

GEORGIUS CASSANDER:  
SEARCHING FOR RELIGIOUS PEACE IN HIS  
CORRESPONDENCE (1557–1565)\*

Rob van de Schoor (Nijmegen)

*Sane agnosco quam parum ingenio & doctrina valeam.*<sup>1</sup>

In an essay on Georgius Cassander (1513–1566) in the sixth volume in the series *Katholische Theologen der Reformationszeit* (Münster 2004, edited by Heribert Smolinsky and Peter Walter), Barbara Henze proposes that Cassander's correspondence should be published. In order to do so, it would be necessary to assemble, introduce, and annotate the letters published by Jean de Cordes in Cassander's *Opera omnia* (Paris 1616), the collection *Illustrium ac clarorum virorum epistolae selectiores [...] tributae in centurias II* (Leiden 1617, compiled by Daniel Heinsius and Petrus Bertius), and Petrus Burmannus's *Sylloge epistolarum* (Leiden 1724).<sup>2</sup> Such a collection of printed letters would need to be completed by including the unpublished letters held by the libraries of Leiden University and other institutions. The project would produce an impressive volume of letters, one that would serve to introduce the reader to the scholarly circles of which Cassander formed part, but it would also help explain the development of Cassander's irenicism: what did he read and what books did he discuss with his correspondents? A collection of this kind would also introduce us to the letter writer Cassander and probably make clear how previous editors tackled the work of making his letters available in print.

In preparing the present paper, I studied the 118 letters printed in Cassander's *Opera omnia*, letters dating from 1557–1565, most of which deal with his efforts to take theological doctrines and ecclesiastical

---

\* Translation Paul Gretton.

<sup>1</sup> Georgius Cassander, *Opera omnia* (Paris 1616), *Ep.* 33, 1124: 'I am only too well aware of the insignificance of my intellectual and doctrinal capacities.'

<sup>2</sup> *Syloges epistolarum a viris illustribus scriptarum tomus II*, 236–302. For information on these collections of letters and the manuscript collections on which they are based, see: R. van de Schoor, 'The reception of Cassander in the Republic in the seventeenth century', in *The Cassandrians. Reception of Georg Cassander's irenicism from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century* [forthcoming].



Fig. 6. D. Veelwaard, *Portrait of Georgius Cassander*, engraving. Catholic University Leuven, Central Library / Prentenkabinet, inv.nr. PA 585

traditions that are in dispute between Roman Catholics and Protestants and test them against Holy Scripture, religious tradition, and the judgement of early-Christian and medieval theologians. The letters are directed to kindred spirits and friends, Roman Catholic opponents, and rulers and prelates who called in Cassander's assistance to find a solution to religious disputes. Although these letters seem somewhat impersonal—and, in their resemblance to minor theological treatises, differ significantly from the more vivid written dialogue characteristic of scholarly correspondence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries<sup>3</sup>—they still consistently arouse the curiosity of the reader, who continues to wonder what inspired this humanist figure—despite the many afflictions from which he suffered—and how he presented himself and his ideals in his letters.

Such curiosity can be worked up into questions that can still only be answered to a certain extent. What is the tone of Cassander's letters when he is writing to kindred spirits or friends, to opponents, or to holders of high office? How does he present himself in letters to sympathetic strangers? How does he pass on news: does he include the opinions of others in his letters to third parties, and does he 'recycle' certain passages? How does Cassander express his concern or satisfaction regarding what happens beyond the walls of his study, and what does he say about the torments of his afflictions, which repeatedly prevent him from contributing to resolving the discord in Church and State? Or, in the case of specific theological issues: is the way Cassander discusses them in his letters the same as what he has to say about them in his books? And what about the style in which those specific issues are discussed in the letters: is it adapted to the requirements of the epistolary genre and can we identify a clear difference between it and the way the same position is expressed in a printed theological work? I wish to focus in particular on the imagery that Cassander uses in his letters to describe theological disputes and the lamentable state of the Church: what comparisons does he employ and why does he do so?

I will report on the differences between Cassander's letters to his friends, his opponents, prelates and princes. Subsequently, excerpts from letters will be presented in which he deals with statements in his

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 'Bij wijze van inleiding. De brief in de vroegmoderne tijd', in P.G. Hoftijzer, O.S. Lankhorst, and H.J.M. Nellen (eds), *Papieren betrekkingen. Zevenentwintig brieven uit de vroegmoderne tijd* (Nijmegen 2005), 9–20.

printed books concerning theological matters. Some of these excerpts show that in his letters he is willing, now and then, to speak out more openly; others reveal the circumstances under which his books were written. One thing that is characteristic of Cassander as a letter writer is the way in which he comments—or in fact fails to comment—on ‘the news’, i.e. current political and theological concerns, and gives expression to his emotions.

#### LETTERS TO OPPONENTS, FRIENDS, AND HOLDERS OF HIGH OFFICE

Cassander displays a naive and touching certainty when he says that he trusts that his irenic writings will pass the test of Roman Catholic criticism with flying colours. If we are to believe what he says in his letters, the prospect does not disturb him of his irenic writings being assessed by the Leuven theologians Johannes Hessels and Jodocus Tiletanus, of whom he has very high expectations,<sup>4</sup> or Gulielmus Lindanus, the Bishop of Roermond.<sup>5</sup> After all, he has not stated anything that conflicts with the doctrines and tradition of the Church: learned gentlemen such as these will want to recognise that fact.<sup>6</sup> He is therefore all the more disappointed when he does not in fact receive the expected approval of Roman Catholic theologians<sup>7</sup> and when they tell him in letters—even if somewhat circumspectly—what they will later express more emphatically and in a more hostile manner in print.

It has become clear that, in his turn, Cassander allows himself to criticise the Church more openly in his letters than in his books. In a long letter dated 16 September 1565 to Johannes Hessels—who in 1566 would confront him with a polemical pamphlet containing a fierce attack on his *De officio pii viri*<sup>8</sup>—he wrote:

<sup>4</sup> *Ep.* 73, 1176.

