional religion of a spiritual community of faith that surpasses, and partly ignores, the social community of interests (dogma, ritual, discipline, etc.) realized in the church. In this sense, the tailor and his apprentice pertain to those early “Christians without a church” celebrated by Leszek Kolakowski.17

But the church was never absent in those days, and certainly not at Woerden where the confession was a major element of group identity. The social recognition of Evert’s experience needed the approval of the ecclesiastical leaders of his group, the two orthodox Reformed ministers. Both came to see him, but only one of them was expressly summoned by Evert as his judge: Domine Henricus Alutarius (c. 1592-1633), a strong character, orthodox without being sectarian (as was indeed his colleague Jacobus Cralingius), an excellent theologian, a popular preacher, and at the same time a practising physician. We know from other sources that in those very years he treated medically a peasant from a neighboring village stricken with “salvation panic.” Just like Francesco Spiera seventy years before, the peasant, convinced of being eternally damned by God, let himself die.18 Alutarius took him into his house in order to observe him and to treat what he considered to be a psychic disorder.

We do not know for certain what exactly he thought initially of Evert’s spiritual experience, but there is no evidence of any medical treatment by the minister. In this case Alutarius’s concerns were not medical but ecclesiastical. He doubted the truth of Evert’s religious experience, even if (and perhaps especially so while) both lived in the same sphere of orthodoxy. Was Evert’s experience conformed to the Calvinist canon of scriptural exegesis, and could it support the interests of the orthodox party at Woerden? Or was it to be combated as detrimental to the purity of faith and the cohesion of the church? And how to measure the dangers?

Domine Alutarius therefore looks for instruments, signs which can incorporate what is happening to Evert into the discourse of dogmatics and in the logic of the church order. Hence his questions:

[DS. Alutarius:] Did the Lord make any special promise to you and any other disclosures that he will keep you alive without the usual means of eating and drinking which he wants us to use for our preservation? [Evert:] Yes, he certainly did; for that is my promise from the voice that said to me that God would keep me healthy and powerful in this world; for that is spoken by the mouth of the angel who said it to me. [DS. Alutarius:] In the New Testament the Lord doesn’t speak to his people through visions and divine revelations like in the Old Testament. And the Holy Ghost warns us that we must not lightly depend on such things since there have been many who have believed them and have been deceived. Therefore, I beseech you that you ponder deeply whether you are doing these things on a firm foundation. Especially since much will depend on it and it will be everywhere publicized; for that reason, we must act very carefully and be assured of everything before we reveal it to others. Will you repeat to me here once again what kind of outcome you think there will be for you? But take care not to strain your heart too much; better keep it for tomorrow and write

it well in advance. He makes sure that not only the rector but also both ministers — three qualified and critical witnesses — are present. When at a given moment he sees the other orphans gathered around the hearth fire (it is the middle of winter) writing and talking, what he perceives reactivates his consciousness. He writes on a slip of paper that the rector and the ministers must be brought, and then he asks them all to sing together a most appropriate psalm apparently found by opening the Bible at random, i.e. Psalm 8:2: “Out of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength . . .” During the singing, Evert regains successively the use of his senses until he leaves the condition of babe mentioned in the psalm and sings along with the rector and the ministers as an adult.

For both ministers, this is sufficient proof. On the next day, a Sunday, Evert is allowed to give the reading in church before the whole congregation. He reads the responses of the Heidelberg catechism to the 35th question, 14th Sunday. Again a very appropriate text: “What do we call what is received from the Holy Ghost?” Had Evert not repeatedly emphasized that the Holy Ghost was working through him? We may consider this reading as the last rite of passage, by means of which Evert completes his official entrance into public life. From this point on, he is empowered to speak in public with adults. But it is just this very confirmation of the change in the direction of his life that provokes new harsh criticism in the town.

