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CATHOLICISM AND RESISTANCE TO THE REFORMATION IN THE NETHERLANDS

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The initial reactions of catholics in the Netherlands to Revolt and Reformation, apparently so different from those of their co-religionists in France under roughly similar circumstances, pose an interesting problem. Answers do not easily spring to mind. We do not know much about the Dutch catholics. Rogier, in his impressive *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de 16e en 17e eeuw* inventoried the institutional apparatus of the church before the onslaught of the Reformation, deplored the protestantizing policies of the new regime and recorded the rebuilding of a catholic community afterwards. The crucial period of the 1560s through the 1570s falls somewhere in between. Interpretation fills the gap. Rogier argues that the hierarchy failed to respond adequately. Where priests remained on their posts the Reformation met with resistance and the catholic faith persisted. In too many places they were absent. It was the absence of pastoral care that shaped the opportunity for concerted action by calvinist church and local magistrates to force protestantism on the population.¹

Rogier, writing during the heyday of pillarized society, could take the passivity of lay catholics in the absence of pastoral leadership for granted. The catholicism he knew was strongly dominated by the clergy. It is only recently that this passivity or resignation of sixteenth century Dutch catholics has raised questions. Today we expect believers to be assertive enough to be able to express or defend their religious convictions without the need for priests to speak for them. Passivity asks for an explanation. Woltjer has recently suggested that Dutch catholicism was in decay, due to widespread penetration of heretical beliefs, against which the inward-looking piety of the *devotio moderna* was unable to rally significant defenses. Van Nierop essentially concurs with this view, adding that a strong sense of civic unity may have helped to prevent inter-confessional violence in the Netherlands. He also points out that in 1566 Dutch catholics, unlike the French, could leave their defence to the government. In 1572 again the Dutch catholics did not defend their religion, this time because this would associate them to closely with the highly unpopular Duke of Alva, and make them appear unpatriotic.² In both cases the Dutch catholics, either due to the

¹ L.J. Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de 16e en 17e eeuw*, Amsterdam 1957, 438-445.

² Henk van Nierop, 'Similar problems, different outcomes: the Revolt of the Netherlands and the wars of Religion in France', in: *A Miracle mirrored. The Dutch Republic in European Perspective*, ed. Karel Davids and Jan Lucassen, Cambridge 1995, 26-56, p. 39-44; J.J. Woltjer, 'Violence during the wars of

inroads of heresy or to lack of political acumen, are unfavourably compared to their French co-religionists.

In the light of the recent trend to distinguish, at least from the second half of the sixteenth century on, between political reformation and confessionalization, it is rather questionable whether in the initial stages of the Dutch Revolt catholics could be expected to act collectively in the defense of their religion, or, more generally, whether it makes any sense to expect popular religious conflict. Political reformation should be understood here as the introduction of a protestant church as an established church by a government or dominant political faction. Introduction of a Reformation from above, by decree, was a necessary precondition for any protestant church to become the bearer of the officially recognized faith in a country, a territory or a city. In the 1520s and 1530s religious reformers and political leaders usually cooperated in introducing a change of faith, operating with some care to win broad popular support. Perhaps in this early stage the introduction of some form of protestantism was seen as in accord with contemporary pressures, also within the catholic hierarchy itself, to reform existing abuses and reinvigorate the church.³ From the second half of the century on however, when it had become clear that protestant and catholic reform would go separate ways, the decision to change the official religion of a city, principality or a country would increasingly be made by those in political power, on their own authority and without recourse to the sensibilities of the population concerned.⁴

The religious sensibilities of a population could not be changed by decree and overnight. The works of Von Zeeden and above all Schilling and Reinhard have demonstrated how the formation of confessional identities lagged behind the political reformations. Whereas a political reformation is an event, that can be pinpointed in time, the formation of a confessional identity was a process that could take more than a generation. This process, currently termed confessionalization, was many-faceted. It entailed the education of the people in the new faith. The sixteenth century saw the emergence of the catechism as a tool for popular religious instruction. Confessionalization also encompassed the development of new liturgies, new styles of church architecture and interior decorating and new devotions, that distinguished the newly introduced faith from the old forms. Since religion was very much part and parcel of popular culture in the sixteenth century — defining the calendar of work and festival, imprinting public spaces with religious imagery and accompanying all sorts of communal activities, including all occasions of state — a change of established church very much changed society at large. The official faith upheld and justified political power. As such confessionalization, no less than the introduction of a

Religion in France and the Netherlands: a comparison', *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 76 (1996) 26-45, p. 40-44.

