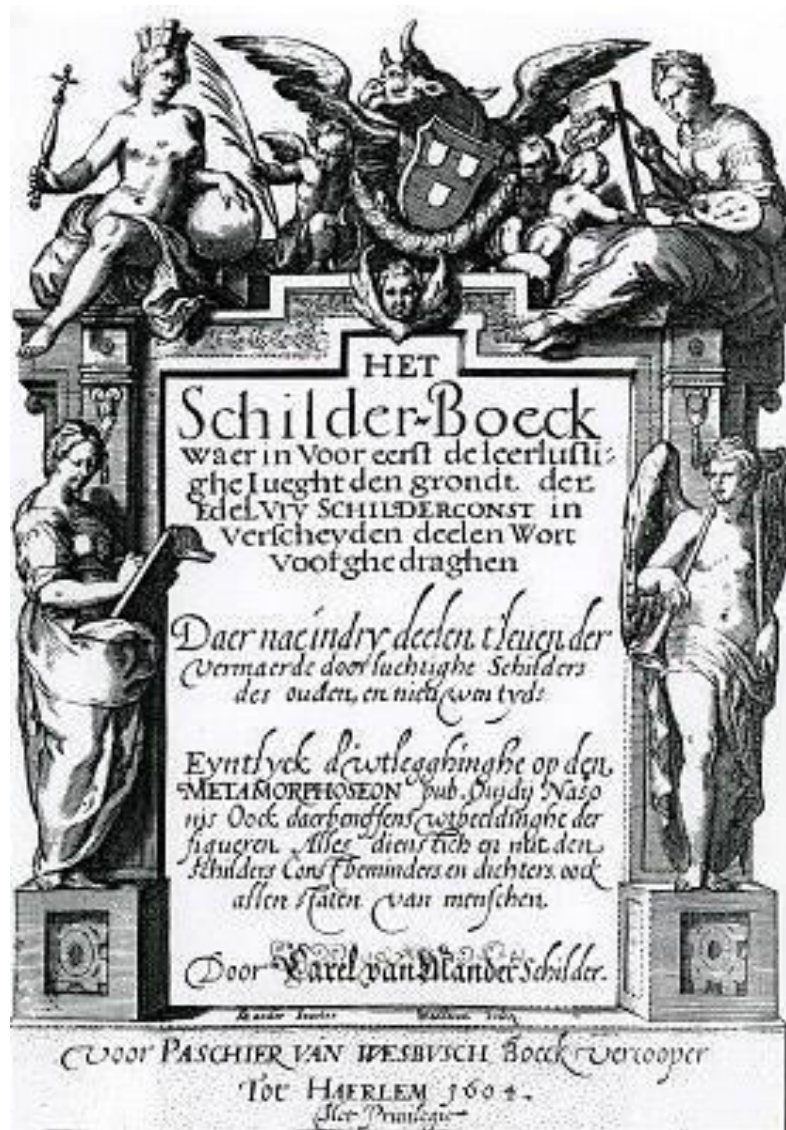


ART AND RELIGION IN KAREL VAN MANDER'S OEUVRE
GOD AND THE GODS IN THE *SCHILDER-BOECK*



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This thesis signifies the end of a wonderful year at the Warburg Institute in London. I would like to thank all the lecturers and my fellow students, who have taught me so much during this past year. I would like to give special thanks to Dr. Paul Taylor, who supervised my thesis. The past year would not have been the same without many good friends I have made, both within the Warburg and outside, and I would like to thank them too for joining me in all kinds of adventures this year.

Geen dingh soo slecht, of daer is somtijts yet goets in.

~ Karel van Mander, 1604

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. The Mennonites	4
2.1. Reforms during the sixteenth century	4
2.2. The origins of Mennonitism	5
2.3. Mennonite theology and practice	6
2.3.1. Baptism	6
2.3.2. Spiritual state	6
2.3.3. Symbols of faith	7
2.3.4. The ban	7
2.4. Religious persecution and tolerance	7
3. Karel van Mander	8
3.1. Van Mander's life	8
3.2. Karel van Mander as a Mennonite	9
4. Mennonites and art	10
4.1. Mennonites and painting	10
4.1.1. Mennonite influences in Karel's painting	11
4.1.2. Reception of painting	13
4.2. Mennonites and literature	13
4.2.1. Mennonite poetry	14
4.2.2. Chambers of Rhetoric	14
4.2.2.1. <i>Rederijks</i> in Haarlem	15
4.2.3. Karel van Mander as poet	15
4.2.3.1. Secular poetry	16
4.2.3.2. Religious poetry	16
4.2.3.3. Reception of literature	18
5. The <i>Schilder-Boeck</i>	18
5.1. God: Christianity in the <i>Schilder-Boeck</i>	20
5.1.1. Talent, God, and <i>Natuere</i>	20
5.1.2. Morals, virtues, and vices	21
5.1.2.1. Good examples	21
5.1.2.2. Bad examples	22
5.1.3. The Church as an institution	23
5.1.4. Religious scenes	24
5.1.4.1. <i>Beeldt</i> and <i>Historie</i>	25
5.1.5. Iconoclasm in the sixteenth century	26
5.2. The Gods in the <i>Schilder-Boeck</i>	26
5.2.1. <i>Wtlegghingh</i> : Commentary on Ovid's <i>Metamorphoses</i>	27
5.2.2. Humanism and art	28
5.2.2.1. Painting and Poetry as sister arts	29
5.2.2.2. Liberal art or a craft?	29
5.2.2.3. Art theory	30
5.2.2.4. Personifications	31
5.3. Conclusion	32
6. Conclusion	32
7. Bibliography	34

1. Introduction

Scholars have formed strong opinions about what kind of man Karel van Mander was, often based on his *Schilder-Boeck* ('Book on Painting'): he is discussed as a humanist or a Mennonite; as a painter or a poet.¹ Even though nowadays Van Mander is mostly known for the *Schilder-Boeck*, he produced many paintings and religious poems during his lifetime too. Humans are complex and contradictory beings, and to extract only one element about this man and try to analyse all his work in light of this is limiting for our understanding of his work. In this thesis I made an attempt to paint a more complete picture of Karel van Mander, by looking at his poetry, paintings, and of course his *Schilder-Boeck*. It is known that Karel van Mander was a strict and devout Mennonite – a reformed Dutch Anabaptist denomination named after Menno Simons – but also that he had an interest in humanist developments in painting and poetry, and went to Italy for his painterly education.

First, Van Mander's background as a Mennonite will be discussed, as well as Mennonite influences in his artistic work. Next, the *Schilder-Boeck* will be analyzed according to two main themes: *God*, including several remarkable aspects regarding Christian elements, and *The Gods*, trying to trace humanist influences on his work. As will hopefully be shown, reconciliation between the two is difficult at times, but sometimes it is more satisfying to respect the difference and try to discover what the reader can learn from it.

2. The Mennonites

2.1 Reforms during the sixteenth century

The sixteenth century was a period of religious and political reform in Europe. Luther and Zwingli started spreading their protestant ideas from the first decades of the sixteenth century onwards, leading to more and more movements resisting the Catholic Church. These reformed ideas partly rooted in the humanistic movement. The earlier Italian humanists were interested in an education that would ensure the optimal development of human capacities, by the combination of knowledge, intellect and virtue. Humanism created an intellectual environment in which the power of church, nobility and individuals was reconsidered and redefined.² The Catholic Church was thus not only criticized by theological reformers, but Humanists like Erasmus confronted the Church too and offered the people a critical mind-set with which they could study the vernacular Bible. This did not necessarily mean that they left behind Catholicism; Erasmus for example remained a Catholic his entire life.³ Even though works by for example Erasmus and Luther were printed and purchased in places like Antwerp, there was barely any true polemic literature to be found in this period, nor mass conversion. Overall, the reform movement in the Low Countries spread in a rather chaotic

¹ Karel van Mander, *Het Schilder-Boeck / waer in Voor eerst de leerlustighe lueght den grondt der Edel Vry Schilderconst in Verscheyden deelen Wort Voorghedraghen / Daer nae in dry deelen t'Leuen der vermaerde doorluchtighe Schilders des ouden, en nieuwen tyds / Eyntlyck d'wtlegghinghe op den Metamorphoseon pub. Ouidij Nasonis. Oock daerbeneffens wtbeeldinghe der figueren Alles dienstich en nut den schilders Constbeminde en dichters, oock allen Staten van menschen*, Haarlem 1604 (fascimile edition, Davaco Publishers, Utrecht 1969). Hereafter: *Schilder-Boeck*.

² S. Voolstra, 'De roerige jaren dertig. Het begin van de doperse beweging,' in *Wederdopers, Menisten, Doopsgezinden in Nederland 1530-1980*, ed. S. Groenveld, J. P. Jacobszoon, S. L. Verheus, Zutphen 1981, pp. 10-24; see pp. 10.

³ Voolstra, *Roerige jaren*, pp. 14-15.

way, since there was no structural leadership from above and there were numerous different movements.⁴

2.2 The origins of Mennonitism

Mennonitism is a version of Dutch Anabaptism, which was based on, but developed differently and independently from the Anabaptist movement which originated in Zürich, Switzerland in the 1520s. Around 1525, some followers of the protestant reformer Zwingli grew tired of his caution in reforming Christianity and his submissiveness to the local government, and took a radical approach which included rejection of infant baptism.⁵ The new Anabaptist movement declared itself opposed to Protestantism rather than Catholicism, and therefore the first persecutors of the Anabaptists were Protestants, who associated them with civil unrest.⁶ The Anabaptist movement spread quickly through Northern Europe, partly because many Swiss Anabaptists fled their country.⁷

In the 1530s, radical attempts were made to establish the Kingdom of God on Earth in Munster and Amsterdam, after the ideas of Melchior Hoffmann. Hoffmann was pacifist, but some of his followers were not and tried to enforce the Kingdoms with violence.⁸ These aggressive and radical actions by the Anabaptists lead to more persecutions, by both the Catholic Church and the Reformed movements.⁹ After these events, therefore, the Dutch Anabaptists stressed their pacifism to show they distanced themselves from the violent congregations.¹⁰

New leaders and Anabaptist congregations arose during these turbulent times, among which Menno Simons around 1535.¹¹ In 1524 Menno had been ordained as a Catholic priest, but he started to rethink his faith and its practices, mainly the transubstantiation, after close readings of the Bible. This was in accordance with the Sacramentalists, who rejected the actual presence of Christ in the Eucharist and other ceremonies that could not be traced back to the Scripture, influenced by the biblical humanism of Erasmus.¹² In addition, Menno closely studied the Bible and reformed works, and could not discover any foundation for infant baptism anywhere.¹³

⁴ A. Hamilton, 'The Development of Dutch Anabaptism in the light of the European Magisterial and Radical Reformation,' in *From Martyr to Muppy (Mennonite Urban Professionals): A Historical Introduction to Cultural Assimilation Processes of a Religious Minority in the Netherlands, the Mennonites*, ed. A. Hamilton, et al., Amsterdam 1994, pp. 3-14. See pp. 6-7; O. de Jong, 'How Protestant are Mennonites? Isolation and Assimilation of Dutch Mennonites in the Framework of Dutch Protestantism,' in *From Martyr to Muppy*, ed. A. Hamilton, et al., Amsterdam 1994, pp. 30-40; see pp. 34.

⁵ Hamilton, pp. 3; Voolstra, *Roerige jaren*, pp. 11

⁶ Hamilton, pp. 3, 5.

⁷ Voolstra, *Roerige jaren*, pp. 12

⁸ Voolstra, *Roerige jaren*, pp. 13, 17; De Jong, pp. 34

⁹ Voolstra, *Roerige jaren*, pp. 21

¹⁰ Voolstra, *Roerige jaren*, pp. 24; I. B. Horst, 'De strijd om het fundament des geloofs. Van Melchiorieten tot Menisten, in *Wederdopers, Menisten, Doopsgezinden in Nederland 1530-1980*, ed. S. Groenveld, J. P. Jacobszoon, S. L. Verheus, Zutphen 1981, pp. 25-45: pp. 28.

¹¹ P. Visser, 'Mennonites and Doopsgezinden in the Netherlands, 1535-1700,' in *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700*, Leiden, Boston and Tokyo 2007, pp. 299-345: pp. 301-303.

¹² S. Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden. Geschiedenis van de dopersen in de Nederlanden 1531-1675*, Hilversum 2000, pp. 65; S. B. J. Zilverberg, *Dissidenten in de Gouden Eeuw: geloof en geweten in de Republiek*, Weesp 1985, pp. 7.