Evert then plays his last trump. Two nights later, his two little brothers, who sleep in the same bed with him, and the other orphans are awakened, because Evert is talking aloud in his sleep. Someone goes after the matron downstairs. Troubled, she wakes him and asks whether something is wrong. Evert calms everyone down and persuades them to return to bed. Hardly had he gone back to sleep when again he starts speaking aloud, as if in a dream. His brother Pieter, five years older than he, obviously knew his younger brother’s tricks. He had pen, paper, and candle ready and wrote Evert’s long rhymed message down for us. The beginning and end again set the tone:

O woe, o woe, people with pride and excess,
Oh ye people mean and heartless,
Your lives today are so godless.
[ . . . ]
And so that people know
Through the work of God the Lord,
Through me they should repent
And listen to God’s word.
All that is spoken here
Will help you ward off sin,
Stop speaking blasphemous words;
Think before you begin.
Then God his blessing to you will give,
And I will depart eternal life to live (B34-35).

This dictated dream — the most classical form of a message from the hereafter, a judgment of God — brought the last Calvinist critics over into Evert’s camp. God himself here legitimized his spiritual experiences and the direction which he wanted to give his life, his public mission — not by Evert’s own doing but while he was unconscious. The next day, the magistracy had the witnesses, including Evert’s brothers, appear before him, authenticated the whole
story, and gave the church council orders to have it published as quickly as possible in Amsterdam. And so it happened. Although Evert’s gradual legitimation among the dominant Calvinist party at Woerden is well documented, we know very little about his acceptance by other local confessional groups. Six years later, the Amsterdam chronicler Claes van Wassenaer (1571/72-1629), a former Calvinist preacher and also a university trained physician, argued that the whole story was a fraud and that the orphan had been a simulator. However, the publication of this popular chronicle did not prevent the Woerden magistracy from providing Evert Willemsz. half a year later with the town scholarship at Leiden nor the Amsterdam consistory from having a very positive opinion of his abilities and sending him successively as a comforter of the sick to the Coast of Guinea (1630) and as an ordained minister to New Netherland (1632). Therefore, the unfavorable sentence of the critical chronicler remains somehow a mystery, and we may well wonder whether, after all, this skeptic deserves more credit than the believers. Didn’t the chronicler exaggerate his criticisms, mix up names or places, or even misunderstand completely what really happened?

The solution to this mystery in one sense or another should perhaps begin at the other end of the story: Evert Willemsz. Bogardus’s later life as a Calvinist preacher. The form which Evert, more or less consciously, gave to the second, adult phase of his life makes it clear to us that the spiritual experience of the fifteen-year-old boy was not a passing fancy, not an isolated event, not a happening which befell the visionary from above or beyond and in which he had no part or participation. On the contrary, it formed an integral part of a lifelong plan that took form at that precise moment and of which we can perceive the outlines retrospectively in the account of the first experiences. The experiences of 1622/1623 signaled a threefold transition: from an oral culture to a written culture; from a diffuse to a publicly structured discourse; from a personal identity achievement to a public representation of self — in a word, to the structuring of the self, of an individual public identity coupled with a mission (the ministry) and a message (the call to repentance). The message laid the emotional and moral foundation for his mission ten years later.

There is no trace of any sickness whatsoever in Evert’s later life. On the contrary, his transitional youthful experience made him exceptionally fit for the spiritual function of a comforter of the sick in the reputedly most murderous of all Dutch possessions, the Coast of Guinea (present-day Ghana), where he worked and studied in 1631/1632. His very survival after the Guinea experience suggests that he was a strong man with a fierce temper who got himself in New Netherland the reputation of a heavy boozer. Evert died accidentally in a shipwreck at the age of forty after a full and healthy life. His sickness and healing in 1622/1623 had been transitory phenomena: they were instruments of his maturation as an individual, images of God’s intervention in human matters, and metaphors of Evert’s own spiritual development. His youthful sickness had been primarily a matter of his soul and his mind.

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**Philipsburg Manor**

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HISTORIC HUDSON VALLEY announces a Fall 1996 conference on Slavery in the North and Its Impact on Contemporary American Society. The conference will be presented in conjunction with the exhibition entitled Under the North Star, scheduled to open September 12, 1996. Both will be held at Philipsburg Manor, Upper Mills, North Tarrytown, New York.

Papers and panel proposals are now being solicited for the conference. Abstracts may consider any aspect of slavery in New Netherland and New York State or other pre-Civil War northern states. Innovative methodological approaches and presentations are encouraged.

Scholarship on the condition of our society today as it related directly to the institution of slavery; new research on the connection between African culture and Northern African-American culture in spiritual, intellectual, economic or physical terms; or the development of the African-American identity during slavery is welcomed.

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