³ Cf. John C. Olin, *Catholic Reform, from Cardinal Ximenes to the Council of Trent 1495-1563*, New York 1990, 1-43.

⁴ Kaspar von Greyertz, *The late city Reformation in Germany. The case of Colmar 1522-1628*, Wiesbaden 1980, 196-205.

reformation, was not a purely religious development, but always in some measure defined by politics.⁵

Confessionalization was not confined to those places where a protestant reformation had been introduced. In countries, principalities and cities that remained catholic — and usually this was decided by those in political power as well — the old church too was transformed. The existence of rival churches led to a change in confessional identities all around. Whereas the development of new forms of catholic religious expression has a name of its own: Counter-Reformation, their protestant equivalents have to make do with the term Reformation, that denotes both the introduction of the new faith and the ensuing confessionalization. Rogier could more or less equate these two. We would do well to distinguish between the act of political reformation and the process of confessionalization that followed it.

The political reformation of the Seven Provinces, although a protracted process, was successful in the sense that it was general and it would last. The political reformation, however, did not as such change the religious sensibilities of the population. In its wake the reformed church enjoyed the privileges that her established position entailed and some measure of protestant confessionalization took place. But neither local magistrates nor reformed consistories were eager to gather all and sundry into the reformed church. Local studies have confirmed the estimates of contemporaries that full members of the reformed church remained a minority in most places. Everyday life retained many reminders of the catholic past, in the use of saints' names for days of the calendar, the continued attraction of popular festivals and the survival of images in public spaces and, not least, the lasting presence of catholics. Political authorities even developed forms of public ritual in which members of all faiths might partake, even though they fully acknowledged the hegemony of the established church. It could be argued that the Dutch Republic never became fully confessionalized into a calvinist society.⁶

The distinction between political reformation and confessionalization is especially relevant to the subject I have been asked to dwell upon, namely the resignation of the Dutch catholics in the face of the Revolt and the suppression of their church. In this article I will demonstrate first that the events of 1566 and 1572, and the violence included in them, are best described as a political Reformation. Following that I will argue that it is wrong to ascribe political agency in these events to protestant or catholic groups, because confessionalization, the formation of a communal identity

⁵ Ernst Walter Zeeden, *Die Entstehung der Konfessionen. Grundlagen und Formen der Konfessionsbildung im Zeitalter der Glaubenskämpfe*, München 1965, Heinz Schilling, 'Die Konfessionalisierung von Kirche, Staat und Gesellschaft — Profil, Leistung, Defizite und Perspektiven eines geschichtswissenschaftlichen Paradigmas' and Wolfgang Reinhard, 'Was ist katholische Konfessionalisierung', both in *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung. Wissenschaftliches Symposium der Gesellschaft zur Herausgabe des Corpus Catholicorum und des Vereins für Reformationsgeschichte* 1993, Münster 1995, 1-49 and 419-452, on the use of this concept see R. Po-chia Hsia, *Social discipline in the Reformation. Central Europe 1550-1750*, London/New York 1989.

⁶ Cf. Joke Spaans, *Haarlem na de Reformatie. Stedelijke cultuur en kerkelijk leven 1577-1620*, 's-Gravenhage 1989, 104, 124-135, Peter van Rooden, 'Van zichtbare orde naar morele gemeenschap', in: Peter van Rooden, *Religieuze regimes. Over godsdienst en maatschappij in Nederland 1570-1990*, Amsterdam 1996, 78-120

based on religion, had not yet taken place in the Northern provinces. Finally I will fit the development of the resurgent catholic mission-church into this reinterpretation of the role of religion in the Revolt. For practical reasons I will focus my attention on the seven Northern provinces, and mainly on Holland, the heartland of the Revolt that produced the officially calvinist Dutch Republic.