<sup>5</sup> E. Janssen, C.ss.R., ‘Gulielmus Lindanus, Georgius Cassander en hunne correspondentie van Ao 1563’, in *Miscellanea Mgr. Dr. P.J.M. van Gils, Publications de la Société Historique et Archéologique dans le Limbourg* 85 (1949), 311–332; J. Lindeboom, ‘Georgius Cassander en zijne pogingen tot bemiddeling en verzoening, naar aanleiding van zijn strijd met Lindanus’, in *Nederlandsch Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* n.s., 8 (1911), 1–29.

<sup>6</sup> *Ep.* 95, 1197: ‘[...] neque tamen doctorum virorum iudicium defugio, sicubi fortassis antiquae illae et indubitatae Christi Ecclesiae mentem non satis assequutus sim.’

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the postscript to *Ep.* 26, 1118–1119.

<sup>8</sup> This had a similar title to the work it was meant to refute: *De officio pii, et Christianae pacis vere amantis viri, exurgente, aut vigente haeresi: cum refutatione sententiae cuiusdam falso hoc ipsum docere promittentis* (Antwerp: Christopher Plantin, 1566).

And I also believe that, under the mantle of the Catholic faith, the Pharisaic leaven may still be hidden of which every pious believer should beware; and one must not say of him who bewares that by doing so he has thus distanced himself from the purity of the Catholic Church. And I do not doubt that the Faith, like all other virtues, exists between two extremes: in other words between Pharisaic superstition and heretical or schismatic unbelief. Erasmus put it very well when he was the object of an accusation of that kind: 'He is not a bad helmsman who can steer a course between Scylla and Charybdis and—to speak more in the language of Scripture—he only makes true progress who takes the royal road, deviating neither to right nor left.'<sup>9</sup> It is the extremes which I consider to be so very pernicious and which must therefore be avoided. If they did not exist, then so many pious men within the Catholic Church itself would have emphatically warned in vain for so long against abuses in the Church that must be corrected. This is why I do not wish to support those who present what is correct and pure as malformed and evil, but I consider that the rule of apostolic doctrine must be followed, as appears from the ancient, unbroken, and unchangeable tradition of the Church.<sup>10</sup>

It is in the same candid tone, in a letter of 1565 to Johannes Metellus (Jean Matal), that Cassander discusses the supposed sympathy of the Emperor for the Augsburg Confession and why that sympathy is not so surprising. His investigation of the Lutheran Confession of Faith—his *Consultatio*, which Maximilian II had received a little time previously—therefore contains opportunities for reconciliation:

Sambucus<sup>11</sup> therefore writes regarding the *Consultatio* that Maximilian has always favoured the Augsburg Confession; I believe that a major

<sup>9</sup> I was not able to locate this quotation.

<sup>10</sup> *Ep.* 106, 1212–1213: 'Item et illud credo, sub titulo Catholicae fidei etiam fermentum Pharizaicum latere posse, a quo pio cuique cavendum sit, et a quo qui caveat, non ideo tamen a Catholicae Ecclesiae puritate recedere dicendus sit: nec dubito, ut reliquas virtutes, ita et religionem in medio duorum extremorum consistere, hoc est, inter Pharizaicam supersti[tionem, et schismaticam seu haereticam impietatem; recteque ab Erasmo dictum est, cum aliquid tale illi obiiceretur: "Non male illum navigare, qui inter Scyllam et Charybdim naviget: et (ut divinis literis magis consentanee loquatur) illum demum recte incedere, qui regia via ingrediatur; ita ut neque ad dexteram, neque ad sinistram declinet", atque sunt extrema illa, quae tanquam vitiosa vitanda puto. Quae si nulla essent, etiam in ipsa Catholica Ecclesia frustra tam multi pii viri iamdudum de corrigendis abusibus in Ecclesia tanto studio monuissent. Neque propterea probo illos, qui ea, quae recta et sana sunt, tanquam prava et vitiosa traducunt, sed regulam Apostolicae doctrinae in antiqua, perpetua, et constanti Ecclesiae traditione explicatam sequendam existimo.'

<sup>11</sup> On him, see A.S.Q. Visser, *Joannes Sambucus and the Learned Image. The Use of the Emblem in Late-Renaissance Humanism* (Leiden-Boston 2005).

reason for his doing so is to be found in the fact that in that Confession some disorders and errors of the present Church seem to be pointed out and improved but without going so far as to remove and abolish what is good and healthy and what the present Church shares with the early Christian Church, which was the true Bride of Christ. It is for that reason—as Sambucus points out—that I have sought rapprochement in my book with the Augsburg Confession: my work, as I have said, therefore genuinely contains no warning, because in this book I have followed only the dictates of my conscience and I did not find it necessary to deviate therefrom out of consideration to each of the two confessions.<sup>12</sup>

In order to show that he genuinely believed that he had found a solution, Cassander copied into his letter two sections from the conclusion of the *Consultatio*, the manuscript of which Metellus had naturally not yet seen. Cassander was so satisfied with his book that he did not find it necessary to answer Maximilian's letters—although he had sometimes quoted from them in his own—because the *Consultatio* took the place of an answering missive.

The network of scholarly friends within which Cassander operates comprises humanists and classicists living in the area of the lower Rhine and the Southern Netherlands as well as various figures at the imperial court of Maximilian II. The most important of these figures are described in Peter Arnold Heuser's impressive study of Metellus.<sup>13</sup> Of the others—people like Matthias Sittardus and Jacobus Horstius<sup>14</sup> (whose names suggest that they came from the area that is now the Dutch and Belgian provinces of Limburg)—we know relatively little.

In the letters that Cassander wrote to the Emperors Ferdinand I and Maximilian II, to Wilhelm V, Duke of Jülich-Cleves-Berg, the Archbishops of Trier (Johannes VI von der Leyen) and Cologne (Fridericus IV von Wied) and the Bishop of Münster (Wilhelm von Ketteler), the first thing he does is explain why he has delayed so long in answering. He says exactly when he received a letter from his highly placed correspondent, how long it has remained unanswered, and what excuses he

<sup>12</sup> Ep. 93, 1194.

<sup>13</sup> P.A. Heuser, *Jean Matal. Humanistischer Jurist und europäischer Friedensdenker (um 1517–1597)* (Cologne-Weimar-Vienna 2003).

