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**COPING WITH RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE
IN THE BORDERLANDS OF WESTERN EUROPE:
CATHOLICS, PROTESTANTS AND JEWS IN VAALS**

Abstract

After the re-Catholization of the Free Imperial City of Aachen (1611–16), Protestant congregations were forced to operate underground until the Reformed Church – openly supported by the Dutch States General – found a new place of refuge in the neighbouring Dutch village of Vaals. Ca. 1680, Vaals developed into a multi-confessional site of religious freedom where Roman Catholics, German- and French-speaking Reformed, Lutherans, and Mennonites lived peacefully side by side. With the exception of everyday controversies in the early decades, the preachers of different Protestant congregations worked together. Violence on religious grounds was not part of daily life in Vaals, although it did at times intrude from the outside. Examples of this were the violent attacks on Protestant churchgoers in the middle of the eighteenth century, which were carried out by lower-class Catholics from Aachen. The Catholic clergy, on the other hand, did not engage in hate sermons. Moreover, the presence of Jews did not cause problems in Vaals and the only documented action against Jewish property was not motivated by anti-Judaism. For the Protestants of this distinctly Catholic area, Vaals became an important place of refuge for the public exercise of their faith. The diverse congregations that worshipped in Vaals knew how to cope with each other's presence in a peaceful manner during everyday life.

Key words: Dutch Republic, Imperial cities, borders, confessional conflicts, confessional diversity

I
INTRODUCTION

Ever since the Reformation, confessional and religious diversity have been a frequently discussed topic, especially in the 'contact zones' located in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. However, there has not been a significant focus on this subject in Western Europe, even though there were numerous instances of adherents of different

denominations living in close proximity in small cities and in border regions. The best-known examples are the so-called bi-confessional imperial cities of Augsburg, Dinkelsbühl, Biberach and Ravensburg. However, in light of the religious diversity of the Empire – most prominently on the western borders of the Dutch Republic – the focus on Catholics and Lutherans alone does not go far enough. The Free Imperial City of Aachen and its neighbouring village Vaals in the Republic were far more diverse than other cities or regions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The author of *Hedendaagsche Historie of tegenwoordige staat van alle volkeren* (1740) stated that “Vaals is a prosperous village, about one hour by foot west of Aachen. There are not more than ten or twelve houses, but it is remarkable that there are four well-built churches, as well as a tiny meeting house used by the Mennonites” and goes on to describe the Catholic, Lutheran, German-speaking Reformed, French-speaking Walloon Reformed, and Mennonite churches in the village.¹ As a tetra-confessional village, Vaals was already a rather strange place for its contemporaries, when toward the end of the eighteenth century, a small synagogue appeared.²

Present-day Vaals is situated in the far south-eastern corner of the Netherlands, known best for its proximity to the highest mountain in the country (Vaalserberg, 322.4m). In the early seventeenth century, it was an inconsequential village and the seat of a lower court in the so-called Lands of Overmaas, the Dutch territory east of the river Meuse. The Lands of Overmaas were Generality Lands, thus without provincial estates, but directly ruled by the government in The Hague.³

¹ Jan Wagenaar, *Hedendaagsche Historie of tegenwoordige staat van alle volkeren, XIIe deel vervolgende de beschryving der Vereenigde Nederlanden en bevattende byzonderlyk die der Generaliteits Landen, Staats Brabant, Staats Land van Overmaaze, Staats Vlaanderen en Staats Opper-Gelderland met den staat der bezetting in de Barriere-Plaatsen enz* (Amsterdam, 1740), 408.

² Cf. Frans Crutzen, ‘De joodse gemeenschap Gulpen-Vaals 1783–1827. Haar begin, haar plaats, haar omgeving’, *Historische en Heemkundige Studies in en rond het Geuldal*, vii (1997), 212–61, esp. 220.

³ Cf. Sybrand J. Fockema Andreae, *De Nederlandse Staat onder de Republiek* (Amsterdam, 1961), 74–81; Karel J.Th. Janssen de Limpens, *Rechtsbronnen van het Hertogdom Limburg en de Landen van Overmaze* (Bussum, 1977); Louis Berkvens, ‘Staatkundige en institutionele geschiedenis van de Limburgse territoria, 1548–1795’, in Paul Tummers (ed.), *Limburg. Een geschiedenis*, ii: 1500–1800 (Maastricht, 2015), 19–114, esp. 79–92. For the later development see: Corneille J. Luzac, *De Landen van Overmaze inzonderheid sedert 1662* (Leiden, 1888); George Goossens, *Étude sur*

During the Eighty Years' War, large parts of Overmaas had been occupied by the troops of Frederik Hendrik, Prince of Orange, though the Spanish still held some territory. As a result, for several decades both Catholic and Reformed services were allowed in many areas, although with some restrictions on either side.⁴

During the Middle Ages, the three territories of Overmaas were connected by the fortress of the old Duchy of Limburg. In the course of the late Middle Ages the territories – Valkenburg, s-Hertogenrade (Herzogenrath) and Dalhem – unofficially became more and more independent. Each of the territories consisted of a number of individual court districts (*banken*), which were also a type of municipality. Like most early modern 'states', the Lands of Overmaas were not closed territories but consisted of many enclaves and exclaves, fragmented by small imperial estates such as Wittem, Wijlre and Gronsveld, some of which consisted only of a farm, a fence and a few fields. The villages of Vijlen, Holset, Lemiers and Vaals formed a court district in the territory belonging to s-Hertogenrade and was an exclave of the States General, surrounded by Aachen, Jülich, Wittem, and the Habsburg Netherlands, all of which were Catholic.⁵

During the peace negotiations of 1648, Madrid and The Hague could not agree on how Overmaas should be divided. Their disagreement lasted until the so-called *Partagetractaat* in 1661 when the individual districts of the local courts were redistributed and Overmaas became even more fragmented. The States General had a strong interest in maintaining jurisdiction over Vaals.⁶ But what did they want with

les états de Limbourg et des pays d'Outremeuse pendant le premier tiers du XVIIIe siècle suivie du texte de la Notitia de rebus statuum provinciae Limburgensis de l'abbé Nicolas Heyndal (Louvain, 1910).