Religion and politics in the Revolt of the Netherlands

Among the various possible causes for the revolt in the Netherlands two are undisputed. These are the frustration of local magnates confronted with the centralizing policies of the Habsburg rulers and the widespread abhorrence of the heresy-laws. A League of high-ranking nobles first successfully maneuvered for the deposition of Granvelle, who had controlled the strict enforcement of the royal policies by the Regent Margaret of Parma, thus curtailing their political influence. As advisers of the Regent they subsequently advocated moderation of the heresy-laws. Soon they were supported in this by a broadly based Confederacy of lesser noblemen. Whereas the members of the League remained catholic, some of the Confederates had embraced calvinism. Under pressure from League and Confederacy Margaret of Parma promised moderation. The ensuing hedge-preaching and iconoclasm far exceeded the limits of what she, let go the King himself, was willing to tolerate. In August 1566 the Regent, cued by the high nobility, tried to contain the damage with an Accord which granted a limited toleration but forbade further spread of the preaching.⁷

Although the troubled summer of 1566 is usually described and explained as the emergence of a repressed protestantism, it is somehow difficult to see hedge-preaching and the iconoclasm that followed as a mainly religious movement. In her description of preaching and iconoclasm in Flanders, Phyllis Mack Crew notes with some astonishment that the ministers, who played such a prominent role in whipping up religious fervour, leading even to armed resistance of cities that had embraced protestantism, were often too fuzzy on theology to make very convincing calvinists and acted as rather more than clergy. They are shown to have been in constant communication with the confederate nobility and to function as their agents. The hedge-preaching and the congregations they organized were used as the infrastructure of a fundraising-effort of the nobles. Some of the ministers led armed bands in order to secure cities for the nobles.⁸

Although there were undoubtedly protestants involved in these happenings, it does not appear that the hedge-preaching aimed at the installation of protestant organized religion, urged on by deep desires of the urban masses. Existing congregations grew, but it is perhaps more significant that during the turbulent summer of 1566 their constituencies suddenly changed. Leadership was taken over by members of the local

⁷ H. F.K. van Nierop, 'De troon van Alva. Over de interpretatie van de Nederlandse Opstand', *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden* 110 (1995) 205-223, p. 210-217, Van Nierop, 'Similar problems', 45-47.

⁸ Phyllis Mack Crew, *Calvinist preaching and iconoclasm in the Netherlands 1544-1569*, Cambridge 1978, 1-38.

elite, who then organized iconoclasm.⁹ The iconoclastic riots in the South in 1566 show a close similarity to the mobilization of the French protestants in 1561/1562. There too protestant congregations all of a sudden multiplied and smoothly inserted themselves into the opposition movement as recruiting grounds and communications centres.¹⁰

In the Northern provinces it is even harder to explain 1566 as the popular upsurge of protestantism. There is abundant evidence that from an early date on individuals read and discussed reforming literature, and that some were in contact with the centers of European Protestantism. Mennonite congregations existed in many towns and villages. Persecution of peaceful heretics was unpopular and almost universally sabotaged. Yet unlike in France, Flanders and Brabant, before 1572 calvinist congregations were virtually absent in the North. Criticism of a number of aspects of the old church was certainly present and widespread, but traditional historiography may well have been overeager to interpret this as a general predisposition to protestantism.¹¹ The weak points of the church were well-recognized and on various levels reform was pursued. This reform included royal initiatives for synods, visitations, inquisition and the reorganization of the episcopal sees. As these infringed upon existing jurisdictions and privileges they met with much resistance. Reform as such seems however to have been welcomed, since there were also local initiatives, as yet insufficiently studied, to improve the standards of pastoral care, enhance the beauty of the liturgy and to invite Jesuits to reinvigorate the catholic faith.¹² On closer inspection the usual assumption of a really popular support for protestantism, the often invoked ‘well prepared soil’ for the (political) reformation-to-come, may turn out rather ephemeral.

The events of 1566 bear this out. Hedge-preaching drew crowds, but was restricted to areas firmly under control of confederate nobles, chief of whom was Brederode. The content of the hedge-sermons can hardly have been full-fledged reformed doctrine. The two men who conducted practically all hedge-preaching in the North, Jan Arentsz. basketmaker en Pieter Gabriel were neither of them trained theologians, and that showed. Theirs appears to have been a rather undogmatic christian message, almost exclusively worded in biblical quotations. The appeal of this type of ‘sermons’ was almost guaranteed. The Netherlands had a long tradition of lay-interest in the Bible, and of criticism of certain aspects of the traditional church. Both were discouraged by church and magistrates, but not persecuted under the heresy-laws. What people flocked to hear was not a gospel long kept out of their reach, but a public

⁹ Andrew Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt. Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism*, Oxford 1992, 120-122.

¹⁰ J.H.M. Salmon, *Society in crisis. France in the sixteenth century*, London 1975, 117-143.

¹¹ See Woltjers use of the term ‘protestantizing catholics’ for those who shared points of criticism and preference for ‘evangelical’ piety with protestants but did not consider separation from the catholic church, J.J. Woltjer, *Friesland in hervormingstijd*, Leiden 1962, 90-96.