<sup>14</sup> 'Horstius' is Jacob Coemans, who acted as an intermediary in the conflict between Lindanus and Cassander; cf. P.A.M. Geurts and J.A.M.M. Janssen, 'De Horstenaar Jacob Coemans (ca. 1515–1592) en zijn relaties met de staatsman Viglius van Aytta (1507–1577)', in P.A.M. Geurts *et al.* (eds), *Horster Historiën 2. Van heren en gemeentenaren* (Horst 1988), 145–160.

has: a whole range of painful disorders, described in all their distasteful detail in convoluted Latin sentences. In his letters to Ferdinand and Maximilian, Cassander regularly refuses invitations to visit Vienna or to write something that would promote peace negotiations between the various confessions, doing so with reference to his weak state of health. But such refusals are always accompanied by the assurance that there are many learned men who would be able to do this just as well as Cassander and probably even better.<sup>15</sup> In an undated letter, he confides to Metellus that the imperial missives rarely mention payment and if they do hold out the prospect of money, he would need to wait months for it. In the meantime, he has in fact had to pay two thalers to the courier who brought Ferdinand's letters. 'Vide igitur, quam parum tutum sit famae credere' ('See, therefore, how unwise it is to trust in fame'), Cassander adds.<sup>16</sup>

Particularly interesting are the letters in which Cassander introduces his correspondents to one another. In one from before 1561—this is dated 22 November, but the actual year is unknown<sup>17</sup>—he tells Henricus Baers, Chancellor to the Duke of Jülich-Cleves-Berg, who François Baudouin is: a lawyer and legal historian whose diligent study of the early Christian Church has made him better able than anyone else to formulate a balanced judgement on the current theological disputes. Incidentally, adds Cassander, legal historians would seem to be extremely suitable as irenicists. Claude d'Espence, who was present at the Colloque de Poissy, is presented to Joachim Hopperus in a letter dated 6 June 1563.<sup>18</sup> Now and again, Cassander requests his correspondents to answer a letter on his behalf, as in the case of the Leuven theologian Jean de Vendeville. De Vendeville had written Cassander a cordial letter with a view to commencing a friendly correspondence, but Cassander—as he wrote to Pedro Ximenez—did not feel like becoming involved.<sup>19</sup> Would Ximenez—who also corresponds

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, *Ep.* 89, 1188–1189, a letter to Maximilian II dated 9 January 1565.

<sup>16</sup> *Ep.* 83, 1185: 'Quod vero de ducentis aureis addis, merae nugae sunt, neque enim obolum unum accepi, neque in literis Maximiliani ulla fuit pecuniae mentio; quin potius duos daderos in tabellarium, qui alteras Ferdinandi Augustae memoriae literas attulit, impendi. Scripserat quidem Ferdinandus in alteris literis se centum aureos mihi numerari iussisse, sed iam aliquot menses elapsi sunt, nec hilum ad me venit.'

<sup>17</sup> *Ep.* 68, 1161. In the *Opera omnia*, this letter is included with the letters for the year 1563, but given the actual content of the letter, that date is impossible.

<sup>18</sup> *Ep.* 60, 1155.

<sup>19</sup> *Ep.* 44, 1141.

with this De Vendiville—perhaps be prepared to write to this good-hearted fellow, telling him that Cassander would not hesitate to be friends with him but that his fragile state of health means he is unable to answer many of his letters? As a ‘pen friend’ for De Vendeville, Cassander would turn out to be a disappointment, certainly compared to Ximenez.<sup>20</sup> Later (?), Cassander did in fact write to De Vendeville on behalf of a friend, the Cologne physician Johannes Bachoven von Echt (Echtius), asking him to consult Leuven jurists on a legal question. Even though no regular correspondence had taken place between them, Cassander did remember De Vendeville when contact needed to be made between Leuven and Cologne.

#### NEWS AND PERSONAL OUTPOURINGS

In a letter to the Emperor Maximilian in which he excuses his ‘insignificant’ essay on the Eucharist under two forms (1565),<sup>21</sup> Cassander writes: ‘I wish that I had a bit more time to ponder and that I had been given better health for the efforts that my studies demand; I could then distinguish certain questions more effectively and explain them more clearly. Indeed, I could even add some arguments here and there that have to do with the matter, a few of which I came across when rereading the little book and browsing through various writings.’ This is in fact the refrain of many of Cassander’s letters to holders of high office: he is sick and weak, and therefore hardly able to gather together all the relevant theological arguments, meaning that his publications are less convincing than they might otherwise have been. In the same year, he tells the Emperor: ‘Recently, there has not been a moment when I have not been in pain; it was either stomach ache, nausea, headache, or festering abscesses; pain in my jaws and teeth, or indeed in other parts of my body: neck, shoulders, hands, hips, knees, feet, and so forth. The attacks of arthritis are breaking down my extremely weak little body and exhausting me totally.’<sup>22</sup> To Andreas Masius he wrote—not without self-mockery—after complaining about pain in his feet: ‘I was once a spry *Peripateticus*; now, I am not perhaps a *Cynic* but I am

<sup>20</sup> *Ep.* 66, 1160–1161.

<sup>21</sup> *Ep.* 95, 1197: *De communione in utraque specie.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ep.* 107, 1198.



often forced to be a *clinicus*, something that is on the worst possible footing with the study of letters.<sup>23</sup>

Cassander's regret that he could not comply with the expectations that the two rulers had of him was tempered—if we are to believe his letters and if we are not simply dealing with a modesty *topos*—by the certainty that there were others who were just as able as he to promote the case of religious peace. His references to sympathisers, or even to an irenicist party, in letters from the years prior to the Colloque de Poissy show how the chance of reconciliation and accommodation seems for a time to grow, only to quickly expire. In a letter to Ximenez (October 1561?), he describes the political situation in France in a much-quoted passage (with an allusion to Caesar's *De bello Gallico*): the irenicist party is thus not in such a bad position.<sup>24</sup>

In a letter to Ximenez that he probably wrote in August 1564, Cassander relates how news had reached him of the death of the Emperor Ferdinand on 26 July 1564.<sup>25</sup> Shortly before, the Emperor had entreated him to draw up a comparison—despite his weak health—of the Augsburg Confession and Roman Catholic doctrine. Cassander is prepared to copy out passages from the Emperor's letter for Ximenez but only on condition that he does not let just anyone read them. Ferdinand's letter had greatly moved him: Christendom should thank God for such a peace-loving Emperor, who had put his trust in the weakest of his subjects:

But once more, my dear Ximenez, you can hardly imagine how much sorrow and embarrassment overcame me when I realised the weight of the task assigned to me and compared it to the weakness of my intellect, my theological incompetence, and my literary impotence, and when

<sup>23</sup> *Ep.* 85, 1186.