¹³ Horst, pp. 31, 33

His rejection of Catholic practices and ideas strengthened, and by the mid 1530s Menno was an influential figure within Dutch Anabaptism. After the revolt in Munster, Anabaptist leaders from different denominations came together to resolve their disputes. By not attending this meeting, Menno showed his rejection of the violence that was used in Munster.¹⁴ The fact that his work and ideas were influential became clear when in 1541-1542 the authorities tried to arrest and imprison him, as well as put a ban on his books. Following this edict, Menno became a nomadic preacher, mainly in the north-west of Germany until he died in 1561.¹⁵

2.3 Mennonite theology and practices

2.3.1 Baptism

The characteristics that bound all the Anabaptist movements together was their view on baptism.¹⁶ The Anabaptists strongly believed in the importance of adult baptism for which reason they were called *doopsgezinden*, which means ‘those who favour baptism’. They considered baptism as a conscious sign of confession and personal faith or conversion, after deliberate study of the Bible and the Christian faith.¹⁷ Baptism as an adult is the start of a new life after Christ’s example, as described in the New Testament.¹⁸ Menno Simons had a Christocentric approach of the Bible, and thorough knowledge of the Bible and the New Testament in particular was the foundation of the Mennonite beliefs. It was thought to be necessary as a guideline for living a purified life, leading towards the final goal of a church and society without misconduct and malpractice.¹⁹

2.3.2 Spiritual state

During the mid-sixteenth century, Calvinism started to become more influential in the Low Countries.²⁰ This reform movement had some similarities with the Mennonites, such as the desire for a purified church. Menno Simons had a clear idea about what the ‘church’ consisted of: the entire assembly of the faithful including laymen, and not only high-ranking clergy and the Pope as was common in Medieval views.²¹ In his desire for a church without spot or wrinkle, Menno rejected any worldly interventions by the state or government. The Anabaptists believed that the congregation was a gathering of reborn, baptized believers, which could not be reconciled with a government or particular borders.²²

Despite commonalities in reformed doctrine such as the struggle for a purified church, reconciliation between different denominations proved to be difficult. This was mainly due to the fact that the Calvinists recognized their social responsibility, and were socially and

¹⁴ Zijlstra, pp. 186.

¹⁵ Horst, pp. 37.

¹⁶ Hamilton, pp. 4; De Jong, pp. 33.

¹⁷ De Jong, pp. 33.

¹⁸ Voolstra, *Roerige Jaren*, pp. 16.

¹⁹ Zijlstra, pp. 190; S. Voolstra, ‘The colony of heaven’: The Anabaptist aspiration to be a church without a spot or wrinkle in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,’ in *From Martyr to Muppy*, ed. A. Hamilton, et al., Amsterdam 1994, pp. 15-29; see pp. 15, 18.

²⁰ Zijlstra, pp. 72.

²¹ M. T. Girolimon, ‘John Calvin and Menno Simons on Religious Discipline: A Difference in Degree and Kind,’ *Fides et Historia*, 27, 1995, pp. 5-29; see pp. 14-15.

²² Horst, pp. 43; Girolimon, pp. 21-23.

politically active, whereas the Anabaptists concentrated on mainly the spiritual welfare of their own congregations only.²³ The Mennonites were in favour of a separation of Church and state, and as a result they were not involved in public or administrative offices.²⁴ Neither would they swear oaths or bear arms in the town militia or the army; not only because the Mennonites thought that the worldly government had no authority in religious issues, but also because they thought that violence did not fit into a faultless community and God's State on Earth should be realized by spiritual means, not violence.²⁵

2.3.3 Symbols of faith

The Mennonites were spiritually focussed and critical of the church as an institution because of its misbehaviour. On the one hand they partly rejected organized religion to go back to the roots of Christianity, and prayers were usually silent, since this was considered the most direct way: no-one can mediate between God and the soul.²⁶ On the other hand, Menno Simons still was of the opinion that a person's faith had to be evident from his works both on individual and congregational levels. According to Menno, believing that faith alone was sanctifying would result in laziness since one does not have to show proof of his faith in any way. Therefore, Mennonite practice included several ceremonies such as the Lord's Supper as a symbolic way to remember the covenant Christ established when he died on the cross, and the pouring of water at baptism to let the faith show.²⁷

2.3.4 The ban

The Mennonites aimed for a pure congregation, and they banned people who blemished it by spreading wrong ideas or erroneous beliefs, but most importantly those who did so by violating the Scripture in moral ways such as adultery, gluttony, drunkenness, avarice, quarrelling, idolatry, blasphemy, and criminal activities such as theft and murder to name a few.²⁸ All social classes were included in this doctrine and practice, so it affected clergy and nobility as much as laymen as a tool for religious control.²⁹ Menno allowed limited contact between members of the congregation and those who were shunned, but all unnecessary and intimate contact was strictly forbidden. Nothing, not even family or marriage, could be a reason not to execute the ban towards sinners.³⁰

2.4 Religious persecution and tolerance

In the struggle for a church without spot or wrinkle, there was no unity among the different Mennonite denominations which led to the development of numerous groups, usually named after their area of origin.³¹ From the early years of Anabaptism onwards,

²³ Voolstra, *Colony*, pp. 22

²⁴ Voolstra, *Colony*, pp. 25; De Jong, pp. 35; Horst, pp. 43

²⁵ De Jong, pp. 35; Voolstra, *Colony*, pp. 25; Zijlstra, pp. 186

²⁶ Voolstra, *Colony*, pp. 24; M. M. Mochizuki, *The Netherlandish Image after Iconoclasm, 1566-1672. Material Religion in the Dutch Golden Age*. Aldershot and Burlington 2008, pp. 196

²⁷ De Jong, pp. 33; Zijlstra, pp. 188-189

²⁸ Girolimon, pp. 11; Zijlstra, pp. 192-193; Voolstra, *Colony*, pp. 18

²⁹ Girolimon, pp. 9, 16

³⁰ Girolimon, pp. 17-18

³¹ Zilverberg, *Dissidenten*, pp. 8.

congregations formed in Flanders and the Low Countries. The main centres of Mennonitism in the Low Countries were the provinces of North Holland and Friesland.³² During the Eighty Years War (1568 – 1648) the Calvinist Reformed Church gradually became the public church in the Northern provinces, but they were relatively tolerant towards other religions.³³ In 1581, the government of Holland announced a measure of tolerance towards other religions than Calvinism, and persecutions stopped.³⁴

The Mennonites were oppressed and persecuted heavily in Flanders until in 1576, after the Spanish Fury in Antwerp, Calvinism became the ruling religion.³⁵ Until the Fall of Antwerp in 1585, when the Catholics recaptured the city and the Southern provinces, the Mennonites were relatively safe, although not fully recognized.³⁶ After 1585, persecutions started again and apart from renouncing their faith, the only option was to flee. Many Mennonites fled to the North in general, and Haarlem in particular, sometimes settling in the areas where there were Mennonites already. Among them were intellectuals, artists and merchants, who brought their works and businesses along with them.

3 Karel van Mander

3.1 Van Mander's life

Karel van Mander was born in Meulebeke, Flanders, in 1548. Most information that is handed down about his life is derived from the *Levensbericht* in the second edition of the *Schilder-Boeck*, published in 1618 in Amsterdam by Jacob Pietersz Wachter.³⁷ The anonymous author described that Karel went to the Latin school in Tiel first, and later transferred to a French school in Ghent.³⁸ However, his talent for drawing did not go unnoticed, and he was sent to Lucas de Heere in Ghent, as an apprentice, around 1566. After a rather short period he became the apprentice of Peter Vlerick in 1568-69.³⁹

From 1573 to 1577 Karel spent his time in Italy, travelling to Rome and Florence.⁴⁰ He returned to Meulebeke at a time when unsatisfied anti-Spanish catholic troops were plundering Flanders. Karel first fled to Bruges, then Courtrai, and eventually, in 1583, he went to Haarlem in North-Holland with his wife and children. The biographer describes some of Karel's paintings, and the cooperation of Goltzius, Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem and Karel as an 'academy, to study after nature', where Karel taught the others the Italian

³² De Jong, pp. 39

³³ De Jong, pp. 36, 39; Voolstra, *Colony*, pp. 22

³⁴ Zilverberg, *Cultuur*, pp. 181; Girolimon, pp. 25

³⁵ Zijlstra, pp. 66.

³⁶ A. L. E. Verheyden, 'An Introduction to the History of the Mennonites in Flanders,' *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 21, 1947, pp. 51-63; pp. 53

³⁷ Anonymous, 't Geslacht, de geboort, plaets, tydt, leven, ende wercken van Karel van Mander, schilder, en poet, mitsgaders zyn overlyden, ende begraeffenis', in *Het Schilder-Boeck [...]*, Amsterdam 1618. Hereafter: *Levensbericht*. The author of the biography is anonymous, but the latest suggestion is that it has been written by Karel van Mander Jr., one of his sons, see H. Duits, 'Het leven van Karel van Mander. Kunstenaarsleven of schrijversbiografie?', *De Zeventiende Eeuw*, 9, 1993, pp. 117-130. Several biographies and monographs have been produced about Van Mander, but, as pointed out by Greve, most of them are largely based on the biography in the 1618 edition of the *Schilder-Boeck*: E.H. Greve, *De Bronnen van Carel van Mander voor "Het Leven der Doorluchtighe Nederlandsche en Hoog-Duytsche Schilders"*, The Hague 1903, pp. 5

³⁸ *Levensbericht*, fol. R3r

³⁹ *Idem*.

⁴⁰ *Levensbericht*, fol. R3v-R4r

techniques and manners.⁴¹ Lastly, the biographer narrates his last few years, sickbed and death in 1606.⁴²

3.2 Karel van Mander as a Mennonite

In Karel's biography, his religious convictions are not explicitly mentioned. It is not known when exactly Van Mander converted to Mennonitism. His biographer describes that Karel was born into a distinguished Catholic family of Flemish nobility, that had served the fatherland well during previous wars.⁴³ The reader is told that Karel's father was a good and noble fighter, but nowhere is mentioned armed involvement by Karel is not mentioned at all – even not when at his return to Flanders after his stay in Italy his country was being looted; instead, Karel tried to find a wife.⁴⁴ Shank sees both his discontinuation with family's tradition with arms, and his ignorance to fight in a period where violence was the order of the day as proof that Karel already practiced the pacifism so characteristic for Mennonites at this time.⁴⁵ Additionally, there are no records of the baptism of his sons in the well-kept Catholic Church records, which might indicate the rejection of infant baptism.⁴⁶

Shank's assumption that Van Mander was affiliated with the Mennonites before he went to Haarlem is plausible, considering evidence of his non-participation in the war, his decision not to register his sons and the fact that he joined the strictest congregation in Haarlem as soon as he moved there. Even though Flanders was still under relatively stable Calvinist rule when Karel came to Haarlem in 1583, the reason he fled might be that even though Mennonites were not persecuted at the time, they were not fully recognized either.⁴⁷ Additionally, in the Low Countries religious toleration was instigated by the government by decree in 1581, so that was an extra safeguard.

Already during the 1530s, Mennonites could be found in Haarlem.⁴⁸ During the first century of Anabaptist existence, there were as many as up to seven congregations in this city.⁴⁹ Haarlem attracted many southern immigrants who were employed in the textile and cloth industry, of which many were Mennonites.⁵⁰ Apart from the fact that Haarlem was an important Mennonite centre, the city was renowned as an artistic town with a thriving painters' milieu and Chambers of Rhetoric. This might have been appealing to Karel as will be discussed below, in addition to the fact that his brother Cornelis who was in the linen business also moved there.⁵¹

⁴¹ *Levensbericht*, fol. S2r: '[...] hielden en maeckten onder haer dryen een Academie, om nae 't leven te studeeren, Karel wees haer de Italiaensche maniere.'

⁴² *Levensbericht*, fol. S3v

⁴³ D. A. Shank, 'Karel van Mander's Mennonite Roots in Flanders', *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 79, 2005, pp. 231-249: pp. 235: *Levensbericht*, fol. R4v

⁴⁴ *Levensbericht*, fol. R4v

⁴⁵ Shank, pp. 236-237

⁴⁶ Shank, pp. 238

⁴⁷ Verheyden, pp. 53

⁴⁸ S. L. Verheus, 'Congregational assimilation in a historical nutshell: Martyrs, Mennonites and Muppies in Haarlem,' in *From Martyr to Muppy [...]*, ed. A. Hamilton, et al., Amsterdam 1994, pp. 41-47; pp. 41

⁴⁹ Verheus, pp. 43

⁵⁰ J. Spaans, *Haarlem na de Reformatie: stedelijke cultuur en kerkelijk leven, 1577-1620*, The Hague 1989, pp. 97-101.