⁴ Petrus J.H. Ubachs, 'De Maasveldtocht van 1632: oorzaken en gevolgen', *De Maasgouw*, cii (1983), 1–23.

⁵ Cf. Fockema Andrae, *De Nederlandse Staat onder de Republiek* (Amsterdam, 1985), 74–81; Izaak H. Gosses and Nicolaas Japikse, *Handboek tot de Staatkundige Geschiedenis van Nederland* (Den Haag, 1920), 162–4. A map is provided in Berkvens, 'Staatkundige en institutionele geschiedenis', 83.

⁶ Cf. the standard work on the *Partagetractaat*: Jozef A.K. Haas, *De Verdeling van de Landen van Overmaas 1644–1662. Territoriale Desintegratie van een betwist Grensgebied* (Assen, 1978), about Vaals esp. 160–3. In addition see also: *idem*, 'Uit de voorgeschiedenis van het Partagetractaat', *De Maasgouw*, xc (1971), 111–22; Wilhelmus A.J. Munier, 'Kerken en kerkgangers in Vaals van de Staatse tijd tot op heden', *Publications de la Société Historique et Archéologique dans le Limbourg*, cxxvii/cxxxvii

this tiny village where only a small amount of taxes could be collected and most of the inhabitants made their living from agriculture, a territory that was an exclave and seen from The Hague, lay at the end of the world? What was so desirable about Vaals for the States General? A glance at the history of the neighbouring city of Aachen in the Reformation era sheds some light on this question.

Beginning in approximately 1560, Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed Protestants lived side by side in the Free Imperial City of Aachen. To a large extent, the atmosphere was peaceful. By various methods of political enforcement, the city became re-Catholicized step-by-step. The city's self-image as a Catholic city was shaped, maintained and reinforced by city magistrates and clergy. This development led to conflicts that came to a climax in 1611 when a group of Protestants took hold of the town hall and violently broke into the Jesuits' convent. Under pressure of military action of the Emperor's troops, Catholic law and order was restored in Aachen in 1614. Two years later, the Protestant group leaders were sentenced to death and – after refusing Catholic spiritual succour – were decapitated.⁷

From 1614 onwards, non-Catholic worship remained strictly forbidden within the city's realm. Although Protestants were excluded from the guilds as well as electoral rights, they were accepted as second-class citizens (so-called *Beiwohner*) and were tolerated in

(2000/1), 85–262, esp. 107–12; Alfred Habets, 'Geschiedenis van de Landen van Overmaas, sedert den vrede van Munster tot aan het Partage-Tractaat 1648–1662', *Publications de la Société Historique et Archéologique dans le Limbourg*, xxxiii (1896/7), 135–213.

⁷ For the history of Protestantism in Aachen before 1616 see the dissertation of Thomas Kirchner, *Katholiken, Lutheraner und Reformierte in Aachen 1555–1618. Konfessionskulturen im Zusammenspiel* (Tübingen, 2015); Frank Pohle, 'Die Urteile gegen die Anführer des Aufstandes von 1611 im Kontext ihrer Zeit', in Werner Pfeil (ed.), *Recht und Unrecht – 1200 Jahre Justiz in Aachen* (Aachen, 2015), 76–85. See also: Matthias Classen, 'Die konfessionelle und politische Bewegung in der Reichsstadt Aachen zu Anfang des 17. Jahrhunderts', *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, xxviii (1906), 286–442; Herbert von Asten, 'Die religiöse Spaltung in der Reichsstadt Aachen und ihr Einfluß auf die industrielle Entwicklung in der Umgebung', *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, lxviii (1956), 77–190; Hugo Altmann, 'Die konfessionspolitischen Auseinandersetzungen in der Reichsstadt Aachen in den Jahren 1612–1617 im Lichte neuer Quellen', *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, lxxxviii/lxxxix (1981–2), 153–81; Hansgeorg Molitor, 'Reformation und Gegenreformation in der Reichsstadt Aachen', *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, xcviix/ix (1992/3), 185–204.

the city for economic reasons. The harsh attitude of Aachen's Catholic elite towards everything non-Catholic did not significantly change through the decades. When, for instance, a great fire destroyed about 80 per cent of Aachen's houses in 1656, the States General offered to pay the entire cost of reconstruction of the city. In exchange, the States demanded that free exercise of worship had to be granted to the Reformed. This demand was immediately rejected by the burgomasters: they preferred living in a city of ruins to living in a city full of 'heretics'.⁸ In general, Protestants were not persecuted on the sole grounds of being Protestant. That did not mean that they were safe: whenever a reason could be found, Protestants were taken to the ecclesiastical court (*Sendgericht*), for example, for having married outside Aachen's territory in a Protestant church, for failing to show reverence when a priest or Catholic procession carrying the Sacrament passed them on the street, or for neglecting Sabbath rest on Catholic holidays. In most cases, they were sentenced to leave the city. Many of the exiled Protestants moved to places in the region, most prominently to Stolberg in the Duchy of Jülich.⁹

The Protestant congregations continued to exist during the Thirty Years' War, after 1614 however mostly underground, meeting secretly. When Georg Ulrich Wenning was appointed minister of Aachen's Reformed congregation in 1645 and the negotiations for a peace

⁸ Cf. Thomas R. Kraus, 'Der Aachener Stadtbrand vom 2. Mai 1656 und seine Folgen', *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, cix (2007), 35–99, esp. 73.