<sup>24</sup> *Ep.* 37, 1131: 'Gallia est omnis in tres factiones divisa; una ab adversariis dicta *Papistarum*, cuius caput est Cardinalis Turnonius cum nonnullis Episcopis, Abbatibus, Monachis, Sorbonic[i]s, et paucis ex nobilitate. Alterius factionis dictae vulgo Hugonistarum, vel Calvinianorum, vel novellorum princeps est Dominus de Conde frater Regis Navarrae homo iuvenis, et (ut aiunt) temerarius [...]. Tertio loco est ordo moderatorum, et pacificorum, qui et corrigenda nonnulla in Ecclesia agnoscunt, neque tamen importunitatem novellorum (ut vocant) Concionatorum approbant [...]. Huius sententiae et animi sunt Rex Navarrae, et Regina mater, Episcopus Valentinus vir prudentissimus, Cancellarius Regni Hospitalius dictus, optimi quoque et praestantissimi ex Regiis consiliariis, et inter eos vir doctissimus et praecipui nominis Paulus Foxius, ex Sorbonicis praecipui Espencaeus et Salignacus Abbas [...].'

<sup>25</sup> *Ep.* 79, 1182.

I compared all these with the extremely erudite writings of other very learned men on this question of belief.

The report of Ferdinand's death therefore aroused extremely mixed feelings in him:

I had progressed, however—not without a great deal of difficulty—to the fifth article of the Augsburg Confession, and I did so by comparing the most sensible views of each of the two parties with those of the other, weighing them against the judgement of the early Christian Church and of later theologians to see what of that judgement should be recorded. It was when I was pondering all this that the report of the Emperor's death reached me, . . . an event that affected me like the death of one of my family—the death of a true guardian of the Church. But—to my relief—this did grant me a certain postponement of the work, which had almost destroyed me.

Cassander would finish the *Consultatio* early in 1565, but Maximilian could no longer make any use of it.<sup>26</sup> The book did not appear in print until 1577.

Generally, however, Cassander hardly shows whether or not a news report has affected him personally. When the French wars of religion broke out,<sup>27</sup> a few months after the failure of the Colloque de Poissy, François Baudouin reported on these events in a letter to Cassander, after which Cassander discussed the situation in France with Ximenez. Baudouin reports with dismay on the civil war that was threatening to engulf France and the massacre that had taken place at Vassy on 1 March 1562.<sup>28</sup>

For the rest, I consider those individuals happy who have been freed from the confusion of this life. For the more deeply I consider the vicissitudes of our times, the more I long for the haven. [...] They say, right enough, that it is a war over religion. But how foreign to all religion is war, especially a civil war? Let alone a war in the Church! [...] You have already heard of the absolutely tragic disturbances in France. Let us hope

<sup>26</sup> M.E. Nolte, *Georgius Cassander en zijn oecumenisch streven* (Nijmegen 1951), 31.

<sup>27</sup> M.P. Holt, *The French Wars of Religion, 1562–1629* (Cambridge 1995), 50–56.

<sup>28</sup> M. Erbe, 'François Baudouin und Georg Cassander. Dokumente einer Humanistenfreundschaft', in *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance* 40 (1978), 537–560: letter 12, also printed in Petrus Bertius, *Illustrium et clarorum virorum epistolae selectiores saeculo scriptae vel a Belgis vel ad Belgas* (Leiden 1617), *Centuria* 1, 32 (148–152).

that what is now hanging over our heads is not an even more dreadful catastrophe!<sup>29</sup>

Cassander, by contrast, would seem to be resigned to the impending disaster: nothing more can be done about it and it is only God who can prevent a catastrophe. He allows no misunderstanding about the fact that it is the Roman Catholic Church that has provoked the war:

This, briefly, is the situation in France, meaning that it would seem that peace and tranquillity cannot be restored by any human intervention but only through divine providence. And if it should indeed come to war, then the worst is to be expected. Those in high positions within the Church seem not to have properly or wisely considered whether they are not in fact those who have instigated the war; as if they think they can extinguish fire with oil, they have recourse to a strange and unsuited remedy that is little in accordance with their office. Other more suitable remedies should be applied because until now they have always been neglected; we must now fear that the harm will only be increased and reinforced, with the greatest damage to these prelates and to the whole of Christendom. In the meantime, we must call upon God's aid and defend ourselves with spiritual weapons, in other words by living a pious life and praying fervently. That is all that we can do.<sup>30</sup>

In two other letters, both dated 1 June 1562, to Ximenez and Arnold Birckmann, Cassander expresses in almost the same words his wish that the war would cease now that the Protestants have gained so many successes, successes that must act as a spur to the Roman Catholic Church to commence real reform.<sup>31</sup>

In some letters, Cassander provides information regarding the reasons for a publication, for example his report of a discussion he had with an Anabaptist in 1565, at the same time showing that he does not think much of Jesuits. In a letter from Cologne to Adolphus Baers dated 24 July 1565,<sup>32</sup> Cassander says that he had heard that some sixty Anabaptists had been arrested in a vineyard, where they had assembled for a night-time prayer meeting. A few had escaped, including a

<sup>29</sup> Erbe, 'François Bauduin und Georg Cassander', 554: 'Alioqui beatos nunc eos esse iudico, qui ex huius vitae confusione liberantur. Nam et quo magis horum temporum intemperiem considero, tantoque magis ad portum aspiro. [...] Dicitur quidem esse de religione certamen. Sed quam aliena ab omni religione sunt bella plus quam civilia? quid dicam Ecclesiastica? [...] Audiisti antea de tumultibus Gallicis plane tragicis. Utinam, quae nunc impendet, non sit multo funestior catastrophe!'

<sup>30</sup> *Ep.* 44, 1140.