⁵¹ M. Leesberg, 'Karel van Mander as a Painter', *Simiolus*, 22, 1993-1994, pp. 5-57., pp. 21; *Levensbericht*, fol. R3r

4. Mennonites and art

Regardless of when exactly Karel van Mander got acquainted and involved with the Mennonite belief, fact is that he joined the Flemish congregation in Haarlem and was clearly and openly a Mennonite by the time he moved to Holland. When the Flemish congregation split into the Old and the Young Flemish in 1586, Van Mander identified himself with the Old Flemish Mennonites.⁵² They were much stricter and more conservative than the Young Flemish in the ban, and held onto practices like avoidance of excommunicated spouses or family and prohibition of marriage outside the congregation.⁵³

At the same time, however, Karel was also a poet and painter who had been to Italy and discussed Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in his *Schilder-Boeck*. The question arises how Mennonites saw art, and thus what context we should place Karel van Mander in. As has become clear, the Mennonites were a religiously focused denomination; they were not much concerned with worldly goods, and lived a sober life following Christ's example.⁵⁴ In the early decades of Mennonitism, cultural life was too far removed from what they considered to be important, but nevertheless they did not isolate themselves entirely.⁵⁵ Especially towards the end of the sixteenth century and during the seventeenth century, the rising prosperity and interest in natural sciences in the Netherlands did not coincide well with the Mennonite rejection of the state and worldly influences.⁵⁶

Over time, the degree to which Mennonite congregations took part in social and cultural life became a point of dispute. They ranged from traditional conservative Mennonites to groups that assimilated to the Dutch economic merchant culture. Since the Mennonites were not politically or religiously involved, they tried to achieve economic equality and successfully so.⁵⁷ As stated before, it was important for Mennonites that their faith shone through in all their deeds, including their jobs. In this way, a Mennonite could be a merchant or an artist, as long as his work was guided by Biblical truths and morals, for these would show as a result, which would be beneficial to the community.⁵⁸

4.1 Mennonites and painting

Mennonites did not seem to have a problem with painting or art at all in the profane sphere. As long as the artist had moral and virtuous intentions and that was visible in his works, they were not opposed to painting or other artistic forms such as poetry.⁵⁹ The fact that Karel van Mander joined the strict Old Flemish congregation and the guild of St. Luke and founded a Chamber of Rhetoric around the same time shows that these two things could be done simultaneously. It would not be correct to suggest that the Dutch Mennonites were

⁵² M. Spies, 'Mennonites and literature in the seventeenth century,' in *From Martyr to Muppy [...]*, ed. A. Hamilton, et al., Amsterdam 1994; pp. 84.

⁵³ Zijlstra, pp. 329-300

⁵⁴ Voolstra, *Colony*, pp. 18

⁵⁵ Zilverberg, *Cultuur*, pp. 180

⁵⁶ Voolstra, *Colony*, pp. 25; Zilverberg, *Cultuur*, pp. 193

⁵⁷ Visser, *Companion*, pp. 304; De Jong, pp. 38; N. Van der Zijpp, *Geschiedenis der Doopsgezinden in Nederland*, Arnhem 1952, pp. 149-156

⁵⁸ P. Visser, 'De artes als zinnebeeld: over doopsgezinden en hun relatie tot kunst en wetenschap,' *De Zeventiende Eeuw*, 5, 1989, pp. 92-102; Mochizuki, pp. 196; H. S. Bender, 'Mennonites in Art', *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 27, 1953, pp. 187-203.

⁵⁹ Zijlstra, pp. 485; Visser, pp. 70

similar to the extremely conservative world-shunning Anabaptists elsewhere, since they usually took part in social life at least as merchants or the like.⁶⁰ Apart from numerous Mennonite painters and poets, there were also Mennonite collectors. Based on inventories, their taste for painting was similar to that of collectors from other religions, and sea- and landscapes and Biblical scenes can be found.⁶¹ What makes it difficult to find Mennonite themes in painting might be that the painters had to follow fashion or the patron's commission, and the work will thus reflect the public's or patron's taste rather than the artist's. Something they might have had a choice in was in what topics they really did not want to depict, such as brothel scenes – but then again, this will not differ much from other Christian convictions.⁶²

4.1.1 Mennonite influences in Karel's paintings

Karel van Mander's talent for painting was discovered early on in his life, according to his biographer. He is portrayed as a typical painter with an uncontrollable urge to paint, and drawing on every wall or paper.⁶³ Karel's life as a painter is described in the same manner as he himself presented the artists in his *Lives*: there are several standard *topoi* that recur in the biographies of many artists, such as the drawing on walls and the practical jokes.⁶⁴ Van Mander studied with Lucas de Heere and Peter Vlerick, before he went to Italy in 1573. Lucas de Heere probably served as an early example of a successful painter-poet, which Karel aspired to become.⁶⁵ In Italy, according to his biographer, he stayed in Florence for a while, and then three years in Rome.⁶⁶ He focussed his studies on the art of antiquity and the artists of the High Renaissance, and he was particularly fond of Raphael.⁶⁷ He also came in contact with fellow Flemish artists and their work, and he would remain life-long friends with Bartholomeus Spranger.⁶⁸ His biographer narrates that Van Mander made some grotesques and landscapes while in Italy, as well as some frescoes for several cardinals.⁶⁹ When he returned to Flanders in 1577, he continued to paint and his works were highly praised.⁷⁰

After he had fled to Courtrai with his family in 1582, he got a commission for a triptych from the weaver's guild depicting the tortures of their patron saint, the devout and pure St. Catherine.⁷¹ Shank takes this painting as evidence for Karel's Mennonite affiliations before he went to Haarlem. According to him, the urban skyline suggests a contemporary setting which he takes to mean that the apparent Catholic decapitation was not only a

⁶⁰ De Jong, pp. 36

⁶¹ Voolstra, *Colony*, pp. 70; Zijlstra, pp. 486

⁶² Zijlstra, pp. 486

⁶³ *Levensbericht*, fol. R3r

⁶⁴ H. Miedema, *Karel van Manders Leven der moderne, oft dees-tijtsche doorluchtighe Italiaensche schilders en hun bron : een vergelijking tussen van Mander en Vasari*, Alphen aan den Rijn 1984, pp. 6-7; W. Waterschoot, *Ter liefde der const: uit het Schilder-Boeck (1604) van Karel van Mander*, Leiden 1983, pp. 24

⁶⁵ Leesberg, pp. 16

⁶⁶ *Levensbericht*, fol. R3r

⁶⁷ *Levensbericht*, fol. R4r

⁶⁸ Leesberg, pp. 17

⁶⁹ *Levensbericht*, fol. R3v

⁷⁰ *Levensbericht* fol. R4r

⁷¹ *Levensbericht* Fol. S1r – S1v

depiction of the history of St. Catherine, it also implied the contemporary events of persecutions and executions of Mennonite followers.⁷²

On the other hand, the fact that Van Mander painted this altarpiece for a Catholic church in Courtrai has been taken as proof that he still leaned towards Catholicism around this time. Yet, as stressed by the biographer, Van Mander and his family were refugees and in need of money; this painting was a commission like any other for the craftsman Karel van Mander.⁷³ Shank's opinion that Van Mander was already a Mennonite in Flanders is plausible, but to try to read all kinds of deeper Mennonite layers into his paintings is too far-fetched. There is no evidence that a Renaissance audience would look for contemporary political significance in religious paintings, so Shank's observation that everyone who would see this painting and was familiar with the Mennonite history would read it within a Mennonite context is doubtful.⁷⁴

After Courtrai, Van Mander and his family fled to Bruges and eventually to Haarlem because of the ongoing troubles in Flanders. In Haarlem he set up a collaboration with Goltzius and Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem, and they practiced techniques for drawing after life that Karel van Mander had taken from Italy, after drawings by among others Spranger.⁷⁵ Van Mander registered with the guild of St. Luke in Haarlem in 1584, and kept producing paintings until his death in 1606.⁷⁶ It has been said that his actual visual work is mediocre compared to that of his contemporaries, that not much stylistic development can be traced in his work, and that his stay in Italy had had little influence on his stylistic development.⁷⁷ As a painter, he was interested in iconographical matters and Renaissance concepts of art and mythology for example, which is reflected in his writings, mainly his *Schilder-Boeck*.⁷⁸ Leesberg even states that the increase in mythological subject matters in the 1590s is due partly to Van Mander's interest in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁷⁹

The question is to what extent Mennonite themes can be traced in Van Mander's painterly oeuvre. It would be logical if Mennonite motives would be used by a painter of Mennonite background, but it should also be remembered that a large part of Van Mander's oeuvre is still produced on commission.⁸⁰ The Mennonite interpretation by Shank of the triptych of St. Catherine has been discussed above, and in my opinion this is over-interpretation. Another painting has been attributed a Mennonite interpretation, this time by Miedema: *The Depravity of Mankind before the Flood*, 1600. It shows mankind shortly before

⁷² Shank, pp. 243-244

⁷³ Shank, pp. 242; *Levensbericht*, fol. Sr: '[...] 't welck hem en de zyne wel te pas quam.'

⁷⁴ C. Hope, 'Religious Narrative in Renaissance Art', *Journal of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce*, 1986, 134, pp. 804-818: pp. 807; E. H. Gombrich, 'Topos and Topicality', *Annual Lecture of the Society for Renaissance Studies*, delivered at University College, London 1975.

⁷⁵ *Levensbericht*, fol. S2r: '[...] hielden en maeckten onder haer dryen een Academie, om nae 't leven te studeeren, Karel wees haer de Italiaensche maniere.'; Leesberg, pp. 17; Noë, pp. 325

⁷⁶ Leesberg, pp. 21, 27

⁷⁷ Leesberg, pp. 27, 43; Noë, pp. 325

⁷⁸ Leesberg, pp. 43; Spies, pp. 85

⁷⁹ Leesberg, pp. 43. For an extensive analysis of mythological scenes in painting in the Low Countries from the late sixteenth century onwards, see E. J. Sluijter, *De "heydensche fabulen" in de schilderkunst van de Gouden Eeuw: schilderijen met verhalende onderwerpen uit de klassieke mythologie in de noordelijke Nederlanden, circa 1590-1670*, Leiden 2000.

⁸⁰ Zijlstra, pp. 485; H. Miedema, 'Een schilderij van Karel van Mander de Oude (1548-1606: een doopsgezinde interpretatie,' *Doopsgezind Jaarboek*, 16, 1990, pp. 113-128: pp. 119.

the Flood, with all its atrocities. It should serve as a warning for a pure and moral way of life, and as an example of how people who blemished the purity of the congregation would be punished.⁸¹ Zijlstra recognizes the warning element in this painting, but points out that this explanation is not necessarily Mennonite; a Catholic or reformed viewer might have gotten this interpretation too.⁸²

Leesberg provides the reader with a catalogue of known works by Van Mander, divided into categories.⁸³ By far the most have religious subjects, of which the larger part scenes from the New Testament, which would be in accordance with the Mennonite Christological focus and their aim to live according to the New Testament. Additionally, she discusses an Old Testament painting, *The Meeting of Jephthah and his Daughter*, which shows the encounter of Jephthah and his daughter as described in the Bible, and not the common depiction of the daughter's sacrifice which is mentioned but not described in the Bible.⁸⁴ This would be an example of his Mennonite approach while painting; depicting what is actually described rather than implied in the Bible.

4.1.2 Reception of painting

Van Mander was honoured as a painter during his lifetime: according to his biographer there were 'few who love art in Holland who have nothing from his hand'.⁸⁵ Indeed his paintings could be found in numerous inventories of the seventeenth century.⁸⁶ Van Mander was included in Hendrick Hondius's series of portraits of sixty-eight artists in 1610 (*Pictorum aliquot celebrium praecipue Germanicae inferioris effigies*), and called a critic of painters here.⁸⁷ Further into the seventeenth century, when the appreciation for late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century art had declined, appreciation for Van Mander as a painter decreased too and the main focus was on him as a poet and writer.⁸⁸ In 1609, *Epitaphs made in honour of the death of Carel van Mander, Painter and Poet, died on 11 September 1606* was published.⁸⁹ In this book, Karel is honoured as a painter – *pictoris celeberrimi, Constenaer* and described as *Const-rijcken* – but this book also honours Karel as a poet, as already becomes clear from the title. Van Mander was not only active as a painter, also within the literary world he left his traces.

4.2 Mennonites and literature

A large part of Van Mander's life was not spent painting, but on writing. Literature and poetry could be more explicitly Mennonite, although Mennonite writers like Van Mander also worked in the tradition of the Renaissance and classical authors. Like painting, writing

⁸¹ Miedema, Jaarboek pp. 121-125

⁸² Zijlstra, pp. 485

⁸³ Leesberg, pp. 46-53

⁸⁴ Leesberg, pp. 43

⁸⁵ *Levensbericht*, fol. S2r: '[...] weynich beminders in Hollant, ofsy hebben van sijn dinghen.'

⁸⁶ Leesberg, pp. 6

⁸⁷ A. De Vries, 'Hondius meets Van Mander: The Cultural Appropriation of the First Netherlandish Book on the Visual Arts System of Knowledge in a Series of Artists' Portraits', in *The Artist as Reader*, ed. H. Damm et al., Leiden 2013, pp. 259-304, pp. 260-261.