⁹ More research still needs to be done about the function of the *Sendgericht* concerning Protestant marriages; see: Herbert Lepper, 'Reichsstadt und Kirche. Die Auseinandersetzung um die Verfassung des Aachener Sendgerichts im Zeitalter der Reformation und Gegenreformation', *Zeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte, Kanonistische Abteilung*, lxvi (1980), 371–92; Leonhard Frohn, *Das Sendgericht zu Aachen bis zur Mitte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Aachen, 1913); Thomas Kirchner, 'Das Sendgericht. Ein kirchliches Gericht im Zentrum der Aachener Rechtsordnung', in Pfeil (ed.), *Recht und Unrecht*, 54–61. An example of a detailed list of all members of the Reformed congregation who had been sent into exile or left Aachen more or less voluntarily was set up by minister Georg Ulrich Wenning; see Düsseldorf, Archives of the Evangelic Church in Rheinland (*Archiv der Evangelischen Kirche im Rheinland*, AEKR), 4KG 004 Aachen, Amtsbuch A1,3, fol. 365–8, printed in Hermann F. Macco (ed.), *Aachener Emigranten aus der zweiten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Aachen, 1906). For emigration of Protestants from Aachen to Stolberg see (among others): Asten, 'Die religiöse Spaltung', 77–190; Klara van Eyll, *Die Kupfermeister im Stolberger Tal – Zur wirtschaftlichen Aktivität einer religiösen Minderheit* (Cologne, 1971).

treaty in Münster and Osnabrück began, the Reformed community saw a little light at the end of the tunnel. Wenning was sent there by Aachen's consistory as a representative in order to tend to the interests of the Protestants, i.e. primarily with the goal of regaining the right to freedom of worship within the city. Although Wenning used his large network – he was a frequent guest at both the Dutch and Brandenburg embassy in Osnabrück – he was unable to reach his aim.¹⁰ Due to the final decisions of the Peace of Westphalia, Aachen remained Catholic, and each and every form of non-Catholic worship was forbidden.

II MUTUAL USAGE OF CHURCHES

In order to strengthen the position of the Reformed fellow Christians in Aachen, in the Spanish parts of Overmaas, and in the Prince-Bishopric of Liège, after the decisions of Münster and Osnabrück, the Dutch States General launched a widespread programme to establish new Reformed churches in these strongly Catholic areas. In many places, preachers of the Reformed churches who were installed by the classis of Maastricht were solely responsible for the pastoral care of Reformed churchgoers from outside the region, since in most cases, there were no Reformed inhabitants in those villages except the preacher.¹¹ This programme

¹⁰ For more information about Georg Ulrich Wenning see: Thomas Richter, 'Anmerkungen zu einer außergewöhnlichen Liste von Predigern in der hochdeutsch-reformierten Gemeinde Aachen-Vaals (1649–1672)', *Jahrbuch der Westdeutschen Gesellschaft für Familienkunde*, v (2014), 199–221, esp. 200–1 (with further reading); Jan H. Scholte, 'Die Niederländische Delegation zur Friedenskonferenz im Lichte der zu Aachen aufgefundenen Aufzeichnungen des Pfarrers Georg Ulrich Wenning', in Ernst Hövel (ed.), *Pax optima rerum. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Westfälischen Friedens 1648* (Münster, 1948), 137–56; Leo van Santen, *Bremen als Brennpunkt reformierter Irenik. Eine sozialgeschichtliche Darstellung anhand der Biografie des Theologen Ludwig Crocius (1586–1655)* (Leiden, 2014). The history of Aachen during the Thirty Years' War has been neglected for a long time, new research has to be done in the future, not only concerning religious aspects; see: Max Wohlhage, 'Aachen im Dreissigjährigen Kriege', *Zeitschrift des Aachener Geschichtsvereins*, xxxiii (1911), 1–64; Joseph Finken, *Die Reichsstadt Aachen auf dem westfälischen Friedenskongress. Ein Beitrag zur Aachener Religionsgeschichte* (Aachen, 1910).

¹¹ See, i.a., Laurentius Knappert, 'De Nederlandsche Hervormde Gemeente te Maastricht voornamelijk in de eerste eeuw van haar bestaan', in Willem Bax

also reached Vaals. In the spring of 1649, Georg Ulrich Wenning was appointed minister for the German-speaking Reformed Christians and Jean Sanisson was appointed minister for the French-speaking Walloon-Reformed Christians in Vaals, primarily for the benefit of Aachen residents. As in other villages with newly installed ministers, the Reformed congregations in Vaals remained essentially “letterbox companies” because at that time, Vaals had no Protestant inhabitants, as the (Catholic) visitation log from 1658 stated: “there are no heretics because they only come here from Aachen”.¹²

As such, most Protestants in the region still lived in Catholic Aachen. They were not persecuted in general, but only for specific reasons and on specific occasions. Thus living in Aachen as a Protestant was usually not problematic. Sunday after Sunday, Aachen’s Protestants crossed the border between the imperial city and the territory of the States General in order to make use of Vaals for free and public worship. After services, they made their way back to Catholic Aachen. Some sources suggest the term *Auslaufen* for this phenomenon; ‘Sunday migration’ is a possible alternative. The concept means that – due to the proximity of the border – there was no need to move to a territory where one’s own faith was predominant. Instead of building new houses on the other side of the border, people built churches that could be reached within an hour or two by foot.¹³

The possibilities offered by *Auslaufen*, in a region with small territories, exclaves, and many borders, lead to the emergence of a specific sacral topography in the border area. The best-known examples are the Catholic *grenskapellen* (border chapels) along the border

(ed.), *Gedenboek der Nederlandsche Hervormde Gemeente van Maastricht 1632–1932* (Maastricht, 1932), 63–124; Emile Braekman, ‘Les églises du Limbourg au XVIIIe siècle’, in Philippe Denis (ed.), *Protestantisme aux frontières. La Réforme dans le duché de Limbourg et dans la principauté de Liège (XVIe–XIXe siècles)*. Actes du Colloque du Centre Interuniversitaire d’histoire du Protestantisme et de la Réforme catholique tenu à Verviers les 22 et 23 avril 1983 (Aubel, 1985), 213–34; Petrus J.H. Ubachs, *Twee heren, twee confessies. De verhouding van Staat en Kerk te Maastricht, 1632–1673* (Assen, 1975).

¹² Gulielmus Simenon (ed.), *Visitationes archidiaconales archidiaconatus Hasbaniae in dioecesi Leodiensi ab anno 1613 ad annum 1763*, ii: *Margraten–Widoye* (Liège, 1939), 722–3; Munier, ‘Kerken en kerkgangers’, 93–103.