<sup>31</sup> *Ep.* 45, 1141; *Ep.* 46, 1142.

<sup>32</sup> *Ep.* 101, 1203–1204.

certain Croocht, who had long been considered a renowned scholar among the Anabaptists. Those arrested included many women, girls, and young boys, some of whom were sent home. Among those still held was the greatly respected widow (De) Vae(d)t of Bonn. Cassander was invited by the Archbishop of Cologne to dispute on matters of faith with a young man, Matthias Cervaes, and he in fact accepted the invitation.<sup>33</sup> A discussion lasting four hours convinced him that he was dealing with a self-assured and stubborn individual.

‘The day before I went to see him, two Jesuits had engaged him in dispute’, Cassander tells Baers, ‘their reasoning seems to have disconcerted him somewhat because, as he told me, they had defended everything that is today current in the Roman Catholic Church—with the exception of the Papal indulgences—under the pretext of defending ecclesiastical doctrinal authority, thus making it significantly more difficult for me to discuss with him.’ He had nevertheless done his best and attempted to convince Matthias Cervaes of a number of important theological insights: he had discussed with him the doctrinal authority of the ancient and unchanging consensus of the Church, which formed the foundations of the most important articles of faith, and he had attempted to show him how dangerous it was to invoke a literal interpretation of the Bible without calling in the aid of the Roman Catholic interpretative tradition because then anyone—seduced by pride—could interpret the Bible as he pleased, as one could see nowadays among the many heretics who were competing with one another. Cassander had also dealt with infant baptism in this connection.

When he was about to draw up a report on his dispute with Cervaes in order to present it to the bishop, as the Jesuits had done before him, he had read and heard to his great surprise that they had denied the resurrection of the dead. He had thereupon returned to Cervaes a few days later to speak to him about this article of faith. He then found that the Jesuits had not so much denied the resurrection of the dead—that would have been going a wee bit too far—but they had been confused

---

<sup>33</sup> See Nolte, *Georgius Cassander en zijn oecumenisch streven*, 19; K. Rembert, *Die ‘Wiedertäufer’ im Herzogtum Jülich. Studien zur Geschichte der Reformation, besonders am Niederrhein* (Berlin 1899), 475–476 (should this Anabaptist ‘Croocht’ perhaps be identified as Heinrich or Johann Krufft?); Cassander, *Opera omnia*, 1234–1240: *Acta colloquii in aedibus vicecomitis Coloniae, XII. Julij, anno Domini M.DLXV.*

about the actual facts of the matter.<sup>34</sup> They had failed to make a clear distinction between *substantia* (or *natura*) and *naturales qualitates*. The latter—Man’s earthly frame—was naturally transitory, while the *substantia* was preserved. In order to clarify the matter, Cassander had explained the resurrection of Christ to the young Anabaptist, whom the Jesuits had thoroughly confused. Christ had risen from the dead on the third day after his Crucifixion in the same body as that in which He had been born and had died. On the Day of Judgement, believers will rise from the dead with their bodies, but also with spiritual qualities such as incorruptibility, glory, and immortality. In the words of St Paul: ‘Oportet corruptibile hoc induere incorruptionem.’<sup>35</sup>

In his report of his discussions with Cervaes (*Acta colloquii in aedibus vicecomitis Coloniae, XII. Julij, anno Domini M.DLXV*, published in his *Opera omnia*), Cassander deals briefly with the matter of the Jesuits, when—in answer to Cassander’s pleading for the importance of the interpretative tradition for a proper understanding of Scripture—the Anabaptist responds that he does not trust any human authority. The two Jesuits had often gone astray and had differed from one another in their opinions; there were so many terrible abuses within the Church that had started right back in the time of the Apostles, and infant baptism was one of them. He added that the Jesuits had misinterpreted a passage in the Bible and that they had argued with one another about the interpretation of certain doctrines. Cassander would seem to wish to soften an unfavourable judgement of the conduct of the two Jesuits when he adds that this wrangling had not severed ‘the bond of concord and love’. ‘But I pointed out,’ says Cassander, ‘that we were not talking about the private views of the two Jesuit fathers but about the public testimony of the whole Church, from which we learn the universal judgement and public belief of the whole Church, and in this testimony learn the true apostolic doctrine concerning those questions which are the most important articles of faith and the basis of our belief.’<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> This confusion is supposedly caused by the teachings of Origen in this regard (*Ep.* 101, 1204): ‘deprehendi illos [...] de modo resurrectionis futurae non nihil Originicum sapere [...]’

<sup>35</sup> 1 Cor. 15:53: ‘For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality.’

<sup>36</sup> Cassander, *Opera Omnia*, 1236: ‘Respondit se nulla humana auctoritate niti, patres saepe errasse et inter se dissentire, multas esse abominationes in Ecclesia, quae statim Apostolorum tempore coeperunt, atque in iis quoque esse Baptismum Parvulorum.’

It is in virtually the same words that Cassander relates this story to Cornelis Wouters a few weeks later, although without mentioning the matter of the Jesuits.<sup>37</sup>

#### THEOLOGY IN LETTERS AND BOOKS

Cassander has a curious way of participating in the disturbing theological *actualité*: as a humanist scholar, he browses in libraries to discover what can put a stop to the troubles going on in the streets. 'I praise the attitude of those who search out old books—particularly those dealing with religious matters—in the libraries where they are buried, and publish them; but I am all the more irritated by those who do so in a careless and clumsy manner.'<sup>38</sup>

It is therefore unsurprising that in the *epistola nuncupatoria*, a dedicatory letter to Henricus Baers accompanying an edition of the work of the martyr Vigilius Tapsensis, Cassander writes that he has found a solution to the current theological discord but that he does not yet intend to reveal it.<sup>39</sup> That solution would seem to have been suggested by reading the work of Vigilius, which Cassander says is extremely topical. It consists of a programme for peace comprising five *capita*. If it is implemented, not only all those who belong to the Church of Christ will be encouraged to embrace 'the true and Catholic faith of Christ' but also many Moslems and Jews. 'What those *capita* may

---

Ad ea paulo latius dictum est, Patres privatim in loco aliquo scripturae interpretando, falsos esse, et quaestionibus aliquot explicandis inter se dissensisse, servato tamen charitatis et unitatis vinculo. Sed nos haec non loqui de privatis huiusmodi patrum opinionibus: sed de publico testimonio totius Ecclesiae ex quo communem sensum et publicam fidem totius Ecclesiae cognoscimus, atque in hoc testimonio de vera Apostolica doctrina, in iis quae ad capitales Articulos, et fundamenta nostrae fidei pertine[n]t.'