⁸⁸ Leesberg, pp. 7

⁸⁹ *Epitaphien ofte graf-schriften ghemaect op het afsterven van Carel van Mander, in sijn leven cloeck schilder ende Poët, overleden zijnde op den 11 september 1606*, Haarlem 1609.

could carry out moral values and pure intentions, which would benefit the community. Basically all Mennonite congregations occupied themselves with the martyrs' stories, which were about those who died for the Mennonite faith during persecutions.⁹⁰ Next to this, lessons for the youth and moral treatises were popular; not only among Mennonites but among all Christian denominations. Typical Mennonite religious writings were their hymns and songs.⁹¹

4.2.1 Mennonite poetry

Mennonite poetry had two main purposes: devotion and didactics.⁹² Religious poetry was very popular among the Mennonites, and every congregation had their own books of songs and hymns.⁹³ Whereas most Christian congregations only sang psalms during their services, the Mennonites had their own songs in addition to these.⁹⁴ Psalms were Old Testament songs, and because the Mennonites preferred the New Testament over the Old Testament they refused to exclusively use the psalms.⁹⁵ They created songs and hymns based on New Testament scenes, and those spiritual songs served as connections between the faithful and God.⁹⁶

The songs were in accordance with a longstanding Dutch tradition of songbooks, both profane and religious, intended for use by laymen.⁹⁷ Mennonite hymns had religious lyrics, but their melodies were often taken from pre-existing profane songs. Whereas the religious songs of Catholics, Calvinists and Lutherans made up an official church repertory that was strictly separated from worldly songs, the Mennonites did not – and were criticized for it. They were of the opinion that a secular melody was transformed into a religious one when the liturgical lyrics were sung to it and the singer was supposed to forget the original context.⁹⁸ Often, one passage from the Bible was taken and put onto a melody, and elaborated upon with more biblical quotes. Stylistic and literary innovations were also incorporated in the Mennonite hymns. Discussions about the nature of poetry and literature in Karel van Mander's time were mainly in the hands of the *rederijkskamers*, or Chambers of Rhetoric.⁹⁹

4.2.2 Chambers of Rhetoric

Chambers of Rhetoric came into existence after 1400, and their members produced literature for public feasts and companies, often with a moralizing message.¹⁰⁰ Writing in this period was only a small part of being an intellectual – writers educated each other, kept each other updated about current developments and practiced their rhetorical skills.¹⁰¹ For the *rederijkers*, the literary tradition was considered very important, including both classical and

⁹⁰ Zijlstra, pp. 489

⁹¹ Spies, pp. 84.

⁹² Zijlstra, pp. 487

⁹³ Zijlstra, pp. 488

⁹⁴ L. P. Grijp, 'A different flavor in a psalm-minded setting: Dutch Mennonite hymns from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,' in *From Martyr to Muppy [...]*, ed. A. Hamilton et al., pp. 110-132, pp. 112, pp. 112.

⁹⁵ Zijlstra, pp. 488

⁹⁶ Spies, pp. 83

⁹⁷ Grijp, pp. 16-17

⁹⁸ Grijp, pp. 114-116

⁹⁹ Zijlstra, pp. 488

¹⁰⁰ A. Dixhoorn, *Lustige geesten: Rederijkers in de Noordelijke Nederlanden (1480-1650)*, Amsterdam, 2009, pp. 13

¹⁰¹ Dixhoorn, pp. 192, 267

contemporary authors. With the influence of humanism, new literary principles from the Italian and French Renaissance were introduced in Dutch literature.¹⁰²

Stress on the use of the vernacular was both a religious and a literary concern. Classical and Neo-classical works were translated and published in the vernacular, and made accessible to a broader public. Around the same period the Bible was translated into the vernacular to improve accessibility. The Chambers of Rhetoric focussed on the vernacular by publishing mainly in Dutch, and trying to standardise and unify grammar and vocabulary.¹⁰³ They tried to develop the language and make it suitable for spreading information efficiently, in the hope that consequently it would stimulate individual thinking among the wider public.¹⁰⁴

The Chambers of Rhetoric often existed of a mixed structure that brought academics and amateurs interested in literature together, and in this way served as an intermediary for all types of social and intellectual classes.¹⁰⁵ Already around the early sixteenth century, reformed ideas were discussed, criticised, processed and spread by the Chambers of Rhetoric. The members of the Chambers had different religious affiliations, and both Catholics and reformed people were represented in them.¹⁰⁶

4.2.2.1 Rederijkers in Haarlem

Haarlem knew several *rederijkerkamers* since before 1570, and from 1580 onwards the town – together with Leiden en Amsterdam – became a centre for Renaissance literary studies.¹⁰⁷ From the mid 1580s onwards, when the stream of refugees came from the southern Netherlands, many new *rederijkers* came who founded their own Chambers.¹⁰⁸ The Chambers in Haarlem served as intersections of many social classes; many painters, gold- and silversmiths and publishers were among the members, for example.¹⁰⁹ Not only were painters involved in the Chambers, the Chambers were also closely involved with the guild of St. Luke in Haarlem.¹¹⁰ This diversity also made that Catholics, Calvinists and Mennonites were all represented in the Chambers of Rhetoric in Haarlem.¹¹¹

4.2.3 Karel van Mander as poet

Karel van Mander was interested in Italian literary concepts and the classical past, and he incorporated these in his work. When he moved to Haarlem he became engaged with the group of intellectuals around the poets and rhetoricians Coornhert and Spieghel, which occupied itself with the development of the Dutch language.¹¹² In 1592 he may have been

¹⁰² Dixhoorn, pp. 13, 189, 267

¹⁰³ Dixhoorn, pp. 268

¹⁰⁴ Dixhoorn, pp. 292

¹⁰⁵ Dixhoorn, pp. 273

¹⁰⁶ Dixhoorn, pp. 121

¹⁰⁷ Dixhoorn, pp. 13, 47

¹⁰⁸ Dixhoorn, pp. 47

¹⁰⁹ Dixhoorn, pp. 116

¹¹⁰ Dixhoorn, pp. 117

¹¹¹ Dixhoorn, pp. 121

¹¹² Dixhoorn, pp. 277

involved in the foundation of a Chamber of Rhetoric himself in Haarlem, *De Witte Angieren*; he was a member for sure.¹¹³

4.2.3.1 Secular poetry

The painter and poet Lucas de Heere was among the first to introduce French and Italian literary ideas in the Low Countries around 1560.¹¹⁴ Since he was the first teacher of Karel van Mander, he no doubt influenced him, also serving as an example of a successful painter-poet. Karel's education caused him to be one of the few Mennonites of his time who had received a classical education and could read ancient Latin.¹¹⁵ He did not only use his knowledge of languages to gather information for his *Schilder-Boeck*, he also translated several works into vernacular Dutch. He seems to have been concerned with the Dutch language, and the accessibility to many historical and foreign works translations could provide.¹¹⁶

In 1597, Karel translated Vergil's *Bucolica et Georgica* into Dutch as *Bucolica en Georgica, dat is, Ossen-stal en Landt-werck*, which he dedicated to his colleague the painter Goltzius. Humanist influences can clearly be seen here; first because it is the translation of a classical Latin work, secondly because Van Mander himself mentions that he will follow the 'new French style' in this work.¹¹⁷ Additionally, posthumously in 1611, his translation of the Iliad after the French translation by Hugues Salel was published as *De eerste XII boecken vande Ilyadas*.¹¹⁸ In the introduction to the first part of his *Schilder-Boeck*, the *Grondt*, Van Mander discusses methods and techniques of poetical composition, based on French and Italian rhyme-schedules.¹¹⁹

4.2.3.2 Religious poetry

Next to being one of the central figures in the literary developments of the sixteenth century in the Low Countries, Van Mander was an important figure within Mennonite religious publications.¹²⁰ It is known from his biography that before he went to Italy, he already published religious plays and songs based on biblical themes. For example, he wrote a play about Noah and the Flood, and later also a play about King David, but unfortunately those are all lost.¹²¹

During his time in Haarlem, several religious works from his hand were published. In 1595, *Dat hooghe liedt Salomo, met noch andere gheestelycke liedekens* ('The Song of Songs by Salomo, including more Spiritual Songs') was published, which contained Mennonite

¹¹³ Leesberg, pp. 38; Dixhoorn, pp. 109

¹¹⁴ W. Waterschoot, 'Marot or Ronsard? New French Poetics among Dutch Rhetoricians in the Second Half of the 16th Century,' in *Rhetoric-Rhetoriqueurs-Rederijkers*, ed. J. Koopmans et al., Amsterdam 1995, pp. 141-156.

¹¹⁵ Zilverberg, pp. 181

¹¹⁶ Spies, pp. 85; R. Jacobsen, *Carel van Mander (1548-1606). Dichter en Prozaschrijver*, Ph.D. thesis, Rijksuniversiteit Leiden 1906, pp. 63

¹¹⁷ Van Mander, *Bucolica en Georgica*, fol. A2r: 'Nieu Fransche wijs ic volgh' [...]

¹¹⁸ G. J. Van Bork and P. J. Verkuijsse, *De Nederlandse en Vlaamse auteurs van middeleeuwen tot heden met inbegrip van de Friese auteurs*, Weesp 1985, pp. 370

¹¹⁹ Van Mander, fol. 4v*-5r*

¹²⁰ Dixhoorn, pp. 278-279

¹²¹ *Levensbericht*, fol. R3r – R3v; Van Bork and Verkuijsse, pp. 370; Zilverberg, pp. 182

songs and hymns that would be used during service and in private. This work was published again in 1597 as *De harpe, oft des herten snarenspeel* ('The Harp, or the Heartstrings' Stirrer'), and in 1605 as *De gulden harpe* ('The Golden Harp').¹²² These poetry- and songbooks were to serve the Mennonite community, and combined high-standard literary quality with devotion. Van Mander was one of the first to apply literary techniques to religious poetry. He stayed close to the Bible and used many literal Bible quotes for his verses – this made his work highly didactic.¹²³ As can be deduced from the fact that it has been republished several times, it was already a popular work within the Mennonite community during Van Mander's life.¹²⁴ A similar songbook of his is *Het herder pijpken* ('The Shepherd's Flute') from 1603.

In honour of the 'golden year' 1600, Van Mander wrote *De Kerck der Deucht* (The Church of Virtue), which was later republished in *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* in 1610; an anthology of ninety poems by twenty Dutch poets, and overall a celebration of the Dutch language.¹²⁵ In the *Helicon*, the poems have been combined into one narrative, and touche upon several topics such as the practice of poetry, the link between art, virtue and religion, and love for art.¹²⁶ The *Kerck* addresses the moral aspects of the artist's existence, discussing the choice between virtue and vice, a theme also scene in the classical story of Hercules, popular among humanists.¹²⁷ Two more works have been published posthumously: *Olijf-Bergh in ofte poëma van den laetsten dagh* ('Mount of Olives, or Poem on the Last Day') in 1609 and *Bethlehem dat is het broodhuys* ('Bethlehem, that is the House of Bread') in 1613. The *Olijf-Bergh* invokes Christ's prophesies on his last day, and is meant as a didactic work.¹²⁸ *Bethlehem* tells about the spiritual songs which the shepherds sung longing for Christ's coming, and it combines Biblical history with evangelical lessons, as does the *Olijf-Bergh*.¹²⁹ As discussed by Jacobsen, Van Mander's poetry could not be mistaken for any Catholic songs, but are explicitly Mennonite in nature.¹³⁰ In the *Gulden Harpe*, for example, one can find an explicit praise of adult baptism.¹³¹

Karel became one of the most influential literary figures and his ideas were further developed after his death by his circle of followers.¹³² In order to find out what milieu Van Mander found himself in, it is best to look at the dedications in his works, plus the introductory, praising poems that can be found in for example the *Schilder-Boeck*. From this becomes clear that it are mainly similarly-minded people, like the painter Goltzius to whom Karel dedicates his translation of the *Bucolica en Georgica* and the notary and art collector Jacques Razet to whom he dedicated his biographies of the ancient painters. Another good source would be *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* and the *Epitaphien*, which both provide us

¹²² Van Bork and Verkruijsse, pp. 370

¹²³ Grijp, pp. 112

¹²⁴ Spies, pp. 84-85; Zilverberg, pp. 182; Zijlstra, pp. 487

¹²⁵ W. Vermeer, 'Den Nederduytschen Helicon,' in *Haarlems Helicon. Literatuur en toneel te Haarlem vóór 1800*, ed. E. K. Grootes, Hilversum 1993, pp. 77-92; see pp. 77. For an extensive analysis of this work, see Vermeer's chapter. Van Mander was the initiator of this work, but it was only finished after his death.

¹²⁶ Vermeer, pp. 79.

¹²⁷ Karel van Mander, *De Kerck der Deucht*, ed. M. Spies and H. Miedema, Amsterdam 1977.