¹³ See, e.g., Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith. Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA, 2007), 144–71; *idem*, *Cunegondes ontvoering: een geschiedenis van religieuze strijd in de tijd van de verlichting* (Amsterdam, 2014), 72–104.

between northern and southern Netherlands from the coast via Flanders and Brabant to the Meuse. Some of them were constructed for this purpose, others were parish churches that had been turned into border chapels due to their proximity to the border.¹⁴ Similar constructions existed in the border regions of Silesia, Saxony and Brandenburg, among which Świdnica, Jawor and Głogów are best known.¹⁵ The same concept of *Auslaufen* applies to the churches and meeting houses in Vaals that Protestants built and used for the free exercise of their faith that was forbidden in Aachen. The connection between *Auslaufen* and sacral topography became visible in Vaals in the decades after 1649.

The States General ordered that wherever there were two or more churches in a place with a Reformed minister, one had to be handed over to the Reformed. In villages with only one church, this church had to be shared by Catholics and Reformed. Accordingly, the parish church of St. Paul's in Vaals was used by Roman Catholics, German-speaking Reformed and Walloon-Reformed. After the Catholics finished mass, the Reformed congregation would blanket the statues of the saints, crosses and other objects of Catholic devotion before commencing their services.¹⁶ The Catholic priest kept the Sacrament in a cupboard in the rectory to prevent it from being spoilt.¹⁷

For unknown reasons, the Walloon congregation left the shared church in the early 1650s and rented a small barn or shed a few meters up the street.¹⁸ "Shed-churches" or *schuurkerken* were a common

¹⁴ Cf. Dominikus de Jong, *Grenskapellen voor de katholieke inwoners der Generaliteitslanden* (Tilburg, 1963).

¹⁵ See, e.g., Hans Caspary, *Die schlesischen Friedenskirchen in Schweidnitz und Jauer – ein deutsch-polnisches Kulturerbe* (Potsdam, 2009); Peter Maser, 'Die Bedeutung der schlesischen Friedenskirchen im Zusammenhang europäischer Toleranzgeschichte', *Jahrbuch für schlesische Kirchengeschichte*, lxxxviii/lxxxix (2009), 287–96; Małgorzata Morawiec, 'Die schlesischen Friedenskirchen', in Heinz Duchhardt (ed.), *Der Westfälische Friede. Diplomatie – politische Zäsur – kulturelles Umfeld – Rezeptionsgeschichte* (München, 1998), 741–56.

¹⁶ Cf. Munier, 'Kerken en kerkgangers', 101; see also *idem*, *Het simultaneum in de landen van Overmaas. Een uniek instituut in de Nederlandse kerkgeschiedenis (1632–1878)* (Leeuwarden, 1998), 20–30.

¹⁷ Simenon (ed.), *Visitationes archidiaconales*, 722–3.

¹⁸ Cf. Munier, 'Kerken en kerkgangers', 120–6; Lambertus Aalders, 'De drie kerken der reformatie in Vaals', *Jaarboekje der Limburgsche Protestanten Vereeniging*, xiii (1926), 152–68, esp. 159–63.

phenomenon in the borderlands of the Dutch Republic.¹⁹ Curiously, the owner of the shed was the Catholic parish of the neighbouring village Holset. In the 1660s, the Walloon congregation – thanks to financial support from The Hague – built a small church directly across the road, next to the Catholic rectory.²⁰

In 1661, the States General and Spain finally agreed on the partition of the Overmaas territories in the *Partagetractaat*. Vaals fell under the rule of the Dutch Republic. The *Partagetractaat* clarified all questions of sovereignty over those small pieces of land, including sovereignty in religious matters. This meant that the Spanish authorities banned Protestants from their *partages* (the individual court districts they gained in the peace with Spain) and gave churches back to the Catholics. The same applied vice versa to the Dutch *partages*, in which all Catholic priests were sent into exile. The shared church in Vaals was handed over to the German-speaking Reformed congregation for their exclusive use.²¹ However, the church seemed to be in a state of disrepair and was too small for the congregation of more than 400 people. Instead of repairing the old church, the consistory decided to build a new church. The building was funded to a large extent by the States General. The result was a strange but practical solution: the nave of the new church was attached on the north side of the existing tower, placing it perpendicular to the nave of the old church. In the spring of 1672, the dedication service took place.²²

Only a few weeks after opening, French troops occupied Overmaas in the course of the war with the Republic. They forced the German

¹⁹ See, for instance: Jan de Jong, 'Brabantsche schuurkerken', *Historisch Tijdschrift*, xiv (1935), 308–15; Antonius van der Braak, 'De sluiting van tien schuurkerken in Brabant in de achttiende eeuw', *Brabants Heem*, xxxv (1983), 22–36.

²⁰ Cf. Aalders, 'De drie kerken', 159–63; Johannes F. van Agt, *Zuid-Limburg: Vaals, Wittem en Slenaken. De Nederlandse Monumenten van Geschiedenis en Kunst* (The Hague, 1983), 68–70; Munier, 'Kerken en kerkgangers', 107; Lambertus Aalders, 'L'Eglise éteinte, dite l'Eglise Wallonne réformée de Vaals', *Bulletin de la Commission pour l'Histoire des Églises Wallones*, ser. 4, iii (1930), 6–12; Jo van der Meij, *De Evangelische Lutherse Kerk Vaals 1737–1987* (Vaals, 1987), 15, 18.

²¹ Cf. Munier, 'Kerken en kerkgangers', 113.

²² Cf. Maastricht, Regional Historic Center Limburg (*Regionaal Historisch Centrum Limburg* [hereinafter: RHCL]), 14.E006 Hervormde Gemeente Vaals, Acta Consistorii, minutes of the meeting of the consistory from 2 May, 1672; Munier, 'Kerken en kerkgangers', 120–6.

congregation to share the small Walloon-Reformed church with its worshippers and confiscated the newly built German church, handing it over to the Catholics.²³ Circumstances changed again a few years later as a result of the Peace of Nijmegen. Because the regulations of this treaty concerning religious matters were not based on the *Partagetractaat*, but instead on the arrangements made in the 1630s, public Catholic services were once again allowed in Overmaas – a rare exception in the Dutch Republic. Nevertheless, the Catholics had to give the church back to the Reformed and started to refurbish their old ruined church. From this time on, the Catholics and the Reformed made joint use of the tower and the bells.²⁴

The years between 1649 and ca. 1680 were characterized by frequent clashes in the everyday life of churchgoers. One example is the account of the Catholic sexton who frequently rang the bells of the shared tower while Reformed services were being conducted.²⁵ An interesting incident (which appears to be out of the ordinary) was reported in the Catholic visitation log of 1658: the fence of the graveyard was pulled down by the Protestants in order to make it accessible for their horses and carriages – desecrating the Catholic churchyard with droppings of the Protestants' horses.²⁶ Nevertheless, there were no instances of larger conflicts exceeding the everyday level during this period. After this period of fluctuation of church ownership and church use, matters were settled by around 1680.

