

Good example of how calvinism influenced the city of amsterdam research paper

[Economics](#), [Money](#)



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And the Netherlands

Through the centuries Amsterdam has played an important role in Dutch society. Because of its position in the province of North Holland, the city grew to become an important focal point for trade and politics. One of the most turbulent and influential episodes in the history of Amsterdam and of Holland for that matter, is the spread of Calvinism and the political and economic struggle that followed, which finally led to the supremacy of Amsterdam as financial and commercial hub during the 17th century.

Protestant ideas took root very early in the Netherlands, after 1560, when religious wars broke out in France, and many Calvinists were forced to leave the country. 1 At first, it was just seen as just another protest religion, for the Lutherans and Anabaptists, more moderate in their doctrines, had preceded the Calvinists in the Netherlands.. However, they soon gained ground and

their beliefs began spreading among the middle classes. 2 This essay will briefly examine the split in Calvinistic doctrine and how it affected the city of Amsterdam and Holland.

In the fifteenth century, Amsterdam became part of the large empire of Philip of Burgundy. 3 The goal of this king was to unify all medieval kingdoms but his plans were thwarted by Jacoba of Bayerne from Holland. In the sixteenth century, Amsterdam and the rest of Holland became part of the Holy Roman Empire. However, this political union would soon be ruptured by fierce wars of religion when Philip II of Spain ascended the throne of the Holy Roman Empire. Unlike his father Charles I, who had been born in Flanders and spoke no Spanish when he assumed the throne of Spain in 1519, Philip II was born in Spain and left the Netherlands permanently in 1559. From Spain, he attempted to crush the religious reformation taking place in the Netherlands by breaking the traditional autonomy of the 17 provinces. 4 In response to this repression, the Dutch started to revolt. The Dutch were adamant about keeping their liberties and flatly rejected the Spanish Inquisition. Thus, the 80 Year War began, and Prince William of Orange acted as head of the rebels. 5

When in 1578 Phillip II of Spain tried to crush the Dutch revolt, he only succeeded in pacifying Antwerp and 10 other southern provinces in the Netherlands. Calvinism was completely crushed in these provinces and Calvinists were forced to convert to Catholicism, or leave for the northern provinces. Today, these southern provinces constitute modern Belgium. The northern portion of the Netherlands, however, proved much harder to control. The seven rebellious provinces, led by the province of Holland,

declared themselves an independent republic. They formed the Union of Utrecht in 1579 and in 1581 they formally declared their independence from the King of Spain. They became known as the United Provinces of the Netherlands, or more commonly known as Holland. 6 War broke out between Spain and the rebellious republic. The United Provinces of the Netherlands turned to Elizabeth I of England for assistance. During a Twelve Year's truce in this war Amsterdam was raged by a split in Calvinism. The split was caused by the issue of predestination and the saving of souls. Could good deeds overcome predestination? On one side were those who believed that the faith and good deeds of the believer, could to some extent, affect the bestowal of grace and ultimately, salvation. Those who subscribed to this belief were the Remonstrants. Opposing these beliefs were those Calvinists who believed that salvation was preordained by God. The elect—those few who would ascend to heaven—were numbered from birth, and no amount of good work would change the fate of the damned. 7 Orthodox Calvinists won, and the leader of the Remonstrants Jahn von Oldebamevelt was executed. Calvinism became the state religion of the Netherlands after the Great Assembly of 1651. 8 Only Calvinists, and in some cases Jews could occupy political offices, but for the sake of commerce and the survival of the newly independent republic, religious tolerance became necessary. Jews were allowed to worship publicly, while other religious groups were tolerated, but were not allowed to worship in public. Even the more moderate Calvinists who were once repressed, were later permitted to worship in private Thus, Amsterdam became a city of tolerance in the 17th century. True to their republic's founding declaration in 1579, which held that ' every citizen

should remain free in his religion, and no man may be molested or questioned on the subject of divine worship' 9

One of the benefits derived from the policy of tolerance was the arrival of enterprising refugees e. g., Huguenots, Jews and even philosophers such as Descartes; some of them were fleeing persecutions in other countries while others like Descartes, simply enjoyed the atmosphere of intellectual freedom prevailing in the Netherlands. 10 Thus, the influx of intellectually gifted refugees and the prosperous conditions prevailing in the Netherlands after the bloody religious wars allowed the Dutch to enjoy a degree of comfort and of intellectual, artistic and commercial achievement unequal in Europe. 11 The triumph of Calvinism in Amsterdam and in Holland became a catalyst for Dutch intellectual, financial and commercial growth. At the conclusion of the religious wars and according to the terms of the Treaty of Westphalia, Spain was permanently banned from intervening in Holland's affairs. Amsterdam closed the port of Antwerp by closing off the river Scheldt to commerce. Consequently, the wealth that had flowed through the port of Antwerp would from then on flow through the port of Amsterdam. Thus, for Amsterdam the real prize of the war was the commercial supremacy it achieved at the expense of Antwerp¹² Calvinism promoted the development of Capitalism by removing the stigma which the Catholic Church had traditionally attached to the money lending practice, known pejoratively as usury. Calvinism encouraged the purposeful investment of money by portraying luxury and self-indulgence as vices. By contrast thrift and hard work were considered virtues. It even suggested that wealth might be a sign of virtue. 13

Another important outcome of the independence of Holland was that

Amsterdam became the financial and commercial center of Northern Europe. In 1609 the Bank of Amsterdam was established. At that time, European money was in a state of chaos. Not only were coins being minted by monarchs, small states and cities in Germany and Italy and even by private persons, but because of inflationary pressures, kings and others habitually debased their coins by adding more alloy to the new coins while leaving the more valuable old coins in circulation alongside with the new coins. Thus, anyone who was dealing with money, accumulated currencies of uncertain value. The Bank of Amsterdam accepted deposits of mixed value . from all persons and from all countries, assessed the value of silver and gold content, and at rates of exchange established by itself, allowed depositors to withdraw equivalent sums in gold florins minted by the Bank of Amsterdam. These coins were of known and unchanging weight and purity, and thus became an international standard of value accepted internationally. In addition, depositors were allowed to draw checks against their accounts. Depositors could feel confident because their deposits were guaranteed by the Dutch government. These conveniences were a magnet attracting capital from other parts of the world and made loans possible for a wide variety of purposes. Thanks to these banking practices Amsterdam remained the financial hub of Europe until the French Revolution. 14

Notes

1R. R. Palmer and Joel Colton, A History of the Modern World, (New York: Alfred A.

Knopf, 1995) 129.

2Chris Trueman, “ John Calvin,” History Learning Site, (2013), Web, 29 March, 2014

[http://www. historylearningsite. co. uk/John_Calvin. htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/John_Calvin.htm)

3 “ Short History of Amsterdam and the Netherlands,” Web 29 March, 2014
[http://home-l2. tiscali. nl/~sparhawk/history. htm#top](http://home-l2.tiscali.nl/~sparhawk/history.htm#top)

4Henry, M. Sayre The Humanities. Culture, Continuity & Change, 2nd ed.
Book 4, (New York: Prentice Hall, 2011) 705.

5” Short History of Amsterdam.”

6R. R. Palmer, 131.

7Sayre, 707.

8Gascoigne, Bamber. “ History of the Netherland” History World. (2001, ongoing.) Web, 29 March, 2014 [http://www. historyworld. net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories. asp? groupid= 1764&HistoryID= ab50](http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?groupid=1764&HistoryID=ab50)

9qtd in Bamber.

10Bamber

11R. R. Palmer, 164.

12Sayre, 705.

13Bamber.

14 R. R. Palmer, 166.

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