¹²⁸ Spies, pp. 85

¹²⁹ Karel van Mander, *Bethlehem dat is het broodhuys [...]* Amsterdam 1613; Spies, pp. 86

¹³⁰ Jacobsen, pp. 59

¹³¹ Jacobsen, pp. 60

¹³² Dixhoorn, pp. 277

with many names of people that were connected to Karel, either by mention of their names or because of their mottoes.¹³³ Overall, Karel's milieu existed of relatively well-developed intellectuals with at least a basic humanist education.¹³⁴ Part of his contacts were also Mennonites, like the publisher of several of his works Passchier van Wesbusch.¹³⁵

4.2.3.3 Reception of literature

Van Mander might have been more influential as a writer than as a painter. His biographer starts the *Levensbericht* with a discussion of Karel's 'heavenly spirit' embodying the Holy Scripture in his poetry so perfectly, and asks the reader 'what heart has not exulted in [his] Christian melodies which, sung aloud, entered upon open ears and penetrated the innermost of our minds, bringing ineffable joy to hundreds of thousands?'¹³⁶ As discussed above, *Den Nederduytschen Helicon* was published after his death in his honour, and also in the *Epitaphien* he was often remembered as a poet. In his Chamber of Rhetoric, his memory was kept alive and he was honoured as a literary master. Apart from the text published in his honour, his bust decorated the façade of the building of *De Witte Angieren*.¹³⁷

5 The *Schilder-Boeck*

Now we have seen all of this, it is safe to say that Karel van Mander was a multi-faceted man, who incorporated Renaissance concepts from French and Italian poetry into his highly religious hymns and poetry. He moved to Haarlem, where he joined one of the strictest Mennonite congregations, but at the same time he also joined a *rederijderskamer* and the St. Luke's guild. However, his poetry and paintings are not what Van Mander is famous for. He is mainly known for his major work, the *Schilder-Boeck*. This book, first published in Haarlem in 1604, is considered to be the first one of such works published in the Low Countries.¹³⁸ It can be divided in three main parts. The first part is *Den Grondt der Edel vrij Schilder-const* ('The Foundations of the Noble and Free Art of Painting'), a didactic poem on the nature of the visual arts.¹³⁹ Next is the biographical part, in which Van Mander discusses the lives of ancient artists, contemporary Italian artists, and Dutch and German artists.¹⁴⁰ The third and last part is the *Wtleghingh op den Metamorphosis Pub. Ouidij Nasonis*, a commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, followed by an iconographical part on symbols and hieroglyphs; the *Wtbeeldinghe der Figueren* ('Rendering of Figures').¹⁴¹ Especially the

¹³³ Leesberg, pp. 38

¹³⁴ Miedema, *Vasari*, pp. 56

¹³⁵ Miedema, *Jaarboek*, pp. 114

¹³⁶ *Levensbericht*, fol. R1r: 'de opghenomenheydt van u Hemelsche gheest'; fol. R1v: 'Wat herte en heeft hem niet verlusticht in u Christelicke deuntjes, die ghy uytshaterende ten open ooren inne deed vaeren, en dringhen tot in 't ingewant der harsenen, alwaerse bereyden hondert duysent onuytsprekelijcke vreuchde.'

¹³⁷ Dixhoorn, pp. 190

¹³⁸ Van Mander, *Schilder-Boeck*; De Vries, pp. 259.

¹³⁹ Van Mander, fol. 1r – 58v. Hereafter *Grondt*.

¹⁴⁰ 'The Lives of the illustrious Ancient painters, the Egyptians, Greeks as well as the Romans', fol. 58r – 90v; 'The Lives of the illustrious Modern Italian Painters', fol. 91r – 192v; 'The Lives of the Illustrious Dutch and German Painters', fol. 196r – 305r.

¹⁴¹ For this last part of the *Schilder-Boeck* the numbering of the pages starts over again: fol. 1r – 136v. If referred to these folios, *Wtleghingh* will be added to the note.

biographical part of the book is inspired by Vasari's counterpart, *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori, e architettori*, of which Van Mander used the 1568 edition.¹⁴²

The purpose of the *Schilder-Boeck* is plural. The *Grondt* is mainly meant to educate the youth in art and to serve them as an example, but also to entertain the reader.¹⁴³ A second purpose is to make sure that the great painters of the past and present will not be forgotten; it resembles Vasari's *Vite* in this respect.¹⁴⁴ Van Mander tells us in the preface to his Dutch biographies that his teacher Lucas de Heere made an attempt similar to the biographies, but the latter's work got lost so Van Mander tried again.¹⁴⁵ In the same preface, he tells us that Vasari was a great source of information for his work concerning the Italian artists.¹⁴⁶ Concerning the Dutch painters he tried to gather information himself and order it properly, but he tells us that people often could not provide the information he needed.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, he managed to gather a wealth of information about Northern painters, and the book partly serves to praise them and elevate their status.¹⁴⁸

Van Mander discusses several purposes of art. Several times he mentions that art loves wealth, so he recognizes that it will give you a living if you do it well, and he does not seem to have problem with this, despite the fact that painting was seen as a free and noble art.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, he often stresses the didactic purpose of art and the way it can be used to educate the young in pious and moral matters, in order to refute people who say it is useless or dangerous. Van Mander says in his dedication of the Italian *Lives* to Bartholomeus Ferreris that art stirs up feelings and incites the youth to follow pious examples.¹⁵⁰ On the title page of the *Wilegghingh* this becomes clear too, because he explicitly states this part is meant to boost pious and honest ways of living.¹⁵¹

The *Schilder-Boeck* has been approached in scholarly research with what seem to be different Karels in mind. Shank argues that the book was fully inspired by his pacifist Mennonite background and that this is clearly visible – although he does not explain how or where – whereas Zijlstra clearly states that no Mennonite motives can be traced back in his *Schilder-Boeck*.¹⁵² These are two extremes, the difference in interpretation raises interesting questions. It seems like both authors read a different *Schilder-Boeck*, and I would like to investigate what elements they got from it to base their argument on, which the following section will be dedicated to.

¹⁴² De Vries, pp. 259; Noë, 326-327

¹⁴³ Title pages biographies: fol. 58r, 91r and 196r; see also, fol. 4v

¹⁴⁴ Miedema, *Vasari*, pp. 6

¹⁴⁵ Van Mander, fol. 198v

¹⁴⁶ Van Mander, fol. 198r: 'T'is waer dat my, aengaende d'Italische Schilders, groote verlichtinghe is gheschiedt door de schriften Vasari, den welcken heel breedt van zijn Landtslyuden handelt.' For a discussion of Van Mander's sources, see Miedema, *Een vergelijking tussen Van Mander en Vasari*, and H. Noë, *Carel van Mander in Italië*, The Hague 1954.

¹⁴⁷ Van Mander, fol. 198v

¹⁴⁸ De Vries, pp. 265. An example is Van Mander, fol. 199r, where he writes that no other people, not even the Greeks and the Romans, had such a good painters as the Dutch, namely Johannes van Eyck.

¹⁴⁹ For example, Van Mander, fol. 199v; fol. 219r

¹⁵⁰ Van Mander, fol. 92r

¹⁵¹ Van Mander, *Wilegghingh*, fol. 1r: 'Alles streckende tot voordering des vromen en eerlijcken borgherlijcken wandels.'

¹⁵² Shank, pp. 232; Zijlstra, pp. 485

5.1 God: Christianity in the *Schilder-Boeck*

5.1.1 Talent, God, and *Natuere*

Overall, Van Mander seems to be of the opinion that a talent for painting comes from Nature, or *Natuere*, rather than from God. In the first chapter of the *Grondt*, Van Mander tells us the importance of *Natuere*: ‘You will not make it sooner or later than you have Nature’s support. Without Nature one cannot become a painter’.¹⁵³ He adds that it will become clear early on in one’s life whether an individual will be a talented painter or not.¹⁵⁴

In his biographies, these ideas are presented on numerous occasions. Nature has endowed Giorgione with talent and he was recognized by his fellow painters as a great artist; Nature steered Cimabue away from his predestined career as a writer towards painting; Lucas van Leyden is chosen by Nature; ‘Nature had imparted on [Rogier van der Weyde’s] noble spirit [...] the light of understanding’ after a dark period in the art of painting; and Jan Mostart was drawn to the art of painting by Nature when he was still very young, to name just a few examples.¹⁵⁵ In the life of Philipppo Lippi, Van Mander adds that talent for painting is not hereditary but only given by nature.¹⁵⁶ Also, even though he acknowledges that working hard is necessary to develop one’s talent, he says that with merely diligence one will not make it as a painter. Hard work pays off only if you have the talent; if not, you will never become a great painter.

Sometimes this *Natuere* is inspired by Heaven, for example in the biography of Leonardo da Vinci: ‘It is to be marvelled at, how the mild Heaven sometimes pours into one human body such great natural and supernatural gifts [...]’.¹⁵⁷ However, here too Van Mander adds ‘to which art [painting] he is drawn by Nature’.¹⁵⁸ The same he does in the life of Raphael, and in the life of Bartholomeus Spranger he even indicates that Nature is assisted by a heavenly outpouring, so Nature is made secondary to heaven.¹⁵⁹

Several times when Karel discusses the death of a painter, he involves God in it. Examples of this are the Life of Cornelis Ketel, where he says that ‘[...] we leave the life of Ketel in the merciful hands of the Almighty’ or the Life of Don Giulio da Caravaggio, who ‘they saw give up his art-full, noble spirit to God’.¹⁶⁰

Also when one looks at his more original writing, like his dedications or the *Grondt*, one can observe that God is mentioned more often than in the biographies for example. In chapter 1 of the *Grondt*, the *Vermaninghe* (‘Exhortations’), Van Mander instructs the youth to thank God for their gift, and to be aware that He can easily take away what He gave us, as

¹⁵³ Van Mander, fol. 1v: ‘Ghy en comtter niet over vroegh noch late, Of ghy en hebt de *Natuere* te bate. Sonder *Natuere* cannen geen *Schilder* worden.’

¹⁵⁴ Idem.

¹⁵⁵ Van Mander, fol. 115r; fol. 94r; fol. 211r; fol. 206v: ‘[...] heel vroegh in onsen voorigen donckere[n] Constijt heeft laten blincken t’licht der vernuftheyt, dat de *Natuere* in zynen edelen gheest hadde deelachtigh ghemaect, en ontsteken hadde.’; fol. 229r

¹⁵⁶ Van Mander, fol. 109r

¹⁵⁷ Van Mander, fol. 111v: ‘Het is verwonderlijck, hoe den Hemel soo mildelijck somwijlen afstort, in een eenigh Menschen lichaem, soo groote natuerlijcke en overnatuerlijcke gaven [...]’.

¹⁵⁸ Idem.: ‘Tot wat Const hem de *Natuere* aenlockt’.

¹⁵⁹ Van Mander, fol. 117r ; fol. 268r-v

¹⁶⁰ Van Mander, fol. 280r: ‘Hier mede laten wy nu t’leven van Ketel in des Almoghenden ghenadighe handen’; fol. 263r: ‘welcken sy daer sagen zynen constighen edelen gheest Gode opgegeven.’

opposed to *Natuere*.¹⁶¹ In his dedications, he often ends his message with a wish of good health and fortune for the dedicatee, with God's grace.¹⁶²

It is interesting to see that Vasari in his *Vite* mentioned *Dio* as a source of the painters' inspiration and talent, whereas Van Mander mentioned *Natuere*, sometimes preceded by a 'Heavenly outpouring', but almost never explicitly *God* – except in his dedications.¹⁶³ The Italian and Dutch lives are similar in this regard. It is different for the *Ancient Lives*, in which both *Natuere* and Heaven are virtually never presented as a source of talent or inspiration. Van Mander acknowledges that there were very talented painters, such as Bularchus, who was 'during such early times already so talented and experienced', but he does not mention a giver of this talent.¹⁶⁴ This makes me think that *Natuere* is a Christian concept after all, but only used by Van Mander for the painters who knew or could have 'known' Christ and God. Nature is God's creation, and via this divine creation the painters receive their talent – thus, indirectly via God. A particular element is that in almost all cases where Vasari uses *Dio*, Karel has changed it into *Natuere*. The questions that remains, then, is that if for Van Mander *Natuere* is a Christian concept, why he did not use the word *God*.