It is no wonder that the Reformed congregations were predominant in Vaals in comparison with other Protestant denominations. The Reformed Church was a state religion, supported directly by the States General in financial as well as organizational matters: the government was responsible for the selection and payment of preachers. While the right to hold Catholic services in Overmaas was secured by treatises, neither Mennonites nor Lutherans were officially permitted freedom of public worship. In spite of this, their presence and semi-private worship was largely tolerated. In fact, in the eighteenth century, there was practically no difference in the treatment of denominations that were officially allowed with the denominations that were tolerated,

²³ Cf. Munier, 'Kerken en kerkgangers', 134–41.

²⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, 141–5, 176–8.

²⁵ Cf. Kaplan, *Cunegondes ontvoering*, 147.

²⁶ Cf. Simenon (ed.), *Visitationes archidiaconales*, 722–3.

on the condition that the churches of the latter were not permitted to have towers or steeples.

Not everybody agreed with this extent of tolerance. For example, prior to the summer of 1669, Aachen's Lutheran congregation attended public services in nearby Stolberg in the Duchy of Jülich. In August 1669, the Lutherans rented a room in a house in Vaals that stood directly next to the border. The owner of the house was a well-respected member of the Reformed congregation; nevertheless, he let the Lutheran minister preach in his house. Reformed minister Wenning did not admonish the owner of the house, but instead wrote sharply-worded letters to the Reformed synods. In his eyes, the synods as well as the States General and local Dutch authorities were responsible for ensuring that Lutheran services in Vaals would be prohibited as soon and as strictly as possible – the Reformed must not be disturbed by Lutherans singing psalms that could be heard out on the street. However, the synods did nothing, nor did the government. Wenning did not engage himself in this case any further and thus Lutheran service in Vaals continued without restrictions. Later on, the Lutheran congregation followed the Walloons in renting the *schuurkerk* from the Catholic parish in Holset, which was just a few meters further up the road.²⁷

III LIVING IN A GOOD NEIGHBOURHOOD

On the whole, the situation in Vaals settled down around 1680 when final decisions were made regarding which denomination had which

²⁷ Cf. Thomas Richter, 'Zehn Häuser und fünf Kirchen. Zur Sakraltopographie der Siedlung Vaals vor den Toren der Reichsstadt Aachen', *Biuletyn Polskiej Misji Historycznej*, xii (2017): *Między Sacrum i Profanum*, 273–310; RHCL, 14.E006 Hervormde Gemeente Vaals, Acta Consistorii, minutes of the meeting of the consistory from 25 Aug. and 29 Oct. 1669; Gerd Rosenbrock, *Unter dem Schwan. Eine lutherische Gemeinde in Stolberg von 1592 bis zur Vereinigung mit der reformierten Gemeinde im Jahr 1860* (Stolberg, 1992); Hans-Joachim Ramm and Gerd Rosenbrock, 'Stolberg – Zufluchtort und Mutterkirche der Verfolgten?', in Uwe Rieske-Braun (ed.), *Protestanten in Aachen. 200 Jahre Evangelische Annakirche* (Aachen, 2003), 109–27; Van der Meij, *De Evangelische Lutherse Kerk*, 18–21; Peter Bertram, 'Lijst van families in de schepenbank Holset-Vaals-Vijlen van 1665', *Historische en Heemkundige Studies in en rond het Geuldal*, ix (1999), 155–84, here 165 (Lothar Gall was the owner of the house 'Römer').

rights in which places and in which churches. Over the years, Vaals turned into a place of refuge for many congregations of Reformed, Lutheran, and Mennonite Christians from the surrounding territories, most significantly from the Free Imperial City of Aachen, the Imperial Burtscheid Abbey, and the Habsburg Netherlands. The predominance of the Reformed was once again linked to being under the protection of the government, but also to the large number of believers: In the German-speaking Reformed church one could count about 400 churchgoers every Sunday and the Walloon-Reformed congregation consisted of another 60–80 people. The Mennonite congregation had always been small and their 20–40 members were scattered across the region from Burtscheid to Maastricht. The Lutherans began as a small community and only in the eighteenth century gradually grew to more than 100 people. In addition to dominating in numbers, the Reformed also dominate the research literature on Vaals and Aachen with written records that were better preserved and a large volume of sources, while the Lutheran sources were only partly preserved and the Mennonite archive only contains three cash journals.

Notwithstanding the disproportion in numbers, and inequality of rights, Vaals developed into a safe harbour for Protestants of various denominations, and religious tolerance became a fact of life. Due to the use of Vaals for Sunday migration, the churches and rectories stood at short distances from each other: The Catholic rectory was the first house west of the Aachen-Vaals border. The neighbouring building was the Walloon church. Across the street from this church lay the Lutheran *schuurkerk*. Only 50 meters west stood the church tower with the Catholic and the Reformed naves, and next to it stood the Reformed rectory that was used as a school. The sacral topography of Vaals was thus very compact: four churches within 100 meters.²⁸

Normally, the shared use of the bells did not cause too much discomfort, and the Lutheran congregation saw nothing wrong with renting a *schuurkerk* from a Catholic parish. On the whole, the religious

²⁸ For an impression see the only known drawing with a view of Vaals from the border to the west with the Catholic rectory, the Walloon church, the two naves of the Reformed and Catholic churches and the house where Lutheran services began in 1669: RHCL, collectie LGOG (Limburgs Geschied- en Oudheidkundig Genootschap), inv.-nr. 34; also in Munier, 'Kerken en kerkgangers', 123; a floor plan of the two naves and the tower is provided *ibidem*, 125.

