

# Solus Deus adorandus

Angelus Merula (1487–1557) en de heiligenverering

De handelseditie van dit proefschrift verschijnt als deel 5 in de serie Publicaties van de Vereniging voor Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis (Gouda 2011).

THEOLOGISCHE UNIVERSITEIT VAN DE GEREFORMEERDE  
KERKEN IN NEDERLAND TE KAMPEN

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# Solus Deus adorandus

Angelus Merula (1487–1557) en de heiligenverering

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

TER VERKRIJGING VAN DE GRAAD VAN DOCTOR  
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ZO GOD WIL IN HET OPENBAAR TE VERDEDIGEN  
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door

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## Summary

This study describes the roots and background of Angelus Merula's (1487–1557) 'heresy' in the matter of hagiolatry. Hagiolatry was clearly a subject of great importance to him. The development of Merula's thought is sketched biographically.

The first chapter ('Introduction') explains why this particular approach was chosen. Until now, studies concerned with Merula's life and work have, to a considerable extent, remained separate from each other.

In the one field there are important biographical studies – the book of martyrs by Van Haemstede from 1559, the *Rvardi Tappart apotheosis* from 1559, the *Historia Tragica* by Paullus Merula from 1604, and the most recent extensive biographical study from 1851 by Willem Moll. These only pay indirect attention to the range and structure of Merula's thought and moreover, were not able to incorporate the source material brought together and published by Hoog in 1897. In the other field, the study by Jan Weernekers, from 1983, which is based upon this 1897 material, is a description of the full range of Merula's thought, but without any reference to the actual course of his life.

The second chapter ('Exploration') is of an introductory character. Successively it includes a sketch of hagiolatry in the Middle Ages, the criticism it received at the time of the Reformation, and the developments which this criticism subsequently caused in the Netherlands. This produces a colourful variety of views, opinions and convictions. From the Middle Ages the popular veneration of saints did not always observe the bounds drawn by the church. Neither was criticism, audible from the beginning of the sixteenth century, always unanimous. For one thing, Erasmus took his criticism less far than the reformers, who thought hagiolatry contrary to the unique position of Christ. But the reformers were often divided among themselves, especially concerning the desired consequences of criticism for hagiolatry. Bucer, Zwingli and Calvin criticized saint's days and saint's figures more violently than did Luther and Melancthon. And the Dutch Reformation is difficult to align with either of these two major reformational trajectories.

The second chapter also discusses the individual value, the reliability and the interrelations between the three above-mentioned contemporary descriptions of Merula's life. This is a necessary preliminary task, since, on important points, these sources contradict each other on details pertaining to Merula's life. These contradictions present the researcher with the critical task of making well-founded choices on various matters which are then further dealt with at a later stage in the study. The book of martyrs by Van

Haemstede, the *Rvarda Tappart apotheosis* and the *Historia Tragica* by Paullus Merula are therefore discussed in some detail. The critical conclusion is that there are no grounds for accepting, without some qualification, the account of events as given by Paullus Merula. But, at the same time, it should be admitted that, since he had the family papers at his disposal, he is and will remain the most important source of information about the fate of his great-uncle.

The third chapter ('Ascertainment') addresses the initial problematic we formulated at the beginning of the study: how did Merula develop his view of hagiolatry and can any sources be indentified from which he drew from the course of life until the beginning of the investigation to which he was subjected in 1552. The chapter opens with an evaluation of the progress of research thus far. Then a sketch follows of hagiolatry in Brielle. Against this, as historical background, and also with our knowledge about later developments, the data known about Engel's personal development up until 1552 is examined. 1552 was the year in which the inquisition against him started. As well, new facts are brought to light from an examination of new source material. These new facts indicate that apart from his time in Paris, Merula had also spent time studying in Louvain. He was initially subjected to investigation in 1533 and so it is also important for this examination of his later trial to identify his view of hagiolatry at that earlier time.

The conclusion we draw at the end of the third chapter is quite remarkable since Merula's view of hagiolatry deviated in striking fashion from the accepted ecclesiastical perspective. The starting point for his view is that the one advocate Christ makes the veneration of saints needless. And this raises a question about the sources he drew upon. On the basis of the material studied we indicated five possible sources: the commentaries on the *Sentences* by Petrus Lombardus in which the claim of hagiolatry is discussed explicitly; the developments in Merula's days that resulted in the Reformation; the 'heretics' he had to deal with in his personal and working environment; the extent to which hagiolatry was popular within the Netherlands in the 1520s; and the *Interim* from 1548. The conclusion is that the possibility that Merula's mind was partly moulded by the *Confessio Augustana* from 1530 cannot be discounted. Another conclusion is that he sided with Bucer against saint's days and with Zwingli against saint's figures; and that a certain relationship is noticeable between Merula's comments of 1533 and the 'popular' ideas about the subject of hagiolatry to be found in the Netherlands in the 1520s. However, on the basis of the source material at our disposal, there is still no demonstrable influence from these or other sources. Weerneker's proposition that, with respect to hagiolatry, Merula can be categorized under the second type of Reformation as distinguished by Oberman, is refuted.