<sup>37</sup> *Ep.* 104, 1208.

<sup>38</sup> *Ep.* 25, 1117: 'Laudo institutum eorum, qui veteres libros, praesertim ad res Ecclesiasticas pertinentes in Bibliothecis passim sepultos proferunt, et in lucem emittunt, quo magis irascor illis qui eandem rem negligenter et infoeliciter faciunt.' Cassander's irritation was aroused by the publication by Wolfgang Lazius of *Fragmenta quaedam Caroli Magni... aliorumque incerti nominis de veteris Ecclesiae ritibus ac ceremoniis... adiectum est perelegans opus Rabani Mauri... de virtutibus, vitiis ac ceremoniis eiusdem antiquae ecclesiae* (Antwerp: Joannes Bellerus, 1560). With respect to this book, see P. Polman, *L'Élement historique dans la controverse religieuse du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Gembloux 1932), 433.

<sup>39</sup> Georgius Cassander, *B. Vigiliij martyris et episcopi Tridentini Opera* (Cologne: Arnold Birckmann, 1555), [18]-[19]. Also in: Cassander, *Opera Omnia*, 449-611; letter to Henricus Baers, nonis Martiis 1555, on p. 449-458.

be,' says Cassander, 'that can remove the causes and consequences of the infection of heresy and can purify and cure those who have been touched by it is not something that I will explain here at the present because this is not the place to present them, and the question requires a longer explanation than is possible here.'<sup>40</sup>

Curious about this mysterious allusion to a 'roadmap for peace', Johannes Molinaeus had written to Cassander asking him to lift just a corner of the veil. Cassander answered on 23 November 1559<sup>41</sup> that he had decided that he should not yet reveal his five-point peace programme because he was fearful of ill-intentioned judgements and calumny. He does however say that he has confidence in the humanity of his correspondent and that he will therefore reveal the most important of his five *capita*. What could not be revealed in print could thus be revealed in a letter to a friend:

In the dedicatory letter referred to, these five *capita* must be reduced to two, those that are the most important and most essential, with the first aimed at improvement in the public domain and the second improvement in the private domain. The public improvement comprises three components, three specific questions.<sup>42</sup>

These are the improvement of the moral fibre of priests and congregation; restraint as regards religious ceremonies and rites; and caution and diffidence in the instruction of the faithful as regards non-essential and complex points of faith. In the private domain, those who adhere to heretical thinking must be incited to return to the true Faith, but without compulsion, whereas, on the other hand, one must prevent the spread of such heretical thinking among innocent believers.

It seems likely that this peace programme formed the basis for the proposal that Cassander published in 1561 during the Colloque de

<sup>40</sup> Cassander, *B. Vigili... Opera*, [18]–[19]: 'Porro hanc omnem, de qua dicere coepimus, curationem quinque potissimum capitibus constare puto, quae si in usum vocentur, spero equidem fore, ut non modo multi ex iis, qui in Ecclesiae corpore constituti videntur, verumetiam ex Mahumetanis et Iudaeis, qui longius a nobis separantur, veram et Catholicam Christi fidem tandem aliquando amplectantur. Verum quanam haec sint, quibus et haereticae contagionis stirpes et semina revelli, eosque qui iam correpti sunt, curari et sanari posse credam, in praesentia exponere non attinet, quum id huius propositi non sit, et res longiorem explicationem requirat, quam hic locus patiatur.'

<sup>41</sup> *Ep.* 16, 1099.

<sup>42</sup> *Ep.* 16, 1100: 'Haec igitur quinque capita ad duo summa et praecipua capita in eadem epistola commemorata referenda sunt, quorum prius publicam, alterum privatam curationem spectat. Publica curatio tres partes, seu specialia capita complectitur.'

Poissy in his *De officio pii viri*. In this treatise, after all, he proposes a comparable distinction between the private and public domains, although this is given a different interpretation in *De officio pii viri*, in which he discerns between the responsibilities of the individual believer and those of Church leaders. In this irenic treatise of 1561, a distinction is made between study of religious doctrine on the one hand and ceremonies and religious discipline on the other. From both categories, institutions and traditions are separated in the final instance that can be classified as superstition or abuse; these must be abandoned, if that is possible without confusion and unrest. Cassander's letter to Molinaeus links the peace programme that had only been hinted at in his edition of Vigilius to the proposals to be revealed in *De officio pii viri*. *De officio* has the following to say about how to deal with heretics:

In my view, one must first condemn heresies which have abandoned Christ, the Head of the Church, by their perverse teachings about Him, and His Body by their wicked schism, and then—among those two parties that retain the foundations of the Faith, even if one does not agree on everything relating to rites and opinions—one must firmly aim to maintain a community of love and not shrink from any effort to also bring about complete and solid unity. I believe that this is the duty of the pious man who is concerned with his salvation in these turbulent and dangerous times. I believe that he who accomplishes this is a true and pure Catholic, because I believe that the true and sincere faith is to be found between two evils.<sup>43</sup>

Contrary to what one might expect of an irenic theologian from the Erasmian-humanist tradition, Cassander did not restrict himself in his theological discourse to the Church Fathers and the early Christian Church; rather, he also investigated the writings of mediaeval theologians in search of insights that might prove useful in sixteenth-century controversies.<sup>44</sup> In the letter to Molinaeus in which he explains the

---

<sup>43</sup> Georgius Cassander, *De officio pii viri* (Basel 1561), 25–26: 'Quin potius haeresibus, quae per impia de Christo dogmata a capite Christo, et nefario schismate ab eius corpore recesserunt, damnatis, in utraque hac parte quae fundamentum religionis retinet ita versandum existimo, ut si non per omnia in ritibus et sententiis conveniatur, charitatis tamen communio firmiter retineatur, et ad plenam quoque solidamque concordiam constituendam omni studio contendatur. Hoc ego officium pii viri, suaeque salutis consultum volentis, his perturbatissimis periculorumque plenissimis temporibus, esse iudico. Quod qui praestent, eos vere pureque Catholicos esse et dici posse arbitror.'