¹² R.R. Post, *Kerkelijke verhoudingen in Nederland vóór de Reformatie van 1500 tot 1580*, Utrecht 1954, 114-116, 335-336, 448-449, 552-553, Woltjer, *Friesland in hervormingstijd*, 29-32, 75, 123-128, O.J. de Jong, *De Reformatie in Culemborg*, Assen 1957, 37-45, Joke Spaans, *Haarlem na de Reformatie*, 31-32.

exposition of well-known views, which were hardly specifically protestant. The iconoclasm of the autumn of 1566 was not a mass movement, but rather an almost surgical operation, performed by small groups of men, in at least a number of cases paid agents of one of the confederated nobles, acting quietly businesslike rather than inspired by religious frenzy.¹³ Moreover in some towns the magistrate could rather easily prevent the entry of iconoclasts, which suggests that wherever they succeeded in their destructive mission they had a measure of support in high places.¹⁴

On the whole the proceedings of 1566 do not qualify as a religious mass-movement. Nobles and preachers were certainly capitalizing on an existing religious issue. This issue was not the spread of heresy, as a problem separable from the conflict over the constitution of the Netherlands. Philip II wanted religious unity in his hereditary lands. The existence of mennonite and calvinist cells infringed upon his wishes. But it is questionable whether heresy in itself was a considerable political problem, that could be a separate cause for the Revolt. Calvinism rather seems to have been forged into a weapon for the use of the noble opposition against a centralizing monarchy. Mass-meetings and iconoclastic violence functioned as the means by which the nobles showed their power, in order to force the sovereign into concessions. The concession they got was a religious peace.

Although not usually classified as such, the Accord of August 1566 can be seen as a religious peace, comparable to the Edict of Amboise of 1563. Religious peace settlements were often resorted to in the sixteenth-century conflicts between confessionally different factions. These conflicts were usually not only religious in character, and the peace settlements were primarily political solutions. Introducing the protestant Reformation or retaining Catholicism as the official religion, whether in cities, principalities or countries, can never be seen as separate from political change. Cameron's recent comprehensive overview of Reformation scholarship describes the introduction of the Reformation everywhere as a marriage of convenience between political factions striving for power and reformers among the clergy.¹⁵ Until the middle of the sixteenth century princes encouraged attempts to end the politically divisive potential of religious schism by means of conferences between theologians. Even though in Regensburg in 1541 compromise seemed within reach all these attempts eventually failed. In the second half of the century religious peace settlements, although second best, were the only option left to contain the damage.¹⁶

¹³ Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt, 124-127*, Alastair Duke, 'The Time of Troubles in the County of Holland, 1566-1567', in: id., *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries*, London 1990, 128-132; Spaans, *Haarlem na de Reformatie*, 34; J. van Vloten, 'Noord-Holland in het Geuzenjaar', *Studiën en bijdragen op 't gebied der historische theologie*, 2 (1872) 119-127. It seems to me that G.N.M. Vis, *Jan Arentsz. de mandenmaker van Alkmaar*, Hilversum 1992 portrays Jan Arentsz. as more of a calvinist than his evidence merits.

¹⁴ Geoffrey Parker, *The Dutch Revolt*, Ithaca 1977, 78-80, Spaans, *Haarlem na de Reformatie*, 34-35

¹⁵ Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation*, Oxford 1991.

¹⁶ Olivier Christin, *La paix de religion. L'Autonomisation de la raison politique au XVIe siècle*, Paris 1997, 21-45. Where strong political polarization was absent another 'religious' solution was to tolerate different cults alongside each other or to mix elements of the religious practices from different creeds,

Religious peace settlements restored unity, law and order within a political unit. Both in the German Empire and in France these settlements strengthened the position of confederations of protestant nobility over against the catholic sovereign. These protestant nobles were not exactly rebels, for the sovereignty of Emperor and King remained beyond question. Yet the power of their faction was recognized and certain rights accorded them, chief among which the right to public exercise of their chosen confession. In view of the close intertwining of public religion and public authority this was an important concession. The Empire became divided between protestant and catholic territories, and the right to determine the established religion that local magnates and magistrates acquired was a recognition of a partial sovereignty. In France protestantism could grow rapidly in the regions which the confederate nobles controlled by their usually extensive clientage-networks. Religious peace in this way always ran counter to centralization and could strengthen federalistic tendencies.¹⁷

The history of the Dutch Revolt shows that Orange was very much taken by the idea of a religious peace for the Netherlands. He can be seen as the architect of the Accord of 1566, of the attempt to maintain catholic worship alongside with the reformed in the conquered cities of Holland in 1572, of the religious peace in Haarlem in 1577 and in Antwerp in 1578. In all of these instances the peace-arrangements followed the example of France. Protestants were to be granted religious freedom alongside catholics. Eventually however the Pacification of Ghent would embody a German-style peace arrangement, with segregation of confessions along geographical boundaries.

