

PREFACE

'Habent sua fata libelli.' In this case that is especially true. With the first version of this book I made my entrance into the scholarly world in 1963, when I gained the degree of Doctor of Divinity at the University of Leiden.¹ The dissertation was written in Dutch and thus only accessible to a limited public. It was my friend Heiko Oberman who strongly encouraged me to publish it in English as well. He did not leave it at that, for he also arranged a subsidy for the translation, which remained practically untouched for many years; only a few chapters were translated in the 1970's, but the further revision remained in suspense. That was partly the result of my appointment as professor of Church history and the history of dogma at Leiden (1967), which led me to pursue my research and teaching outside the middle ages so that, apart from a second more modest study of Gerson² – a direct spin-off from my dissertation – I went on to tackle quite different themes. Time passed, and it was not until my retirement that I again found the time and the opportunity to go back to my first love and take the necessary revision in hand. Thus this revised version of my first work now appears thirty six years later.

In preparing the new edition I have made grateful use of critical remarks, queries and suggestions put forward in the reviews of my dissertation. Above all the discussions which the well known 'gersonian' Mgr. A. Combes, the Nijmegen professor R.R. Post, both alas now no longer with us, and the latter's successor, my former colleague emeritus professor A.G. Weiler, devoted to my book in the sixties, have set me thinking and their influence will be detected on several points. Mgr. Combes, who to my astonishment – because of his studies of Ruusbroec? – proved to know Dutch, sur-

¹ Jean Gerson. *Zijn kerkpolitiek en ecclesiologie*, thesis, Leiden, 's-Gravenhage 1963, appeared, under the same title, as commercial edition in the series: Kerkhistorische Studiën behorende bij het Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis, 10, 's-Gravenhage 1963.

² Jean Gerson et l'Assemblée de Vincennes (1329). *Sa conception de la juridiction temporelle de l'Eglise*. Accompagné d'une édition critique du *De jurisdictione spirituali et temporalis*. Préface de Marcel Pacaut, Leiden 1978 (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, vol. XXVI).

prised me within a year of the publication of my dissertation with a detailed and in general agreeably positive verdict on the first part.³ He did not fail to point out my errors and omissions, which I was grateful to acknowledge, and made criticisms of a question of attribution. In this, however, I was unable to follow him; indeed I found it a new example of the hypercriticism with which, in my youthful boldness, I had reproached him in my dissertation. The medievalist Post found my account of Gerson's idea of the hierarchy insufficiently clear and posed the difficult question of how one was to explain why a conciliarist such as Gerson should have been so remarkably critical of canonists, when recent work (Brian Tierney) had shown just what an important contribution canonistic legal discussions had made to conciliarism.⁴ Finally, my colleague Weiler suggested that I had been very summary in my treatment of Gerson's views on the Church as a mystical body.⁵ A very just criticism, which can be directly traced to my membership of the Reformed tradition.

In this revised version I have tried to satisfy my critics. Errors have been corrected, omissions filled in and new insights taken into account as far as possible. I have added a new chapter, expanded the text and documentation on many points, and of course have done my best to include the literature which has appeared in the meantime as well as the fruits of my own continued research. I am conscious that the notes have sometimes swollen to an extent which borders on the excessive. But that was hard to avoid, since the interpretation of Gerson, particularly the themes with which this book is concerned, is still contentious, which made more detailed documentation inevitable.

I must thank first the Faculty of Divinity at the University of Groningen, which made me very proud by awarding the original version of this book the prestigious Mallinckrodt prize in 1965. I also voice my thanks to Professor Heiko A. Oberman, for the great loyalty and encouragement I have received from him over the years and above all for his unwearied patience. I had not been aware of

³ André Combes, *La théologie mystique de Gerson. Profil de son évolution*, I, Romae [etc.] 1963, Appendice II: 'Gerson et l'Eglise d'après G.H.M. Posthumus Meyjes', 403-17.

⁴ *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis*, N.S. XLVI (1965), 237-41.

⁵ *Tijdschrift voor Theologie* (5) 1965, 95-7.

this quality in him before, but I have come to realise its existence over many years of putting it to the test, which, however, did not put any noticeable strain on our relationship. I also express my thanks to the directors of the 'Gravin van Bylandt Fonds' in The Hague for the award of a generous subsidy to meet the costs of translation. In this context I also thank the translator Mr J.C. Grayson (Southport, United Kingdom) for the energy with which he has worked and for the particular care that he has been willing to devote to my intellectual progeny. Finally I thank my publishers, Koninklijke Brill, for the agreeable collaboration which I once again received from them and for the very handsome style in which, loyal to a long tradition, they have produced this book.

Like the first, this revised version is dedicated to my wife. There is quite a difference between forty-eight years of marriage or twelve. There too, many things have been revised, but not fundamentally, just as little as in this book.

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