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Nolte, *Georgius Cassander en zijn oecumenisch streven*, 86–87.



peace programme that we have just considered, he refers in the context of his first 'action point'—improvement of morality in the Church and the removal of abuses—to mediaeval theologians who pressed for necessary reforms of the Church,<sup>45</sup> for example Guillaume Durant, 'vulgo Speculator dictus',<sup>46</sup> Petrus de Alliaco (Pierre d'Ailly, *De emendatione Ecclesiae*), Matthaeus Cracoviensis (Matthaeus de Cracovia, *De naevis et squaloribus Ecclesiae*), Jacobus de Paradiso (*De VII. Statibus Ecclesiae, in Apocalysi descriptis* and *De auctoritate Ecclesiae, & de eius reformatione*), and Petrus Episcopus Urbevetanus, while later Nicolaus de Cusa (*De concordantia Catholica*) and Pico della Mirandola (*De reformandis moribus*) devoted themselves to the same cause.

The third point in Cassander's programme—caution in instructing disputed, non-essential articles of faith—had already been considered by Jean Gerson (*in declarationibus defectuum Ecclesiasticorum*, cap. 6), Guillaume Durant (*de concilio generali celebrando*, pars II, rubrica lvii), and Gabriel Biel (*in Canonem Licet*, lxix). The value of ecclesiastical institutions and the religious tradition was also discussed by Gerson<sup>47</sup> (*Liber de vita spirituali animae*), Erasmus, Thomas Caietanus (*de obligatione praecepti* quaest. xxi) and Panormitanus (*De clericis coniugatis*, cap. *Cum olim*). The conclusion therefore must be that Cassander's Erasmian-humanist irenicism is based on wide reading of scholastic theology. In *Defensio insontis libelli*, references to these mediaeval writers are not in fact lacking: Gabriel Biel, 'vir alioqui non indoctus nec ineptus' (actually, by no means an ignorant or illiterate man),<sup>48</sup> Alexander Alesius, and others are cited in defence of Cassander's views as expounded in *De officio pii viri*. In this work, it is above all St Augustine and St Jerome who are cited as authorities.

Cassander also refers in a number of letters to such authors as Paschasius Radbertus, Honorius Augustodunensis, and Rupertus Tuitiensis, whose work he was able to consult in an edition published by his friend, the Cologne printer Arnold Birckmann (*sub pingue gallina*).<sup>49</sup> He tells Johannes Sambucus that he is engaged in an exhaustive search for a book by Hincmarus, a ninth-century archbishop of Reims, who

<sup>45</sup> *Ep.* 16, 1100.

<sup>46</sup> See also *Ep.* 72, 1168 (*Guillelmi Duranti Rationale divinatorum officiorum*).

<sup>47</sup> See G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes, *Jean Gerson, zijn kerkpolitiek en ecclesiologie* (The Hague 1963), 266.

<sup>48</sup> Cassander, *Opera omnia*, 849.

<sup>49</sup> Heuser, *Jean Matal*, 17.

had disputed in writing with his cousin of the same name, Bishop Hincmarus of Laon.<sup>50</sup>

Cassander's reference to Rupertus Tuitiensis deserves further attention. On 6 November 1557,<sup>51</sup> Cassander wrote to the bishop of Münster, Wilhelm von Ketteler, regarding the importance of figurative language and imagery, as an introduction to explaining the real presence of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist according to the views of another mediaeval theologian, Paschasius Radbertus (= Ratramne de Corbie).<sup>52</sup> According to the latter, for a proper understanding of the real presence and transubstantiation, a distinction must be made between the physical and spiritual Body of Christ: both were the 'verum corpus', but the physical body now remained in heaven after being born of the Virgin Mary and dying on the Cross; the spiritual Body was present on each occasion in the Eucharist when the bread and wine were turned into the Body and Blood of Christ at the Consecration. In his letter, Cassander prepares the bishop for the far-reaching consequences of this theological find, giving an explanation of the figurative use of language, for which he had consulted the twelfth-century theologian Rupertus de Deutz (Rupertus Tuitiensis):<sup>53</sup>

So if someone wishes to move another person and rouse him by speech, it is necessary to convey the purpose in his own mind into the mind of the listener by means of distinct words. This purpose, grasped by the listener, is associated with the issue that abides in the mind of the speaker, precisely so that the same thing can be said. After all, we rightly say 'I have taken your meaning, I get your idea', by which similitude Rupertus de Deutz has so aptly profited.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>50</sup> *Ep.* 110, 1217; see also *Ep.* 19, 1103. Cf. R. Schieffer (ed.), *Die Streitschriften Hincmars von Reims und Hinkmars von Laon, 869–871* (Hannover 2003).

<sup>51</sup> *Ep.* 2, 1081.

<sup>52</sup> Ratramnus, *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini. Texte établi d'après les manuscrits et notice bibliographique*, J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink (ed.) (Amsterdam 1954) (= Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, afd. Letterkunde, new series, vol. 61, no. 1).

<sup>53</sup> Rupertus Abbatis Monasterii Tuitiensis, *De Divinis Officiis Libri XII* (Cologne: Arnold Birckmann, 1532), lib. 2 de divinis officiis, cap. 9, [16].

<sup>54</sup> *Ep.* 2, 1081: 'Ita si quis alium commovere oratione et incitare velit, necessum est ut animi sui sententiam in animum audientis per voces significantes transferat, quae sententia ab auditore comprehensa coniuncta est rei, quae in animo loquentis manet, prorsus ut eadem dici possit. Vere enim dicimus, *accepi tuam sententiam, teneo tuam mentem*, qua similitudine quam appositissime usus est Rupertus Tuitiensis.'