diversity in Vaals did not cause problems. On the contrary: when the Walloon minister Jacques Lamberg died in 1749, it was not even a question that the three other Reformed ministers, as well as the Lutheran and the Mennonite preacher, were invited to join the funeral procession, while the corpse was cared for by the Catholic Alexian friars.²⁹ Reformed ministers also took part in the dedication service of the new Lutheran church in 1737. This event characterized the peaceful inter-confessional cohabitation in a significant manner: among the guests of the ceremony were Lutherans, Catholics, Reformed, Mennonites and Jews.³⁰ This octagonal church stood close to the manor of the Lutheran cloth manufacturer Johann Adam Clermont who had moved to Vaals from Burtscheid. In fact, the church was placed in the garden of his baroque estate where others would have expected a tea pavilion.³¹ Across the street from his manor, Clermont built a cloth dye manufacturing facility. Many of his dyers were Mennonite – so Clermont dedicated some rooms in the factory to become the new Mennonite meeting house.³² Donating a church or chapel to people of a different faith – as Clermont did – was extraordinary, although in this case it seems it was part of a programme to make his factories attractive for workers regardless of their denomination.

²⁹ Cf. Leiden, University Library (*Universiteitsbibliotheek*), Waals Archief, AW1, Vaals, inv.-nr. 820. Except for the Mennonite preacher, all other ministers were present in the funeral procession.

³⁰ Cf. Johann H. Schmid, *Zions=Freude über den Einzug ihres Königs in seinen Tempel, bey Christlicher Einweihung des neuerbaueten Evangelischen Kirch-Hauses zu Vaëls* (Essen, 1737), 23: “Merkwürdig ist, daß nicht nur das Kirch-Hauß von vielen Menschen angefüllet war, und von den hiesigen und umliegenden Oertern, von 1 biß 6 Stunden weit, als Vaels, Aachen, Bortscheid, Eupen, Gulpen, Maestricht, Stolberg, Zweifel, Monjoye, Zuhörer zugegen gewesen; sondern von allerley hieselbst sich befindlichen Religionen, als Lutheraner, Reformirte, Mennonisten, Römisch-Catholische, wie auch ein fremder Jude, und die Judin, so in Vaels wohnet”.

³¹ Cf. Van der Meij, *De Evangelische Lutherse Kerk*, 43–7; Van Agt, *Zuid-Limburg*, 82–102.

³² Cf. Van Agt, *Zuid-Limburg*, 119–21 (with some incorrect remarks on the history of the Mennonite congregation); Jakob Loosjes, ‘De Doopsgezinde Gemeente te Maastricht’, in Willem Bax (ed.), *Gedenkboek der Nederlandsche Hervormde Gemeente van Maastricht 1632–1932* (Maastricht, 1932), 379–85. Nothing is known about the interior of the meeting house and there are only fragments left from the archives of the congregation.

IV VIOLENCE FROM ABROAD

Although religious diversity in Vaals did not lead to violent conflicts amongst the residents and regular visitors, the village and Aachen's Protestants experienced numerous instances of religious violence. The first example is the 'crucifix affair' in 1738. When Vaals came under the rule of the States General in 1663, the government passed a law that forbade the restoration of public symbols of Catholic piety, such as crosses, statues of saints, and chapels. In spite of this, in the winter of 1737–8, parish priest Petrus Rademacher refurbished a large crucifix that hung on the outer wall of the Catholic church with fresh paint. The mayor ordered him to remove it. Surprisingly, the Protestant preachers asked the mayor not to execute his order because they feared violence from Aachen's Catholics. The crucifix was nevertheless removed – and their fears were substantiated: on their Sunday journey through the streets of Aachen heading to Vaals, Protestants were attacked by a furious group of Catholics, who insulted, beat, and threw stones at them. In the course of the turmoil, some of the imperial city's soldiers were wounded. The following week, hardly anybody dared to make the journey to Vaals. Only after further Sunday attacks, followed by weeks of diplomatic negotiations between Aachen's magistrates and the States General, warnings of criminal proceedings against the perpetrators, and the final restoration of the refurbished crucifix on the wall of the Vaals church, the conflict calmed down. The city's lower-class Catholics warned their Protestant neighbours: if further action was taken against Catholic services or symbols of public Catholic piety in Vaals, riots would immediately begin again.³³

Catholics also provoked incidents against public Protestant worship in Vaals. After a festival in Vaals in the summer of 1757, which was attended by many Catholics from Aachen and the surrounding villages, some Catholics – possibly drunken – fired shots at the weather vane of the Walloon church and shot part of it down. Though filled with indignation, the Dutch authorities could not catch the perpetrators

³³ Cf. Kaplan, *Cunegondes ontvoering*, 140–6; Lambertus Aalders, 'Verhinderde kerkgangen', *Jaarboekje der Limburgsche Protestanten Vereniging*, xv (1928), 112–16; Thomas Richter, 'Edict van de Staten-Generaal uit 1738 betreffende "het amoveren van een Crucifix beeld"', *Verleden en Heden – Tijdschrift van Heemkundekring Sankt Tolbert Vaals*, xvii (2015), 101–8.

because they shot from the 'safe', i.e. Aachen's side of the border.³⁴ Unfortunately, Protestant reactions to this event are not known because of a lack of sources.

The fiercest attacks were yet to come. In 1762, a newborn baby of a mixed Catholic-Reformed couple was to be baptized in the Reformed church (the faith of the mother).³⁵ Minister Johann Pferdmeniges was in the middle of the baptismal ceremony when suddenly a woman stormed into the church, screamed, and tried to snatch the baby from the arms of the minister. Her attempt failed because she was overpowered by the guests of the ceremony. She was taken to 'jail', i.e. a guarded room in a pub. In her eyes, she wanted to prevent the baby from the heretical, devilish, Reformed baptism and instead arrange for a baptism in the true Catholic faith. According to local legend, pastor Johann Wilhelm Bosten is believed to have stood in his vestments in the neighbouring church ready to carry out the Catholic christening. Since the woman was regarded as an imbecile, it was clear to the Dutch authorities who was to blame: the priest was thought to be the mastermind behind the scene.