The fourth chapter ('Defence') deals with the second question in our research with which we began the study: how exactly did the inquisition into Merula's views proceed and was it demonstrably reasonable for him to alter his view of hagiolatry? After an assessment, at the beginning of the chapter, a description is given of the progress of the research, the investigation, the trials, and the execution. On the basis of biographical literature and of his own works, a picture is drawn of the view Merula's inquisitors had of the purpose of such an inquisition and of hagiolatry. In this context the views of Franciscus Sonnius, Ruard Tapper van Enkhuizen, Nicolaas van Nieuwland, Herman van Lethmate, Ludovicus Blossius and Johannes Hentenius are successively dealt with. On the

basis of new source material it is possible to clarify certain matters, some of which now appear in a brighter light. This is especially true with regard to the deception of Tapper in the initial stage of the first trial, and as to the events that took place in the Southern Netherlands after this trial.

The conclusion that is formulated at the end of the fourth chapter is that although Merula's inquisitors had the reputation of being moderate they did not always operate within the bounds of the law. And furthermore, with regards to what he had actually written and advocated, they formed a united front in the sense that they attacked Merula with formal arguments rather than with respect to the details of his comment. In other words, with respect to hagiolatry he was considered a 'rebel' revolting against ecclesiastical doctrinal authority rather than a 'heretic' whose deviating view had to be refuted. The question as to whether their inquisition induced him to adapt his view of hagiolatry is answered by examining source material, to ascertain whether modifications occurred in his views. The first investigation of 1533 and the confession and tracts of 1553 are therefore taken as check points. The conclusion is that the lines are clearly continuous: the denial of any invocation of the saints by reason of the principle of *solus Christus* (Christ the only Mediator), and *sola scriptura* (the gospel does not teach this), as well as the senselessness of it (seeing the saints have no knowledge of our prayers) has been clarified in various ways and further substantiated, but it has not changed the account of his view in any material way. This conclusion is in agreement with that of Weernekers on this point. As to the first trial in 1554 it is difficult to get a clear picture of it, but after it Merula has certainly returned to his former view and it is partly for this reason that he was condemned to death in Mons in 1557.

In addition to the conclusion at the end of the third chapter, the question is asked, at the end of the fourth chapter, whether there are any other sources upon which Merula relied when developing his view of hagiolatry. The actual focus then is upon: the literature which he most certainly consulted – the *Interim* from 1548, the *Formula Reformationis* from 1548 and a work by Vervetius; the literature he possessed according to the evidence provided by the inquisitors – works by Luther, Brenz, Bucer, Melancthon, and Capito; the scholastic theology; his friends Johannes Sartorius and Herman Stein; and the 'ancient heretics'. The final conclusion is that any influence from whatever side cannot be proved conclusively, but that, in agreement with Weernekers, a decided consonance can be identified especially with the *Confessio Augustana* from 1530 as well as with the protestant theologians at the Regensburg religious colloquy (i.e. Brenz, Bucer, Melancthon, and Capito). A striking feature is that both sources are linked to Melancthon's name, whose works Merula knew and consulted. This is clear from the sources. Any affinity to Calvin's *Institutions* from 1536 proves to be much less clear.

In the fifth chapter ('Final Conclusions') the research is brought to its final conclusion. As regards the first part of the investigation the conclusion is that the lack of source material, especially about the early part of Merula's life, makes it impossible to indicate, with any certainty, sources upon which he relied when developing his view of hagiolatry. But it is true that progress has been made from a biographical point of view as the development of Merula's view has been placed in the 'narrower' context of his course of life. The picture as sketched by Weernekers has been modified but also further substantiated. With regard to the second side of the problematic (the range of his doctrinal views) there

are three points that can be made conclusively. First, up until the first trial Merula did not adjust his view of hagiolatry. The first trial itself presents us with many questions; notwithstanding its impact upon him at the time first trial was completed, we certainly know that he subsequently maintained, or returned to his initial view. It is on this point that progress has been made: our research has rendered a better picture of the development of Engel's thought about hagiolatry. It has also clarified the remarkable fact that, in spite of everything, Merula left room for an exclamation like 'Peter, pray for us!'. However, this will remain an element difficult into integrate in the totality of his views.

It is especially this latter element that makes Merula an independent figure in the (Dutch) Reformation. The same goes for Veluanus. Thus, the result of this study confirms the conclusion of recent investigation into the Dutch Reformation: this Reformation is characterized by diversity rather than by unity.

## Curriculum vitae

Adriaan (André) Bas werd geboren op 16 november 1969 te Dordrecht. Hij groeide op in Alblasterdam en behaalde in 1988 zijn gymnasiumdiploma aan de Gereformeerde Scholengemeenschap te Rotterdam. In datzelfde jaar begon hij aan een studie theologie aan de Theologische Universiteit in Kampen (Broederweg). Tijdens deze studie specialiseerde hij zich in de oude kerkgeschiedenis (voor 1650). Dit leidde tot de doctoraalscriptie "*Ghenoech ende suffisant*". *Doctoraalscriptie over Angelus Merula (1487–1557) en het sola Scriptura*, waarop hij in 1995 afstudeerde. In 1996 werd hij bevestigd als predikant van de Gereformeerde Kerk (vrijgemaakt) te Lemele-Lemelerveld, sinds 2001 dient hij de Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt) te Kornhorn en Marum. André Bas is getrouwd en heeft met zijn vrouw de zorg voor een pleegdochter.