Catholic passivity in context

In the context of a political reformation the perceived passivity of the Dutch Catholics makes sense. Political reformations, as the 'late' reformations in the second half of the sixteenth century usually were, did not seek popular support. They were introduced by those in political power. Those who could not live in the new religious establishment had to leave. The others would eventually be disciplined into the new faith.

The very callousness of these procedures can be sufficiently, if somewhat impressionistically, demonstrated in a number of cases, both in 1566 and 1572. In 1566 in some towns in the area under the control of Brederode a full-blown Reformation was introduced. We have a vivid account of the events in Asperen, where the local lord, Wessel van Boetzelaer, pushed by a radically-inclined wife, proscribed catholic worship and invited first anabaptist, later calvinist preachers from Antwerp to conduct services in his manor, in the parish church and in the church of the local monastery. Catholics were prevented to attend Mass elsewhere by the closing of the town gates and threats of losing their jobs on the manor. Even the monks were forced to attend the new preaching, dressed for the occasion in lay attire. The lord of the manor personally interfered to obstruct administration of the last rites

Ernst Walter Zeeden, *Die Entstehung der Konfessionen. Grundlagen und Formen der Konfessionsbildung im Zeitalter der Glaubenskämpfe*, München 1965, 72-80.

¹⁷ On clientage R.J. Knecht, *The French wars of religion 1559-1598*, Harlow/New York 1996, 13-14 and references, on the interrelation between religious peace and federalism Christin, *La paix de religion*, 169-205

and to let an obstinate anabaptist be buried in hallowed ground. Baptism was administered according to calvinist rites. Van Boetzelaer offered hospitality to image-breakers and had the wooden images chopped up and doled out to the poor for fire-wood. Those who refused the wood were denied further parish-charity. Van Boetzelaer even disposed of monastic revenue, in that he decreed that the monastery should pay a pension and a new set of clothes to one of the monks, who wanted to become a protestant minister. Alastair Duke suggests that similar things may have happened in other towns in the vicinity.¹⁸

What is curiously absent from the account of what happened in Asperen and a number of similar cases is an indication of popular support for the introduction of a Reformation by the local nobleman. The new order seems to have rather met with surreptitious resistance. Priests tried to keep books and consecrated objects safe from sacrilege, but they were found, broken and defiled nonetheless. The parish-priest objected to the burial of heretics in consecrated earth, but to no avail. There was only one ‘Catholic’ success. Catholic citizens and the magistrate united against Van Boetzelaer when he ‘wanted to bring his town under the rule of Brederode’. All of this suggests that Asperen underwent a purely political Reformation, introduced from above, and that the populace was well aware of this. They did not particularly like the religious innovations, but they did not offer forceful resistance. They could and did draw the line at the point where the lord wanted to drag them into the politics of Brederode.¹⁹

There was often not terribly much catholics could do when the local nobility supported protestant provocation. The events of 1566 bear eloquent witness to this. Some priests publicly defended orthodox doctrine against evangelical hedge-preaching. It took considerable courage however to speak up for the traditional order. The priest of Vlijmen had his house ravaged and was threatened with death. A priest in The Hague was accosted by three petty noblemen, one of whom put a rope around his neck and threatened to strangle him. ‘Good catholics’ who took offence at ostentatious psalmsinging, made their parish-priest complain to the baljuw, who silenced the singers. The priest was afterwards singled out on the graveyard of his church and harrassed by some of the singers.²⁰

Examples of intimidation of ‘good catholics’, or any that opposed the demonstrations of the alliance of nobles and genuine or self-styled protestants abound. They are often very similar to the forms of violence reported from France. Priests bore the brunt of this violence. They were threatenend and scolded, sometimes during the church service, for teaching false doctrine. Natalie Zemon Davis has given a strongly religious interpretation to incidents like these. She sees them as statements of faith, a defence of true doctrine. This ennoblement of abuse of power seems to me quite unjustified. The armed guards at the hedge-preachings and the threats of armed

¹⁸ Duke, ‘Time of troubles’, 132-133.