5.1.2 Morals, virtues, and vices

Van Mander seems to put a lot of focus not so much on the works which the painters produced, but rather on their behaviour and morals.¹⁶⁵ Van Mander wants his book to be an example for the youth in several ways, and the *Grondt* serves as an example for the art of painting. The *Lives*, on the other hand, seem to provide examples of proper ways of living for an artist, and sometimes Van Mander literally says that young painters should or should not do certain things other painters did. His selective use of Vasari's *Vite* shows, according to Noë, that indeed his main aim was to show characters his readers should model themselves after rather than the works they should take as an example for their own art.¹⁶⁶ Miedema points out that Vasari's use of the word and concept of virtue, or *virtù*, is mainly focussed on the quality of the painter's work rather than personal characteristics as for Van Mander.¹⁶⁷

5.1.2.1 Good examples

Overall, painters should be friendly and polite, and lead a honest and modest life, in order to receive 'mercy and friendship [...] with God and all people'.¹⁶⁸ A characteristic that Van Mander highly appreciated was piety. This not only becomes evident when he says about Lucas Gaffel van Helmont that his piety was equal to his art and perception; the story which he tells of the shipwreck of Hendrick Cornelisz Vroom in front of the Portuguese coast serves to emphasize the importance of piety too.¹⁶⁹ With several people, Vroom managed to climb on a rock, while all their belongings floated ashore. Among these were devotional pieces that

¹⁶¹ Van Mander, fol. 6r

¹⁶² For example Van Mander, fol. 59v; fol. 92v.

¹⁶³ See also Miedema, *Vasari*, pp. 21-23. Sometimes it slipped through (e.g. Life of Michelangelo), but overall he seemed to have been rather consistent with adapting it.

¹⁶⁴ Van Mander, fol. 64r: '[...] die onwijslijck in soo vroegen tijdt seer constich en ervaren was'

¹⁶⁵ Miedema, *Vasari*, pp. 15. He leaves out many paintings, but includes stories about behaviour and character.

¹⁶⁶ Noë, pp. 327

¹⁶⁷ Miedema, *Vasari*, p. 24

¹⁶⁸ Van Mander, fol. 3v: '[...] om ghenade en vrientschap [...] vercrijghen bij Gode end' alle Menschen.'

¹⁶⁹ Van Mander, fol. 220r; fol. 287v-288r

the painter had had with him, and eventually the monks of the monastery that was located on the coast were convinced because of these ‘schilderikens van devotie[n]’ that the stranded people were good Christians and saved them. As soon as they got to land they went to the little church and thanked God. Van Mander adds that without Vroom and his pieces, this boat crew would not have survived, and ‘thus it is (as they say) good to consort with the *vromen* (pious)’.¹⁷⁰

Van Mander describes works of art not only in terms of composition, subject and colour, he often remarks that the diligence and patience it was made with are visible in the painting as well. He lauds diligence and hard work, and considers these to be highly important.¹⁷¹ Willem Key is praised because even though he was rich and prosperous, he was ‘not extravagant or wasteful, [and] always diligent regarding work and earning money’.¹⁷² About Joachim Patenier it is said ‘that he was a master of great patience or diligence who put a great deal of time and effort into his works,’ and that this was indeed visible from his works.¹⁷³ Van Mander states that diligence, hard work and practice as additions to Nature’s gift can lead to great things and results: ‘Painters, scholars [...], princes and captains have, by suppressing laziness, ascended by hard work to renown and honour’.¹⁷⁴

Van Mander does not only praise virtuousness and good morals in the behaviour of painters, he also praises pious and chaste scenes, such as the depiction of the story of David and Abigail by Hugo van der Goes, where ‘[t]he great modesty to be seen in these women is particularly to be admired in this’, and he recommends the painters of his time to give their women some moral education so they can learn to imitate them.¹⁷⁵

5.1.2.2 Bad examples

Apart from praising good examples, Van Mander also provides his reader with examples that should not be followed. In his *Grondt*, he explicitly states what kind of behaviour to avoid, for example: ‘So that the painterly youths avoids drunkenness’.¹⁷⁶ Additionally, painters should be eloquent, and not quarrel and scold.¹⁷⁷ A bad example is Lucas van Leyden, who – after he got married – ‘wasted a great deal of time on banquets and festivities’.¹⁷⁸ He criticizes overconsumption, but Van Mander also seems to be worried about wasting time. Another painter squandering time and lapsing into drunkenness ‘to the

¹⁷⁰ Van Mander, fol. 287v-288r: ‘daerom (so men seght) is goet met den vromen om gaen’. This is also a pun on his name; ‘vromen’ is the plural of ‘vroom’; it is good to consort with Vroom, as well as with pious people; both is alluded to here.

¹⁷¹ Van Mander, fol. 183r

¹⁷² Van Mander, fol. 232v: ‘Hy was van goeden vermogen en rijk, doch niet overdoende noch quistigh: maer atlijts vlijtigh om wercken en winnen.’

¹⁷³ Van Mander, fol. 219v: ‘[...]dan zijn wercken, die men te veel plaetsen by den beminders siet, ghetuygen ghenoech, dat hy een Meester is gheweest van groote pacientie oft ghedult, grousaem veel tijdt en werck in zijn dinghen doende.’

¹⁷⁴ Van Mander, fol. 3r: ‘Constenaers, Gheleerde, veel t’eender sommen, Princen, Capiteynen, door’t onderdrucken der luyheyt, zijn met arbeydt op gheclommen tot vermaertheyt, en ter eeren ghecommen.’ See also De Vries, pp. 294-295.

¹⁷⁵ Van Mander, fol. 203v: ‘Hier is bysonder te verwonderen wat een groote zedicheyt als in dese Vroukens te sien is [...]’

¹⁷⁶ Van Mander, fol. 3r: ‘Dat de Schilder-jeucht, dronke[n]schap vermijden moet.’

¹⁷⁷ Van Mander, fol. 3v

¹⁷⁸ Van Mander, fol. 212v: ‘[...] en verloor t’zijnen leetwesen doe veel tijt met banckettere[n] and goet chiere maken.’

detriment of his art and his noble talent’, was Frans Floris, who ‘was held to be as great a drunkard as a painter’.¹⁷⁹ Van Mander continues to reprimand the abuse of alcohol and discusses its shamefulness elaborately. Basically, the talent of painting should not be wasted by misbehaviour.¹⁸⁰

Occasionally, Van Mander leaves out painters that are found in Vasari’s work, as is the case with for example Giovannantonio Verzelli. Karel avoids mentioning Verzelli’s sexual orientation and nickname, Il Sodoma, and he is only sporadically mentioned in the lives of other painters such as Beccafumi.¹⁸¹ Miedema concludes based on this example and some more, that Van Mander avoided eccentricity and left out information, and sometimes entire biographies, that did not provide the right moral example.¹⁸² As has been discussed above, this is not entirely true since Van Mander every once in a while includes negative characteristics as examples of what not to do, but overall Miedema seems to be right in assessing that Van Mander was highly focussed on moral behaviour and virtues and vices of painters.

Furthermore, he does not approve of pride and arrogance, and he introduces his biographies of still-living Dutch artists by saying that he hopes that his laudatory pen will not make anyone ‘elevate himself too much in his spirit’.¹⁸³ Even though he recognizes numerous times that art can lead to wealth and he does not seem to have problem with making a living from it, painters have to be cautious so as not to get too greedy. Van Mander praises Goltzius, whose motto is *Honour above Gold*, and who is concerned with art alone in a modest manner, not involved in gossip or any other worldly distractions.¹⁸⁴ The same can be said for Hans van Aken, who was ‘harmful to no one but helpful to all’, and very far removed from self-conceit and ‘poisonous tongues [causing] others trouble and grief’.¹⁸⁵

5.1.3 The Church as an institution

The Mennonites saw their congregation as a gathering of believers, mainly in a spiritual way, and they broke with many of the practices by the Catholic Church. Van Mander wrote his *Schilder-Boeck* after the early stages of the reformation were over, and had experienced the unrest first hand. In his biographies, he does not discuss these issues often, especially considering how influential they were in society. The only aspect that seems to recur numerous times on which he Van Mander has a strong opinion is the Iconoclasm.

Van Mander describes people who went to Italy and visited Cardinals or worked for them. When he mentions these religious patrons, however, he does not seem to be concerned with them too much. While discussing some portraits by Durer, he says one is ‘representing a cardinal, or some other ecclesiastic person’, which comes across as rather indifferent, as if he

¹⁷⁹ Van Mander, 240r: ‘soo dat hy de Const en zynen edelen gheest ongelijck doende, werdt ghehouden voor een also groot Dronkaert als Schilder.’

¹⁸⁰ Van Mander, fol. 225r

¹⁸¹ Miedema, *Vasari*, pp. 10

¹⁸² Miedema, *Vasari*, pp. 10-11

¹⁸³ Van Mander, 265r: ‘[...] niemant ontmaetlijck in zynen gheest opstijghen sal.’

¹⁸⁴ Van Mander, fol. 286r: ‘Eer boven Golt’

¹⁸⁵ Van Mander, 290v: ‘dewijl hy allen Constnaren goetgunstigh wesende, niemant schadigh maer voordierlijck is’; ‘[...] anderen met giftigher tongen hinder en leedt doen.’

does not care what kind of person it is exactly.¹⁸⁶ The same can be observed when Van Mander discusses the pope's commission with Joseph d'Arpino for the decoration of the San Giovanni in Laterano in the year 1600. Karel only focusses on how much money d'Arpino receives for the job, and he does not make any remarks about church decoration or critique on the expenditures of the Church.¹⁸⁷

Even though Van Mander himself was a follower of reformed ideas, he discusses that Rome, after a period of decline, started to recover under the 'peaceful rule of the popes'.¹⁸⁸ This positive remark about the popes seems to be opposed to what he says two pages later, namely that 'Luther began to stir up the world with his teachings'.¹⁸⁹ Of course it was the case during the sixteenth century there was great upheaval connected to the reformation and especially in the Low Countries when the revolt against Spain started, but still one might expect that Van Mander would address a reformer like Luther in a more positive light, especially when compared to how he discusses the Catholic pope.¹⁹⁰

Van Mander seems to just mention the popes as commissioners or hosts at times, without attaching a judgment to this. Occasionally, he calls the pope 'Holiness' instead of 'Pope', but most often he stays very neutral. He is not outspokenly negative towards the popes and cardinals and their lavish commissions, be they individual or for the Church. He remarks that they pay their painters well and that the artists are welcomed in a friendly way at their palaces, like Raphael was.¹⁹¹ Cardinals and Popes are sometimes of art, and in this regard they seemed praised and accepted, perhaps even put in a positive light.¹⁹²

Even more so than with the Popes, when Van Mander talks about Rome, he emphasizes the role this city has played in the development of art. He does not mention Rome as the central city of the Catholic Church or the place where the Pope lives, he rather discusses Rome as a centre of art, 'being the leader of Pictura's academies'; a place painters should travel to.¹⁹³ Rome seems to be the city of painters, not the city of the Pope or the Church.¹⁹⁴

5.1.4 Religious scenes

Art in a religious context is different from profane art. The Mennonites rejected large parts of organized religion, and especially in the earlier years silent prayer and spontaneous sermons were common.¹⁹⁵ During the early decades of the Mennonite faith, it was illegal for Mennonites to practice their faith, and as a result there were no official or permanent Mennonite buildings. Instead, they worshipped where gathering was the easiest: in the open

¹⁸⁶ Van Mander, fol. 208v: 'wesende eenigh Cardinael, ofty geestlijck Persoon.'

¹⁸⁷ Van Mander, fol. 190r

¹⁸⁸ Van Mander, fol. 234r: 'maer doe eyndlingh Room haer begon beter bevoelen[n] onder de vredighe heerschinge der Pausen [...]'

¹⁸⁹ Van Mander, fol. 235r: 'op dien tijdt Lutherus met zijn leeringhe de gheruste Weerelt begon te beroeren.'

¹⁹⁰ Van Mander mentions the Dutch Revolt against Spain, under leadership of the Prince of Orange, fol. 260r

¹⁹¹ Van Mander, fol. 108v; 111v; 118r

¹⁹² Van Mander, fol. 3v*; 119v; 160r; 263r

¹⁹³ Van Mander, fol. 6v: '[...] wesende het hoofd der Picturae Scholen welcke noch de hooge Academie der Schilders is.'

