



**Jochen A. Fühner.** *Die Kirchen und die antireformatorische Religionspolitik Kaiser Karls V in den siebzehn Provinzen der Niederlande 1515-1555.* Brill's Series in Church History. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004. viii + 414 pp. . \$173.00 (cloth), ISBN 9-0041-4083-2.

Reviewed by Violet Soen, Department of Early Modern History, Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.  
Published by H-German (November, 2005)

## Still Lacking an Adequate Framework for the Inquisition

Countries""

Jochen Fühner's University of Heidelberg dissertation offers the first complete juxtaposition of Charles V's Church and anti-Reformation policies in his hereditary and conquered territories in the Low Countries. The geographical scope presents an often neglected perspective in German or international literature. These two advantages allow this monograph to provide a valuable complement to the German historiography concerning the stakes and strategies of Charles's religious policy within the Holy Roman Empire. Unfortunately, however, the author often did not correctly grasp the underlying balance of power and his conclusions tend to be too generalizing. Moreover, readers seeking additional biographical information on Charles V may end up disillusioned, for the Emperor rarely made personal statements on religion and Church policy in the Low Countries (p. 365). Finally, readers interested in the Holy Roman Empire may be the most disappointed as a comparative stance is mostly absent.

The first chapter of Fühner's book provides an introduction to the religious and political situation of the Low Countries in 1515. The two following sections relate largely to questions haunting German historiography: the status of the Seventeen Provinces in Charles's subsequent political testaments and the role of the regents *absente imperatore*. Fühner correctly makes the point that traditional church-state politics and governmental actions to combat "heresy" were closely interwoven in the macro-historical process of Burgundian-Habsburg centralization. Subsequently, the repression of "heretics" was not a "Selbstzweck" (p. 363). But the book fails to live up to this important conclusion by treating both

themes strictly separately in chapters 4 and 5. For example, in light of traditional church policy, the emperor seemed to increase his authority by managing successfully the appointment of bishops with jurisdiction over his lands in the Low Countries. But one has to consult the next chapter to conclude that the interests of those "appointed" bishops and the emperor collided heavily on the jurisdiction over heretics. The last small chapter focuses more distinctively on the role of the regents in the church and anti-Reformation policies in the Low Countries.

Embarking upon Charles's church policy in chapter 4, the author judges it to have been more effective than the measures against the Reformation. The Emperor continued and even intensified the Burgundian policy of encroaching on ecclesiastical privileges. He largely restrained canonical jurisdiction and imposed higher financial demands on the first estate without hesitating to fall back on its financial resources. Furthermore, he also acquired important papal nomination privileges and sought to diminish the power of the curia. Here, Fühner sticks to the nineteenth-century division of church-state politics. The role of "the pope" is not analyzed in depth, although literature on the relationship between Charles V and the papacy has proliferated. The most extraordinary conclusion may be the author's claim that the emperor transformed the church of the Low Countries into a state church which helped him to develop his seigniorial power in the Seventeen Provinces (p. 164). On the contrary, in 1999 Heinz Schilling argued that "there was certainly no sign of a national church movement like that in Spain or French Gallicanism".[1] So Fühner corrects Schilling's thesis but he tends to overemphasize

his conclusion. In any case, the outbreak of the Dutch Revolt proved that even after Charles's reign, resistance sustained towards governmental claims on ecclesiastical matters.

The governmental struggle against the Reformation in the fifth chapter is the most completely elaborated part of the book. Much of this material has been dealt with quite recently in Aline Goosens's book on the "Inquisitions" in the Low Countries.[2] Although Goosens's book did not receive favorable reviews, Fühner challenges her problematic conclusions only occasionally. The key problem of the debate is the characterization of the institution Charles V created in 1522 by nominating an inquisitor of faith, who received a year later papal proof of his competences. Some scholars see the institution as a pure state Inquisition while others consider it to have been a purely Papal Inquisition. Fühner opts for a "papal" Inquisition firmly controlled by the government, without identifying that those inquisitors actually could act quite independently of the Emperor and his regent, basing their authority on their papal nomination.[3]

The description of the role of the regents in the Low Countries within Charles's political system is well developed, but their role in the religion policies is rather challenging. Fühner sketched Margaret of Austria, Charles's aunt and regent until 1530, as "Protagonistin der Verfolgung der Neugläubigen" (p. 253) while Mary of Hungary, his sister and regent in the period 1530-1555, plays the role of the "Sympathisantin der Reformation" (p. 257). These titles should be interpreted with care. The author mentions that until 1529, heresy laws and actions against the Reformation were fragmented and only after that date did repression increase. Margaret of Austria was more a person who, in the Burgundian manner, believed that a reorganization of the bishoprics would lead to an inner reform of Catholicism and therefore decrease the spread of heresy. Since the author omitted those reform measures, his work ignores this important nuance. The judgment that Mary of Hungary was more inclined to compromise and promulgate moderate religious laws stems from a fine analysis of her discussion with the Emperor on the rigor of the religion laws; but the role of the general pardon for heretics she formally issued in 1534 and 1554 is not fully developed.[3]

Despite these critical remarks, the book is worth reading as the theme is particularly interesting and offers important material to understand the world of the Emperor. It presents a modern account of the events, since relevant studies on church-state politics in the Low Countries usually date from the 1950s. Also, it brings together a wide range of sources which otherwise only can be found fragmentarily. Relevant legislation or archival records from the Brussels State Archive are generously summarized, which will make the book a useful instrument for scholars and a stepping stone for further research.

#### Notes

[1]. Heinz Schilling, "Charles V and Religion: The Struggle for the Integrity and Unity of Christendom," in *Charles V 1500-1558*, ed. H. Soly (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 1999), pp. 285-392, 335.

[2]. Aline Goosens, *Les inquisitions modernes dans les Pays-Bas méridionaux 1520-1630*, 2 vols. (Brussels: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1997-1998).

[3]. See my forthcoming study on the role of a "general pardon" and an inquisitor during the initial stage of the Dutch Revolt: Violet Soen, *Geen pardon zonder paus! Studie over de complementariteit van het koninklijk en pauselijk generaal pardon (1570-1574) en over generaal inquisiteur Michael Baius (1560-1576)* (Brussels, forthcoming in the Transactions of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts series).

Copyright (c) 2006 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For other uses contact the Reviews editorial staff: [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).

**Citation:** Violet Soen. "Review of Jochen A. Fühner, *Die Kirchen und die antireformatorische Religionspolitik Kaiser Karls V in den siebzehn Provinzen der Niederlande 1515-1555*, H-German, H-Net Reviews, .

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=326391145975587>.

Copyright © 2005 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu) .