¹⁹ Sententien en indagingen van den hertog van Alba, gesproken en geslagen in zynen Bloedtraedt, ed. Jacob Marcus, Amsterdam 1735, 130-141, cf. Alastair Duke, ‘The Time of Troubles in the County of Holland, 1566-1567’, in: id., *Reformation and Revolt in the Low Countries*, London 1990, 132-133

²⁰ Sententien en indagingen, 33, 175, 176.

violence that accompanied requests of protestants for the use of a building for their services can be seen as similar provocations.²¹ Most, if not all, of these forms of provocation and violence were not so much inspired by popular religious sensibilities, but can be brought to the account of noblemen or their retainers. The role of the nobles themselves is not always unambiguously clear from the available sources. It was however in their interest to disguise their involvement in incidents of violence and intimidation.²²

In 1572 matters were not substantially different. Again we see a political reformation, a repetition of Asperen on a larger scale. Reformed congregations were formed in the wake of the military successes of the Prince of Orange and his Beggar troops, and accorded the status of a public church. Catholic worship was severely limited, and by 1573 almost everywhere proscribed. The extent of popular involvement remained low. Catholics did not offer any kind of organized resistance. Individuals did in some cases. During the siege of Haarlem by royal troops members of the civic elite within the city held correspondence with the besiegers. Haarlemmers who had fled the city before it was surrounded for Amsterdam, that had not joined the Revolt, had letters smuggled into their home-town in order to try to persuade their fellow-citizens to surrender. Their efforts to return the city to Habsburg obedience and the Catholic faith were considered highly dangerous, and the carriers of the letters risked their lives. Once the Satisfactions of Haarlem and Amsterdam had proved their attempts futile, a number of these loyalists from Holland went into exile. Cologne harboured a considerable exile community by the end of the sixteenth century.²³ More widespread than this kind of open opposition may have been the rescue by individual Catholics of liturgical utensils, vestments, books and objects of Catholic devotion, and title deeds to ecclesiastical revenue.²⁴

The diaries of Gualtherus Jacobi Masius, better known as broeder Wouter Jacobsz., allow us to view this period through the eyes of a Catholic of unquestionable loyalty. The diarist, from a bourgeois family of Gouda, was a priest, of the order of Augustinian Friars, and prior of the monastery of Stein, near Gouda. The diary spans the period 1572-1579. When he started it the author was about 50 years old. In 1572 Gouda joined the Rebellion and Wouter Jacobsz. went to live in exile in Amsterdam. In his diary he records the daily news about the hostilities in Holland, and occasionally also further afield. His comments on the developments during the Revolt are what make the diary important. They have to be evaluated with some discretion, as they only partially reflect his feelings at the moment the recorded events took place.

²¹ Sententien en indagingen, 23-25, 38, 40, 154, 168-169, 172, 176, Natalie Zemon Davis, 'The Rites of Violence', in: *Society and Culture in Sixteenth-Century France*, London 1975, 152-187, p. 156-157

²² Cf. the account of intimidation by members of the retinue of Brederode in Egmond Abbey and Brederode's indignant defence of his good intentions to have these gentlemen protect the abbey, *Sententien en indagingen*, 48-50, vs. Duke, 'Time of troubles', 146.

²³ Spaans, Haarlem na de Reformatie, 42-45, B.A. Vermaseren, *De katholieke Nederlandsche geschiedschrijving in de 16e en 17e eeuw over den Opstand*, Maastricht 1941, 47-50.

²⁴ Spaans, Haarlem na de Reformatie, 95, 125-126.

Frequent flash-forwards show that the diary has been edited. It is a matter of conjecture when or why this happened. Since the definitive manuscript is in the authentic handwriting of the author it cannot have been later than 1595, when he died. The diary probably started, like many war-diaries, in order to preserve the memories of extraordinary experiences. Rather than a mere record of events the author seems to have written it as a means to come to terms with the changes he witnessed and which were to shatter his worldview. Meditations on Gods will and prayers for divine intervention are copiously interspersed in the narrative of events, and often overwhelm the latter. It is in these devout commentaries that edition is to be expected.