¹⁹⁴ Van Mander, fol. 291v

¹⁹⁵ Mochizuki, pp. 196

air, at people's homes or in barns.¹⁹⁶ From the late sixteenth century onwards, when different religious convictions were tolerated by law, Mennonites got their own buildings. However, they continued the simple style that represented their way of life, but apart from this no uniform Mennonite architectural style developed.¹⁹⁷ Finding written treatises debating this plain and simple style is difficult.¹⁹⁸ In this sober, simple way of worship focused on the Scripture and inner spirituality, images did not have a place, and contemplation of touching of sacred objects was considered idolatry.¹⁹⁹

5.1.4.1 *Beeldt and Historie*

The Italians during the fifteenth century divided religious pictures into two categories: images (*imagini*) and stories (*storie*).²⁰⁰ The purpose of images was devotion and usually they portrayed one person, such as a saint. Stories were didactic and showed narratives, usually taken from the Bible, and both types of paintings were present in churches.²⁰¹ This distinction can also be found back in Italian writing – Vasari uses it systematically – and in Van Mander's work. Not only in the *Italian Lives*, but also in the Dutch biographies, Van Mander systematically makes the division between *beeldt* (image) and *historie* (narrative). When discussing art in churches, Van Mander often calls images of Mary a *Mari-beeldt*, *Mary-beeldt*, *Mary-beeldekens* or variations of the sort.²⁰² He does the same for other alone-standing figures, such as Evangelists or prophets. The distinction with narratives becomes clear for example in the life of Taddeo Zucchero: 'In this church Taddeo made several images: the vault, divided crosswise, he decorated with Evangelists, Sybils, prophets, and he also made four histories of Christ and Mary'.²⁰³

Overall, Van Mander seems not to have any problems with art in churches. He discusses the *beelden* in the same manner as the *histories*, and draw the attention mainly to their painterly qualities such as colour or composition rather than the fact that they are religious scenes or persons. He follows Vasari in the development of art as declining after Late Antiquity and condemning the Byzantine iconoclasts in the eight century.²⁰⁴ Van Mander seems to be in favour of the popes, such as Gregory, who protected paintings in churches because of their didactic function – which makes sense with his Mennonite attention for religious education – but warned against idolatry.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁶ H. Funk, 'Today's Church Buildings in the Anabaptist Mennonite Tradition,' *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 73, 1999, pp. 355-367.

¹⁹⁷ Funk, pp. 356

¹⁹⁸ See for a more in-depth discussion of Mennonite church history K. Sprunger, 'Mennonite Debates about Church Architecture in Europe and America: Questions of History and Theology,' *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 73, 1999, p. 306-322; and J. M. Janzen, 'Anabaptist-Mennonite Spaces and Places of Worship,' *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 73, 1999, pp. 151-167.

¹⁹⁹ Woolstra, pp. 16

²⁰⁰ Hope, pp. 804-805

²⁰¹ Hope, pp. 804

²⁰² Van Mander is not consistent in his spelling, which explains the different forms of describing images of Mary.

²⁰³ Van Mander, fol. 161v: 'In dees Kerck dede Taddeo verscheyden Beelden: het welfsel cruyswijs bedeeft, maeckte Evangelisten, Sibillen, en Propheten, met noch vier Historien van Christus en Maria.'

²⁰⁴ Also see Miedema, *Vasari*, pp. 5

²⁰⁵ Van Mander, fol. 93r

It is to be expected that Van Mander is talking only about histories here; from his Mennonite point of view, *historien* should not be a problem since they are not meant for devotion – and thus could not lead to idolatry – but rather to educate. The concept of *beeldt*, however, might be expected to be more problematic but still Van Mander seems to be as upset about the destruction of *beelden* as of the destruction of *histories*, and he is concerned with the damage to art when Emperor Leo the Third implemented physical punishment for everyone who had an image of Christ, Mary or any other Saint.²⁰⁶ The art seems to be more important to him here than the religious connotations, controversies, or theological debates.

5.1.5 Iconoclasm in the sixteenth century

A similar negative attitude towards the destruction of art can be seen in his discussions of the Iconoclasm during the sixteenth century in the Low Countries. Van Mander is very judgmental about this, and considers the people who destroyed the works of art to be barbaric and crude. Van Mander narrates many times about works of art destroyed in the *beeldstorminge* or *kerck-braeck*.²⁰⁷ Often he adds value judgments, and calls it the ‘mindless fanaticism of the Iconoclasm’; destruction by evil and barbaric hands in the fanaticism and ignorant frenzy; and works by great masters ‘lamentably for art, destroyed by defiling hands through savage stupidity’.²⁰⁸ In the life of Hugo van der Goes, Van Mander discusses an anonymous painter, and is surprised ‘that [he], who belonged to the art himself, would want to vandalise and destroy such an art-full, noble piece, certainly to great detriment and disgrace for the art of painting; that someone ought to have witnessed that with tearful eyes.’²⁰⁹ Overall, Van Mander seems to be more concerned with the fact that art is destroyed, whether it are narrative scenes or *beelden*, which is surprising regarding his Mennonite background.

5.2 The Gods in the *Schilder-Boeck*

As we have seen before, Van Mander had received a Latin and French education, went to Italy for his painting career, and from his translation of Vergil and literary developments and techniques it becomes clear he had an interest in classical poetry too. He was involved in the development of the Dutch language – the interest in vernacular languages was an aspect of humanism. His years in Italy proved to be a major influence on his development as an artist, as well as on his *Schilder-Boeck*. He did not only encounter the great art-works of the Renaissance, but also met several artists who would provide him with information for his book later.²¹⁰ As discussed before, this influence was not so much visible in his paintings regarding technique, but it was visible in his ideas and theories that he had studied in Italy, which he shared with his colleague-painters in Haarlem, and incorporated in his *Schilder-Boeck*, either consciously or sometimes perhaps unconsciously.²¹¹ He could not have known

²⁰⁶ Van Mander, fol. 93v

²⁰⁷ Some examples: Van Mander, fol. 206r; 207v; 210v, 217r-v; 224v; 238v;

²⁰⁸ Van Mander 204r: ‘den onverstandighen yver der Kerck-braeck,; fol. 241r and fol. 254r; fol. 244r: [...] zijn van scheyndige handen, tot jammer der Const, door het woest onverstandt vernielt.’

²⁰⁹ Van Mander, fol. 204r: ‘dat een die self van der Const was, soo constighen edel werck heeft willen verderven en te niet doen: wislijck tot groote injurie en oneere der Schilder-const, die sulcx wel hadde moghen met betraenden ooghen aensien.’

²¹⁰ Noë pp. ix; Greve, pp. 10.

²¹¹ De Vries, pp. 26

all the art treatises that were circulating in Italy, but the ideas they contained had been widespread among the painterly community for a while by the time he went to Italy, so it is unavoidable he encountered them. The *rederijkers* in Haarlem were closely connected to the guild of St. Luke, and innovations from both sides were mutually influential.²¹²

Van Mander's interest in classical antiquity and its comeback during his time can be seen in his *Schilder-Boeck* too. Most obviously, the last part of his work consist of a commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and an iconological guide book. Additionally, iconological and humanistic ideas on the art of painting are visible throughout his work too, but often less explicitly pointed out by Van Mander. Both elements will be discussed below.

5.2.1 *Wtleghingh: Commentary on Ovid's Metamorphoses*

The *Wtleghingh* is Van Mander's commentary on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The book seems to be separated from the rest of the *Schilder-Boeck*: the paging starts at fol. 1r again, and the work has a separate title page. Whereas the rest of Van Mander's book is dedicated to the art of painting, the *Wtleghingh* does not explicitly refer to it: the information is as relevant for painters as it is for poets or other intellectuals. At first sight it might be difficult to reconcile a commentary on Ovid with strict Mennonitism. In his introduction, however, Van Mander provides the reader with an explanation of why he wrote this commentary, which is twofold: explain its didactic use – useful for everyone – and its iconological use for painters and poets.

Commentaries on Ovid's work had been written already since the twelfth century, and by the sixteenth century, the *Metamorphoses* were translated, commented on or illustrated more than any other work from Antiquity.²¹³ Interpretations based on religious allegories start to disappear around this time, while allegories of a more general moral nature seem to increase.²¹⁴ Van Mander fits into this last category, as will become evident.

Van Mander is very convinced that poetry has the power to touch people's hearts, and by doing this, makes them live a better life by moderating their thoughts, tame lust and become pure in will and action, 'in order to finally reach peace of soul and mind'.²¹⁵ For the Mennonites poetry and hymns could have this function – religious poetry that is. Yet, Van Mander is talking about Ovid's *Metamorphoses* here; a classical work discussing pagan gods and myths. He addresses the fact that critics have said that the *Metamorphoses* were too unbelievable, with stories about people changing into trees and animals, but Van Mander says they have not reached the core by biting through the metaphorical husk, and that it is time that 'one should realize that they have another meaning and purpose'.²¹⁶ He then tells his reader that similarly not all Christian stories should be taken literally, but are also meant symbolically.

The next issue addressed is the fact that people question how these pagan non-Christians can still convey these proper values and morals. According to Van Mander, 'the

²¹² Dixhoorn, pp. 117

²¹³ Sluijter, pp. 170

²¹⁴ Sluijter, pp. 175. For a more extensive analysis of the development of commentaries on the *Metamorphoses*, see Sluijter, mainly pp. 170-192. For Van Mander's sources for the *Wtleghingh*, see pp. 179-180.

²¹⁵ Van Mander, *Wtleghingh*, fol. 3v*: '[...] om eyndlijck tot de gheest-vredighe Siel-rust te gheraken.'

²¹⁶ Van Mander, *Wtleghingh*, fol. 4r*: 'Nu heeftmen doch te bedencken, datter wat anders mede ghemeent, en te kennen ghegheven wordt.'

Almighty' had been a mild and friendly God for everyone, including the pagans. They all lived in God's world, and were moved by Him. So, when they wrote about morals, virtues and vices, they were inspired by God, even without them knowing or realizing it, 'so that they naturally and from an innate goodness fulfilled the divine laws in modest and pious ways'.²¹⁷ One thing that Van Mander points out and is very concerned with, is that even though the morals and lessons these poems contain might be in accordance with Christian morals and values, these poems should *never* be read in a Christian way. He warns to 'avoid reading this pagan fables in a divine manner, or to denote Christ in them' because the poets did not know Christ's teachings, and the narratives do not serve as prophecies of Christ either – the only way they are useful is to 'improve the morals, and to inspire the humans to a sincere, virtuous, honest and civil life'.²¹⁸

The second reason for writing this part of the *Schilder-Boeck* is aimed more specifically at painters, poets, and other artists. Van Mander tells the reader that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* have been called the 'Painter's Bible' because so many stories have been painted from it. Van Mander had expected and desired a Dutch commentary since a long time, but because no one had met his wishes yet, he decided to do it. He wanted to instruct the painters and poets, so that they would actually know their stories and what they meant. The necessity for this becomes clear in the life of Cornelis Ketel, when a man asked Ketel's maid to take a look at a painting so he could explain it to her. While the painting portrayed Danaë on a bed with Cupid flying towards her, the farmer thought it was an Annunciation scene, with the holy Angel bringing Mary the message.²¹⁹

5.2.2 Humanism and art

During the Italian Renaissance, the position of both art and the artist changed compared to the Middle Ages. During the Middle Ages, painting was considered one of the *artes mechanicae*, or mechanical arts. It was a craft, as opposed to the intellectual liberal arts, or *artes liberales*, and therefore of a lower standard. This approach changed, and instead of approaching art mainly on a theological basis, emphasizing the spiritual rather than the material, artists in the early fifteenth century such as Leon Battista Alberti and Leonardo da Vinci started looking at painting as the principles of human reason and intellect applied to a rendering of the visible world – or, how to represent the three-dimensional world on a two dimensional surface based on scientific principles such as mathematics.²²⁰ Because of this scientific focus, concepts like perspective and proportion became important. The main focus was on empirical research and individual observation of reality, and how to transfer this to a panel or canvas.²²¹

²¹⁷ Van Mander, *Wilegghingh*, fol. 3v*: 'soo datse uyt aengeboren goedtaerdicheyt, oft van der Natuere, met bescheyden en vromen wandel daedlijck de Godlijcke Wet volbrachten.'

²¹⁸ Van Mander, *Wilegghingh*, fol. 4v*: 'en vermijdt [...] dese Heydensche Fabulen te trecken op eenen gheestelijcken sin, en op Christum te duyden'; 'Dan sy zijn seer nut (als gheseyt is) om de zeden te verbeteren, en den Mensch aen te leyden tot een oprecht, deughdigh, eerlijck, borgherlijck leven, en om ander natuerlijke dinghen te leeren kennen: verder zijn sy niet te trecken.'

²¹⁹ Van Mander, fol. 280r

²²⁰ R. W. Lee, 'Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting', *The Art Bulletin*, 22, 1940, pp. 197-269, pp. 200. See this article for an extensive overview of humanism and art theory in the Renaissance. Also see: A. Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy 1450-1600*, Oxford 1940; pp. 2.

²²¹ Blunt, pp. 2

During the sixteenth century, a next step was taken: surpassing nature rather than exactly imitating it.²²² Next to this, the ancients were brought in as a model too, in contrast to Alberti's and Leonardo's focus on nature alone, since their art was considered to depict the ideal. According to some, the antique was faultless. Since they had already mastered a perfect way of imitating nature, they served as a proper example of how to not only imitate, but also to surpass. By surpassing the ancients, who depicted a perfect version of nature, one also surpassed nature.

5.2.2.1 Painting and Poetry as sister arts

A redefinition of poetry, which was counted among the liberal arts, took place, based on classical authors such as Horace and Aristotle. The parallels between poetry and painting in ancient works like Aristotle's and Horace's, which merely function to illustrate literary ideas metaphorically, were used in the early fifteenth century to redefine the art of painting as belonging to the liberal arts, and the classical concepts relating to poetry and rhetoric were adapted so they could apply to painting.²²³ By doing this, the art of painting was invested with the same dignity as poetry, based on a non-existing link with antiquity.