After the detention of the priest, a new, even fiercer wave of violence erupted among Aachen's Catholic mob, and warnings of criminal proceedings by Aachen's magistrate once again proved ineffective. In the course of events, one Lutheran churchgoer even died of severe wounds from being attacked. As a reaction, the States General, who had sent troops to Vaals in order to secure the last 100 meters of the Protestants' road to church, ordered all Catholic churches in Overmaas to be shut down for a few weeks. It was only after several months that the situation began to calm down and the attacks became fewer and less severe. The legal proceedings against the woman in question were ultimately dropped in 1766, and the priest – who

³⁴ Cf. Kaplan, *Cunegondes ontvoering*, 147–8; Van Agt, *Zuid-Limburg*, 68–70; Hermann Ariovist von Fürth, 'Die historischen Notizen des Bürgermeisterei-Dieners Johannes Janssen', in *idem* (ed.), *Beiträge und Material zur Geschichte der Aachener Patrizier-Familien*, iii (Aachen, 1890), 3–390, esp. 261–2; Thomas Richter, 'Wetterfahne der wallonisch-reformierten Kirche Vaals in Form eines posaunenblasenden Engels', in Frank Pohle and Carmen Roebbers (eds.), *Das Ringen um den rechten Glauben – Reformation und Konfessionalisierung zwischen Maas und Rhein* (Aachen, 2017), 204–5.

³⁵ Mixed marriages were not widespread, but quite common in many places in the Overmaas territories in the eighteenth century; cf. Munier, 'Kerken en kerkangers', 146–51, 155–65.

in the meantime had been imprisoned for four years – was sentenced to exile and a 10,000 guilders penalty. The fine ruined him financially in spite of solidarity offerings arranged on his behalf by the bishop of Liège.³⁶ The story of the weeks, months and years of violent attacks on Protestant churchgoers in Aachen spread across Western Europe and became known as ‘the christening incident’ (*doopincident*). It was the most prominent episode of violence in the history of the congregations in the border area between the Netherlands and the Empire in the eighteenth century.³⁷

However, the eruptions of fierce violence were only one side of the coin. While a climate of hate was perceptible amongst Aachen’s Catholic lower-class workers, farmhands and illiterates, violence only occurred as a result of Protestant actions that were seen as being against Catholic public exercise of faith in Vaals. The crucifix incident showed that the Protestants of Aachen were not necessarily the initiators of such actions. On the contrary, the educated elite citizens and clergy of Aachen, both Catholic and Protestant, did not take part in such actions. Concerning the Catholic clergy, not a single hate sermon against Protestants has been documented. The only incidents of hate sermons were when Freemasonry appeared in Aachen in the late eighteenth century and Catholic priests spoke out against them during services. The Freemason Lodge was expelled a few years after its foundation. It is no wonder that the members of the lodge gathered in Vaals in the house of the Lutheran needle manufacturer Jacob Kuhnen, who – being a Freemason himself – provided a room in his manor for assemblies.³⁸ After two years in exile, when the situation

³⁶ It was only after a petition for clemency presented to William V that he was released. For the story in *extenso* see: Kaplan, *Cunegondes ontvoering*; Munier, ‘Kerken en kerkgangers’, 178–89; Lambertus Aalders, ‘De Jaren 1762 en 1785 in de geschiedenis van het protestantisme te Aken-Vaals’, *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, xxiv (1931), 69–80.

³⁷ Printings and engravings of this incident were spread across the Netherlands, the best known version was printed in the *Vaderlandsche Woordenboek*, xxix (1793), 71–5; Thomas Richter, ‘Mishandeling der Gereformeerden omtrent Vaals ten jare 1764’, in Pohle and Roebers (eds.), *Das Ringen um den rechten Glauben*, 252–7.

³⁸ Cf. Victor Voncken, ‘Jacob Kuhnen en het huis “der Bau” te Vaals’, in Jan Francotte, Thomas Richter and Wino Winkens (eds.), *975 jaar Vaals – mensen en grenzen door de eeuwen heen* (Vaals, 2016), 59–62; August Pauls, *Geschichte der Aachener Freimaurerei: Die Aachener Freimaurerei in der reichsstädtischen Zeit (bis Ende September 1794)* (Clausthal-Zellerfeld, 1928).

had calmed down and violence seemed to have subsided, the lodge moved back to Aachen.

V

PLOUGHING A GRAVEYARD

One might expect that in the course of the occasional waves of religious violence, Jews would also have been possible targets and victims. This was – quite surprisingly – not the case in Vaals. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Overmaas region had several Jewish communities, some of which had a synagogue or *sjoel* – which can be defined as a type of meeting house without having the status of a synagogue. Gulpen, a few kilometres west of Vaals, was among the villages with either a *sjoel* or synagogue. Present-day Vaals has one of the oldest remaining Jewish tombstone in the whole province of Limburg, which dates back to the year 1756. The stone is heavily weathered such that the only legible information indicates that it is of a woman who died on 15 March 1756.³⁹ It is possible that she was the Jewish woman who was referred to as living in Vaals in 1737, although clear evidence is lacking. Interestingly, it is the *festschrift* of the inauguration service of the new Lutheran church in 1737 that states that among the participants of this service were Lutherans, Catholics, Reformed, Mennonites and two Jews: a foreign Jew and a Jewish woman living in Vaals. This is the oldest source documenting the existence of Jews in Vaals.⁴⁰

Today's Jewish graveyard in Vaals, however, was established in the early nineteenth century and the 1756 stone was obviously moved there.⁴¹ There had been a graveyard which lay directly across from Kuhnen's manor, the rich Lutheran needle manufacturer.⁴² This land

³⁹ Cf. http://www.stenenarchief.nl/phpr/nik/stenen_archief/nik_view.php?editid1=7737 [Accessed: 30 April 2016].

⁴⁰ Cf. Schmid, *Zions=Freude*, 23: "wie auch ein fremder Jude, und die Judin, so in Vaels wohnet".

⁴¹ It remains unclear whether only the tombstone was brought to the new graveyard or the corpse was also transferred.