The flashes forward and occasional phrases where the author explicitly addresses his readers suggest that the diary was eventually rewritten as a book of devotion. As such it may have been intended for circulation among members of the catholic mission community of the 1580s and beyond. To them the diary would bear witness to the persecution of their church during the first stages of the Revolt and the miraculous survival of a handful of steadfast priests who had preserved their faith. They could derive from it the certainty that they were a chosen few, who had to endure, if not outright persecution, the humiliation of a church ‘under the cross’, for which a heavenly reward was in store. Part of the diary thus reflects the interests of catholics of a somewhat later period, and it is impossible to be certain which comments are original, in the sense that they accurately describe the sentiments of the author at the time of the recorded events, or even if there are any such. Some of them however do not quite fit the character of a later catholic exhortatory devotional work. Those can be adduced here as indications of how a catholic defender of the old order saw the Revolt when he was living through it, and how he defined his place in it.

Clearly authentic is Wouter Jacobsz.’s conviction that political and religious adherence were inseparable. The conflict in the cities of Holland was between Orange and the Beggars, who were protestants, and the King and his loyal servants, who were catholics. Such an outright equation of catholicism with royalism would lose currency as the end of the sixteenth century drew near. The Beggars are his bad guys, who brought the land to ruin. Their battlecry was against tyranny and heavy taxation, but the results of their revolt were worse than what they allegedly opposed. Prices had soared, innocent people had lost life and property in Beggar raids, cities were ruined during sieges. Their talk was of the gospel, but in their actions they were worse than Turks or wild beasts.²⁵ Beggar troops had it out especially for churches, monasteries and all who wore the cloth. They were prime targets for threats, harrassment and outright murder.

All these evils were defined as a divine punishment for human sins. Punishment was not supposed to last forever, and Wouter Jacobsz prayed fervently to God to show His mercy. He expected the King to restore order. In 1572 Wouter Jacobsz. was fully convinced that the royal forces were far superior to the Beggar troops. Even the Turk feared Philip II. It was therefore deeply disturbing that the Beggars did not, but, to the contrary, showed great confidence in their ability to hold their own against the King. Worse, city magistrates treated the Prince of Orange with all the deference due to a

²⁵ Dagboek van broeder Wouter Jacobsz (Gualtherus Jacobi Masius) prior van Stein, Amsterdam 1572-1578 en Montfoort 1578-1579, ed. I.H. van Eeghen, Groningen 1959-1960, 3-4, 71-72.

lawful sovereign, and seemed to expect the rule of his party to last. Here the author hits a note of near despair. After all, the fortunes of war are eventually in Gods hand, and whom He grants victory is thus lawful authority. He is overcome with doubt that God might be displeased by the catholic religion and that Orange, his Beggars and protestants in general might have God on their side.²⁶

Although this is only a passing temptation, and over all throughout 1572 Wouter Jacobsz. holds on to his trust that the Revolt is a finite punishment,²⁷ his apprehension remains that the effect of the Beggars' confidence will be mistaken by the populace for a sign that they enjoy divine support. In the conquered cities the inhabitants are made to tender oaths of allegiance that they are in no position to refuse. Wouter Jacobsz. is all too aware that swearing loyalty to the Prince of Orange implied not only recognition of a new political regime, but automatically also acceptance of the new religious regime that came with it.²⁸

The arrival of royal troops in December 1572 did not improve matters. The fate of Naarden could hardly be interpreted as a liberation. Then the royal troops failed for months to take Haarlem, with its reputedly weak fortifications, and were publicly shamed by the stamina and the dashing feats of arms of its defenders. Wouter Jacobsz. was very disappointed in the disregard the royal troops showed for priests and monasteries. With the passing of months and the coming of Christmas he showed concern that many common people had been deprived of the ministrations of the catholic church for quite some time. Priests were dead or in exile and separated from their flocks, monasteries had been plundered and their communities scattered, and even though catholic services were allowed to continue in cities under the provisions of religious peace, in many places Holland was as desolate as Turkey, and any preaching that was available was a distortion of truth, aimed at the seduction of good christians.²⁹

Even Wouter Jacobsz., describing events in a style and language that are steeped in catholic piety, presents his readers with a purely political reformation. Protestantism was the religion of the Prince of Orange and his Beggars. If it would turn out to be the religion of the victors even Wouter Jacobsz., writing in 1572, would not deny the legality of a protestant public church. It went without saying in the 1570s that a prince, by accession to a throne, by conquest or by whatever means he had come to power, could determine the religion of his subjects. Political and religious regimes were simply inseparable. Even though he is convinced that the protestant religion is erroneous, he does not even begin to blame either priests or laypersons for taking

²⁶ Dagboek, 13, 20, 22, 59, 67-68. In this last passage he actually compares the iconoclasm of the beggars with the Old Testament precepts to destroy pagan places of worship.