Van Mander refers to painting and poetry as sister-arts several times: '[...] while she is the silent sister of the highly reasonable Poetry', and '[...] similarly Pictura and Poetry like each other's company, and are sisters or good friends', to name some examples.²²⁴ In his dedication to Goltzius of the *Bucolica en Georgica* he explains the importance of knowledge of both poetry and painting, and he alludes to the almost commonplace expression that painting is mute poetry, and poetry is a speaking picture.²²⁵

5.2.2.2 Liberal art or a craft?

The concept of painting as one of the liberal arts presents itself already in the title of the first part of the Schilder-Boeck, *The Foundations of the Free and Noble art of Painting*.²²⁶ In the introduction to this book, Van Mander says his purpose in writing about this art is 'confirming her nobility and eminence'.²²⁷ He provides many examples of how ancient rulers like Alexander the Great had appreciated art and how art served them well, which makes the art of painting more prestigious.

In the *Life* of his second teacher Pieter Vlerick, Karel calls Pictura the 'nurturer of all honourable virtuous arts, who has to avoid none of your fellow sisters, who are called the liberal arts'.²²⁸ He continues by saying that in his time in almost all cities – except Rome – the noble art of painting is restricted by disgraceful laws and forced to be practiced within guilds, 'like has been done with all coarse handwork and crafts, such as weavers, sewers, carpenters

²²² Lee, pp. 203

²²³ Lee, pp. 196-198

²²⁴ Van Mander, fol. 61v: '[...] dewijle sy de stomme suster is va[n] de seer geestige Poeterije'; fol. 296v: '[...] ghelijck Pictura en Poësie geern by een, en geode susters oft vriendinnen zijn.'

²²⁵ Van Mander, *Bucolica en Georgica*, fol. A1v

²²⁶ Van Mander, title page: Den Grondt der Edel Vry Schilderconst'

²²⁷ Van Mander, fol. 4r*: 'Het bevestighen oock haer edelheyt, en hooghweerdicheyt'

²²⁸ Van Mander, fol. 251v: '[...] die gene uwer Mede-susters, die men vrye Consten noemt, te wijcken hebt [...]'

and smiths'.²²⁹ Karel discusses concepts of guilds and all their rules, and then concludes that guilds are meant to exclude foreigners, no matter how talented.²³⁰ Clearly, Van Mander was aware of the artistic developments that had been taking place in Italy during the previous two centuries, when the Italians had tried elevated the art of painting to an intellectual and liberal art.

Van Mander was a member of a guild himself, but part of the reason for this may be that he would not be allowed to practice as a painter or sell any of his work if he were not. Whether Van Mander only joined a guild out of necessity or not, fact is that the passage makes a clear distinction between the concept of painting, a noble liberal art, and the crude crafts.

Karel seems to recognize the practical art of painting, next to the intellectual and liberal aspect. Everything that is in the artist's mind needs be transferred by hand.²³¹ Additionally, Nature provides everyone with a way of 'making a living in this world', whether it is an art or a craft. In the life of Ambrosius Lorenzetti, Van Mander discusses that painting embellishes the world, while at the same time it creates honour, fame and wealth for the painters.²³² Despite of the acknowledgement of these worldly functions of art – making money and decoration – Karel is still of the opinion that 'time passes all riches': painters should not attach too much value to these earthly pleasures.²³³ In summa: One is drawn to the art of painting because of two things, 'honour and profit', but in the end honour and morals should weigh heavier.²³⁴

5.2.2.3 Art theory

Van Mander sporadically includes concepts of Renaissance art theory. The *Grondt*, for example, incorporates the importance of the use of proportion (chapter 3) and invention (chapter 4). Also the importance of drawing (chapter 2) and the importance for working after nature are clearly present. Especially the last one seems to have been highly valued by Van Mander, and has been mentioned by his biographer as the main purpose of his 'academy' with Goltzius and Cornelis van Haarlem. Also the idea that painters should know their stories, either Biblical, mythological or historical has become clear already with the example above. Renaissance art theory had a focus on *decorum*, or the fact that all elements in a painting should be appropriate to its story. This combines with the ideal of a learned painter and intellectual.²³⁵ However, his *Schilder-Boeck* is not an art-historical treatise as such. It contains elements of Renaissance art theory, but the main subject is the lives of painters as example for the youth.

²²⁹ Idem: [...] van de edel Schilder-const wort een Gildt ghemaect, ghelijck men van alle plompe handt-wercken en Ambachten, als Weven, Pers-naeyen, Timmeren, Smeden, en derghelijcke doet.'

²³⁰ Van Mander, fol. 251

²³¹ Van Mander, fol. 1v: 'En de milde Natuere gheeft hier elcken eenich bysonder Instrument in handen, om zijn broodt te winnen in s'Weerelts landen.'

²³² Van Mander, fol. 99v

²³³ Van Mander, fol. 2v: 'Summa, den tijdt passeert alle rijckdommen.'

²³⁴ Van Mander, fol. 230v: 'eere en gewin'

²³⁵ Lee, pp. 211

5.2.2.4 Personifications

The main subject of the *Schilder-Boeck* is painting. Van Mander describes this often with *Const* of *Schilder-const*, but also often by using the personification *Pictura*. He describes her as a person, who can be jealous or happy, and is nurturing all the arts.²³⁶ In a sonnet preceding the Italian *Lives*, he even describes her as bearing many great Florentine artists.²³⁷ Artists who devote their entire life to the art of painting are represented by Van Mander as marrying *Pictura*, as is the case with Bartholomeus Spranger.²³⁸ *Pictura* is jealous when she is replaced by laziness, drunkenness or amorous affairs with others. Van Mander uses symbolical ways of saying this: ‘Bacchus’ jugs and Cupid’s arrows’.²³⁹

Also for war, Van Mander uses a personification. *Mars* often functions a synonym for war, violence or related aggressive concepts. As seen before, he disapproves of anything to do with violence, which may be due to his peaceful Mennonite background. When he discusses the great things art has achieved in the past, he tells his reader that the cities Rhodes, Cicionia and Syracuse have not been destroyed by ‘cruel Mars and raging Bellona’.²⁴⁰ In the introduction to the Italian *Lives*, he partly blames Mars for the decline of painting after the ancients. Mars, the enemy of art, did not only divide Europe while raging between the Popes and the Emperors, but also made art hide away.²⁴¹

Van Mander seems to be especially upset when he talks about Iconoclasm, and for this Mars is also held responsible, since ‘art-destroying, unscrupulous Mars startles and horrifies our lands with thunderous gunfire [...]’, and Hans Bol ‘left Antwerp in 1584 on account of the approaching revolt and misery of art-hating Mars.’²⁴²

Concepts that have been discussed before in a Christian context, like the behaviour of painters or their deaths can be found as personifications too. The deaths of painters have been retold as them giving their spirit to God. However, when Van Mander starts his discussion of the Dutch artists that are still alive, he introduces it as follows: ‘Now that I have described the lives of the celebrated, illustrious Netherlandish painters, whose lives’ threads have been cast off or cut by Atropos [...]’.²⁴³ Also in the life of Abraham Bloemaert, Van Mander hopes that his name will be immortal and protected against the baleful Atropos, rather than God or the Almighty.²⁴⁴

Van Mander illustrates his warnings to the youth with stories. Often, however, these illustrating narratives are not religious and based on the Bible, as seems to be the case in his other literary works and songs, but taken from classical authors. When he discusses examples for teaching women chastity, he goes back to stories about Helena, Penelope and a princess

²³⁶ Van Mander, fol. 3v*

²³⁷ Van Mander, fol. 91v

²³⁸ Van Mander, fol. 268v

²³⁹ Van Mander, fol. 2r: ‘De slaperighe traecheyt moet ghy swichten, Oock Bacchi cruyck en Cupidinis schichten.’

²⁴⁰ Van Mander, fol. 4r-v: ‘den wreedten Mars en rasende Bellona’

²⁴¹ Van Mander, fol. 93v

²⁴² Van Mander, fol. 299v: ‘Dewijl den Const-verdervenden roeckloosen Mars onse Landen met donderende geschutten verschrickt en verbaest [...]’; fol. 260v: ‘A°. 1584. vertrock hy uyt Antwerpen door de aenstaende beroerten, en fellicheden an den Const-vyandige[n] Mars.’

²⁴³ Van Mander, fol. 265r: ‘Nae dat ick nu hebbe beschreven het leven van den vermaerde doorluchtighe Nederlandtsche Schilders, der welcker leef-draet afgesponnen, oft door Atropos afghesneden is [...]’

²⁴⁴ Van Mander, fol. 298r

discussed by Castiglione, but he provides no biblical examples such as that of Susannah and the elders.²⁴⁵ Similarly, to illustrate a warning against arrogance and overconfidence, the story of Arachne and Minerva is presented, again a classical source.²⁴⁶

5.3 Conclusion

As has been shown, Van Mander incorporated both Mennonite morals and values as well as humanist concepts in his *Schilder-Boeck*. However, whichever topic he talks about, he seems to be rather neutral about it: he mentions it, but rarely ever judges. When he remarks on depicted scenes, it is mostly in a descriptive and objective manner. If he praises the scene, it is because of the skilful composition, great technique, or beautiful use of colour, but not so much on the subject of the scene. He will be equally laudatory about a Crucifixion, an image of Mary, or a gathering of pagan gods.²⁴⁷ In the life of Pieter Coecke van Aelst, Van Mander provides a description about Turkey and the Islam, and he is very positive about the great and beautiful way Pieter portrayed them.²⁴⁸ The only things Van Mander really seems to be worried about and condemns are misbehaviour and the destruction of art. He has a fierce opinion about the Iconoclastic destructions, but all entirely based on the fact that art is destroyed. Nowhere he mentions the theological debates behind it. Nevertheless, his two sides can be reconciled here: as a humanist and painter he condemns Iconoclasm because art is destroyed, and as a Mennonite he condemns the violence.

A moment where Van Mander discusses the link between Christianity and paganism is in his introduction to the *Wtlegghingh*. Even though he warns his reader not to read Ovid's myths as prophecies of Christ, or try to find exact Biblical parallels, he still says that the moral lessons contained in the myths can be reconciled with Christian virtues. The way Van Mander writes about it, it seems like both Christians and pagans were inspired by God in their artistic creations. Even the pagans were directly inspired by God, although they did not know it – perhaps this is Van Mander's way of reconciling his interest in Classical Antiquity with his Mennonitism: all inspiration comes from the one God after all. Even though the pagans might seem entirely Godless, they still received God's goodness. Nevertheless, Van Mander seems to make the distinction between Christians and pagans that are inspired by God. In the *Ancient Lives* he does not talk about talent as a gift of *Natuere*. Perhaps he tries to find a balance between justifying the admiration for the ancients for their artistic achievements by claiming their talent was God-given, but also not praising them too much because they lacked this one important element: knowledge of God and Christ and therefore were always one step behind, no matter the quality of their art.

6 Conclusion

When taking a step back and looking at all that Karel van Mander has produced during his life, it becomes very difficult to say whether he was mainly Mennonite or mainly a humanist. Nevertheless, scholars have made attempts, and most often came to the conclusion that Van Mander had a split personality. It might indeed seem there is a painter-Karel and a

²⁴⁵ Van Mander, fol. 14v

²⁴⁶ Van Mander, fol. 6r

²⁴⁷ Van Mander, fol. 296r

²⁴⁸ Van Mander, fol. 218v

Mennonite-Karel, but often they can be reconciled. Zilverberg, for example, states that towards the end of his life Karel distanced himself from his humanist influences and fully rejected all pagan elements, and could not appreciate it anymore.²⁴⁹ I think this is strange to say; he wrote his *Schilder-Boeck* towards the end of his life, containing many humanist elements. Also, appreciation of classical authors is not necessarily the same as fully agreeing with them. Van Mander appreciated Classical Antiquity, but felt the gap with Christianity.

In my opinion, Van Mander tried to find a balance in his life between these two very important aspects of Renaissance artistic developments and Mennonitism; a difficult task to do. He was careful not to mix his religious views too much with the classical past, as has become clear from his warning in the introduction of the *Wtleghingh*. Yet, he does not fully reject pagan stories, and sees in them universal truths and virtues that can be applied to his times. When studying Van Mander's oeuvre, one should accept that not everything can always be perfectly explained or reconciled, and accept inconsistencies. Probably this is what Van Mander did; he remained a painter until the end of his life and published the *Schilder-Boeck* just two years before his death, while remaining a strict Mennonite. If Karel van Mander did not make a problem out of it, why should we?

²⁴⁹ Zilverberg, pp. 182, 186

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