In the difficult passage from Rupertus's *De divinis officiis* from which Cassander takes this reasoning—in the margin of the 1532 edition this is cheerfully praised as an 'apta similitudo'—a comparison is made between the Incarnation of Christ and the expression of ideas. The physical expression of language, in other words the sound, is received by the listener's ears but once the words have been spoken it disappears into nothingness, whereas the thoughts continue to exist in the head of the speaker and are recreated in the brain of the hearer when he hears the sound. So did the Word of God take on the physical form of flesh and blood when the Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus and the physical form of bread and wine in the Eucharist. Just like language that has been expressed and disappears, so is this form of the Eucharistic Body transitory and fleeting. But the Word to which it has given expression continues to exist intact with the Father (the speaker) but at the same time is communicated, at Communion, to the believer (the listener).<sup>55</sup> This theological communication model—in which the simple truth 'the Word was made flesh' is made so (un?)understandable by means of scholastic cleverness that it becomes baffling—is cited by Cassander in order to convince the bishop that his view of the Eucharist is in no way in accordance with that of Calvin.

#### IMAGERY

Cassander conforms to the humanist tradition in his conviction that language offers the solution to theological disputes and misunderstandings. Everything depends on how one puts things into words; the important thing is to express theological issues in such a way that all the parties understand them properly. This is the reason for Cassander's great interest, as we have just seen, in figurative language, in imagery. His letters are full of analogies intended to get across the essence of theological intricacies to his correspondent.

<sup>55</sup> Rupertus Tuitiensis, *De Divinis Officiis*, lib. 2, cap. 9, [16]: 'Quemadmodum in corporeis sensibus menti et corpulento aëri media lingua intervenit, et utrunque conjugens unum sermonem efficit, quo in aures dimisso, id quod audibile est, cito absumitur et transit: sensus autem sermonis et in dicente et in eo qui audit integer permanet et inconsumptus. Sic verbum patris, carni et sanguini, quae de utero virginis assumpserat, et pani ac vino quod de altari assumpsit, medium interveniens, unum sacrificium efficit, quod cum in ora fidelium sacerdos distribuit, panis et vinum assumitur et transit. Partus autem virginis cum unito sibi verbo patris et in coelo et in hominibus integer permanet et inconsumptus.'

In many cases, Cassander—but also other sixteenth-century theologians—compares the abuses within the Roman Catholic Church—which the Protestants had seized upon in order to separate themselves—with an infectious disease.<sup>56</sup> Somebody who comes into contact with a disease can respond in a number of different ways: he can deny that it exists (as Catholics tend to do); he can endure it (Castellio and other adherents of tolerance choose acquiescence); he can attempt to exterminate the illness (and the affected body) by cutting off the affected limbs (and even limbs that are not affected!)—a radical approach chosen by the Protestants—or he can attempt to cure the disease (the objective of Cassander and other irenicists). The idea that abuses within the Church are a kind of *infectious* disease imposes far-reaching requirements on the kind of treatment: protection of those portions of the Church that have not yet been affected, in particular the authentic components of the Faith, becomes extremely important. The image of an infectious disease can also be applied to such heresies as Anabaptism.

In another letter, directed to Georg Witzel,<sup>57</sup> Cassander compares the Church to an extremely well-formed and fruitful tree, one rooted in the apostolic tradition and the doctrine of the gospels. In the course of time, however, the tree has grown crooked due to the negligence of those to whose care it was entrusted; it has thus been robbed of its beauty and now produces fruits that are less sweet and fragrant. At the point when the tree tilted over so far that it seemed likely to collapse, some individuals rushed forward to set it straight again (Cassander does not wish to speculate about their reasons for doing so)<sup>58</sup> and restore it to its old splendour. But those who took this action were hot-headed gardeners: they had no understanding of horticulture and they pulled the tree so far in the other direction that it seemed to be torn loose from its roots. A new evil presented itself that until now had not threatened the tree, when one person began to heave at one branch and another person at another, damaging the tree rather than helping it. But, all the same, it was clear that the tree needed to be helped, except that its recovery was more difficult than in the past now that two opposing parties had decided to look after it. Anyone

<sup>56</sup> For one example among many, see *Ep.* 21, 1113.

<sup>57</sup> *Ep.* 5, 1086.

<sup>58</sup> '(quo id studio fecerint disputare nolo)'.

who attempted to adopt a 'third way' was driven away by those two parties. Cassander concludes this entertaining comparison—in which the irenicist appears as an ambitious tree surgeon—with the sentence: 'Haec similitudo quamvis non per omnia ut fateor, quadret, tamen ad id, quod volo, significandum satis idoneam puto', i.e. 'Although I must admit that this comparison does not apply in every respect, I still believe that it expresses rather well what I mean.'

Cassander compares the situation of the irenicist more than once with that of a person who intervenes between two opposing parties only to receive blows from both of them<sup>59</sup>—a comparison that would later also be used by Hugo Grotius. Cassander recognises his own fate in that of Erasmus: 'Although I cannot stand in the shadow of Erasmus, the same fate awaits me, so that I receive blows from both sides whenever I attempt to act as an intermediary between the two conflicting parties.'<sup>60</sup> It is probably also Erasmus from whom Cassander derives the image of the irenicist who seeks the right course between Scylla and Charybdis: a 'royal way' through the centre ground where few wish to follow. Although he is entirely convinced that he is in the right—in this sense he fits in very well with the theological quibblers on both left and right—Cassander's imagery consistently makes clear that the irenicist is a misunderstood, lonely, and rather unfortunate individual, who shuffles sadly along the untrodden, dusty path through the centre ground. In a period in which vehemence, intransigence, and a refusal to compromise were seen as badges of truth, comparisons of this kind in letters in which he expresses himself and his ideal of religious freedom did not really contribute to the success of irenical theology.

---

<sup>59</sup> *Ep.* 26, 1118 (regarding Lindanus's rejection of *De officio pii viri*): 'Non ignorabam quidem, quod et libellus exponit, hanc esse indignissimam et deplorandam pacificatorum conditionem, ut cum se inter pugnantes medios interponant, utrinque non raro plagas accipiant, verum ab hac parte tam graves et indignas plagas non expectabam.'

<sup>60</sup> *Ep.* 72, 1170: '[...] quamvis umbram Erasmi non attingam, tamen eodem fato sum, ut cum inter partes dissidentes sequestrum aliquo modo agere, et medium me interponere cupiam, utrimque vapuler, et plagas accipiam [...].'