⁴² Cf. Voncken, 'Jacob Kuhnen', 59–62. The manor still exists in Vaals. The graveyard lay on the south-eastern corner of what today is the crossroads of Tentstraat and Bergstraat. Most likely, this graveyard was only established due to the death of the unknown Jewish woman in 1756. As there are no further tombstones known before 1828, the 1756 stone seems to have been the only grave in this graveyard.

was not owned by the community; an unknown owner sold the parcel to Kuhnen. In 1780, Kuhnen had the graveyard ploughed and levelled to use the parcel as garden. Consequently, the Jewish community took Kuhnen to the Court of Brabant. Although Kuhnen promised to donate a new, larger piece of land that was equipped with a hedge, the court sentenced him. His heirs had to provide a piece of land for a new Jewish graveyard at their expense. The old parcel was, however, not given back.⁴³

The Kuhnen-episode is the only known incident of an anti-Jewish act in Vaals and was clearly not prompted by anti-Judaism, but merely by practical or economic motives. In comparison with the neighbouring village of Gulpen, this is striking: Gulpen as well as other Overmaas villages like Eijsden and Meerssen experienced numerous anti-Jewish incidents, the majority of which appear to be at least partly motivated by anti-Judaism. In contrast, Vaals was a safe place for Jews – although there were only very few Jews living there.⁴⁴

VI CONCLUSIONS

When Georg Forster visited Aachen and Vaals in 1790, he stated that in Vaals five congregations (Catholics, Reformed, Lutherans, Mennonites and Jews) worshipped peacefully.⁴⁵ For the period of time around 1790, this holds true. The history of the various congregations and relationships within the border regions of the Empire and the Dutch Republic reveals cooperation as well as conflict. Different layers of conflict and cooperation can be observed, as follows.

In the inter-congregational relationship between different congregations of the same denomination – in Vaals, this applied to the German-speaking and Walloon-Reformed – we see that conflicts arose in everyday life as well as in the use of churches. There were also conflicts

⁴³ Cf. Crutzen, 'De joodse gemeenschap Gulpen-Vaals', 220, 248.

⁴⁴ Since around 1780, there had been a *sjoel* or house-synagogue in Vaals in the estate of Abraham Hartog; cf. Crutzen, 'De joodse gemeenschap Gulpen-Vaals', 220. For the total number of births between 1776 and 1809 see Vaals, Communal Archives (*Gemeentearchief*), inv.-nr. II-1858 ('Register van geboorten der Joodsche gemeente te Vaals en van aangenomen geslachtsnamen').

⁴⁵ Cf. Georg Forster, *Ansichten vom Niederrhein, von Brabant, Flandern, Holland, England und Frankreich, im April, Mai und Junius 1790* (Leipzig, 1979), 158.

on an administrative level, which were not included here. All in all, it seems that there was not much cooperation between the German- and Walloon-Reformed, at least in the seventeenth century.

The inter-Protestant relationship between the German-speaking Reformed and Lutherans underwent a significant change. In the seventeenth century, Reformed minister Wenning tried to suppress public Lutheran services, whereas in the eighteenth century, his successor took part in the dedication ceremony of the Lutheran church. The christening incident and the violent attacks that followed forged a bond between Reformed, Lutheran and Mennonite Christians who attended service in Vaals. With the exception of one instance concerning a mixed marriage, there were no conflicts with the Mennonites mentioned in the sources. On the contrary, a Lutheran manufacturer provided a new meeting house for his Mennonite workers. The eighteenth century appears to have been a peaceful time concerning the relationships between Lutherans, Mennonites and the Reformed.

Regarding the inter-confessional relationship between Protestants and Catholics, things were more complicated. On the one hand, the ecclesiastical court in Aachen forced many Protestant families into exile. Catholic priests and laypeople in Vaals engaged in minor everyday behaviours that at minimum provoked annoyance, and Protestants did the same, not limited to the shared use of churches. On the other hand, no major problems arose from the reality that the Catholic rectory and the Walloon church lay directly next to each other, nor did renting a *schuurkerk* from a Catholic parish in order to use it as a Walloon, and later a Lutheran church cause problems or pricks of conscience on either side. ‘Swapping churches’ was not a significant matter in the seventeenth century, as evidenced in 1649–80.

Aachen’s clergy did not engage in hate sermons against Protestantism. Even though some of Vaals priests were pugnacious, violence came from the outside. The attackers were not Catholics living in Vaals – who were accustomed to having Protestants as neighbours and Sunday guests – but lower-class farmhands from Aachen and its rural surroundings. During the attacks, the Reformed and Lutheran consistories organized resistance jointly and stood together as one.

Concerning inter-religious contacts, Vaals hosted a small number of Jews. The Jewish community had a graveyard and later also a small meeting house. The only known action against Jews in Vaals was the ploughing of the graveyard in 1780. As can be seen from the context,

this had no anti-Semitic motivation. Jews seem to have been considered an ordinary part of local society as can be seen from the presence of two Jews at the dedication service of the Lutheran church in 1737.

It is clear that a survey like this cannot observe every detail and has to operate with preliminary results from selected sources. However, what is clear is that Protestants of all three denominations – Reformed, Lutherans and Mennonites – were conscious of the fact that Vaals was a safe harbour for free worship and a place of refuge for them, as the public exercise of their belief was forbidden in the surrounding territories. Without Vaals, it would have been very difficult for the congregations to survive. Catholics in Vaals were also conscious of the reality that they were living under the rule of a reformed republic that had deliberately turned Vaals into a Protestant place of refuge and patronized the Reformed Church. Besides mutual annoyances in everyday life, religious diversity was – at least from ca. 1680 onwards – not an unwelcome burden that people were forced to cope with. On the contrary, it seems that such a colourful religious landscape within a small village was well integrated into the everyday life of the inhabitants as well as the regular Sunday visitors. One indicator of this is the fact that it did not matter on which level conflicts arose or cooperation succeeded – inter-congregational (same denomination), inter-Protestant, inter-confessional (with Catholics), or inter-religious – it was not a matter of denomination or fundamental beliefs, but a matter of rights, spaces and everyday issues.

After the waves of violence – which had intruded from the outside – calmed down again in the late eighteenth century, peace and quiet came back to Vaals such that Georg Forster in 1790 could appropriately state that all five congregations lived and worshipped peacefully there. It seems that more than two denominations living together and worshipping in one place was an exception, at least in the borderlands of early modern Western Europe, but further research still has to be done.⁴⁶

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