²⁷ His initial confidence that the end of these tribulations is near gradually wanes. He even compares the fate of devout catholics to that of the Jews, whose suffering has lasted for centuries and is not yet at an end, but who ultimately remain Gods chosen people, Dagboek, 107. This interpretation may reflect the situation in the 1580's and 1590's.

²⁸ Dagboek, 42, 82, 101.

²⁹ Dagboek, 90-93, 122, 146-148, 106.

oaths under the new order and so condoning the change of religion. Choices were limited. Those who could not swear loyalty to the new political and religious regime had to flee into exile or face an uncertain fate and possibly death. Wouter Jacobsz. mentions this choice only in relation to priests.³⁰ This may well imply that, from this early date on, he considered it unavoidable that the majority of the lay population would conform in some way or another, both in politics and in religion.

Rethinking the position of the catholics in the Revolt

This catholic resignation has been unfavourably compared with the often violent reactions of French catholics to organized protestantism. It has been suggested that Dutch catholicism lacked the vigour that was so obviously present in France. Dutch catholicism has even been decried as uninspired and ‘wishy-washy’, due to a combination of weaknesses in the old church and deep penetration of protestant convictions in popular religious sensibility.³¹ This wishy-washyness of Dutch catholics is however striking only if it is confronted with vigorous protestantism. This however was not very much in evidence in the Northern provinces in the initial stages of the Revolt. In 1572 and the following years the membership of the reformed church did grow, but certainly did not boom. So was the Dutch population as a whole religiously rather inert, and the Revolt not a religious war?

Obviously this does not do justice to what actually happened. Religion was important in the Revolt. Sixteenth-century religion was not however the kind of religion that we know from personal observation and living memory. It was not something that could be separated from society, or the State, or the commonwealth³² — a separation that today civilized societies take pride in. Above all, it was still too early for confessional identities to be fully formed and strong enough to mobilize popular support. Political polarization could be strengthened by theological polarization, since authority, and thus any party striving for hegemony, ultimately needed ideological justification. For religion to be able to mobilize people, independently of established authority, a process of confessionalization, stretching over a number of generations, was indispensable. It is not before the seventeenth century that populations can retain the religion of their forefathers when the sovereign changes religious adherence.³³ That makes it questionable whether it could be expected from protestants or catholics in the sixteenth century to stand up against lawful authority and carry a Revolt or a Reformation from below. It will be evident from the course of the argument so far that I do not believe in such popular movements.

³⁰ Dagboek, 82.

³¹ J.J. Woltjer, ‘Violence during the wars of Religion in France and the Netherlands: a comparison’, *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 76 (1996) 26-45, p. 40-44.

³² John Bossy, ‘Unrethinking the Sixteenth-Century Wars of Religion’, in: *Belief in History. Innovative Approaches to European and American Religion*, ed. Thomas Kselman, Notre Dame 1991, 267-285.

³³ Examples are the regions added to the Dutch Republic after the Twelve Years Truce, which remained solidly catholic and the lutherans of Prussia who remained the establishment under a calvinist ruler, Hsia, *Social discipline*, 61-63.

If it was rather normal for people to conform or resign to religious change ‘from above’, it does not make much sense to call Dutch catholics uninspired and wishy-washy. This normality becomes more apparent when we take into consideration the reaction of English catholics to the Elizabethan settlement. Comparison between English and Dutch catholics may seem incongruous. After the Elizabethan settlement the English catholic community was tiny, whereas Dutch catholics formed a sizeable minority. In fact however they had much in common. Both English and Dutch catholics found themselves overnight in an officially protestant country. Both had to build a community out of shattered remnants of the former hierarchy, that was no longer acknowledged as such by Rome, and had to rely heavily on lay support. Missionary efforts, both by exiled natives and regular clergy from abroad, played an important part in the building of a new type of catholicism, inspired by tridentine piety but lacking the normal forms of church government and adapted to an existence as a voluntary religion. In both countries the same type of problems arose from this situation, leading up to conflicts between native secular priests and foreign regular missionaries around 1700. The parallel runs into the nineteenth century with the restoration of a regular church hierarchy around 1850 in both countries.³⁴

In both countries traditional catholic historiography has focused mainly on those catholics who managed to build a mission church, proudly developing distinctively catholic forms of church organization, liturgy, art and piety, despite the hostility of their surroundings. Recently however some English historians have questioned the sharp distinctions between catholic and protestant. They have demonstrated a considerable measure of continuity in popular religious sensibilities notwithstanding the changes in established church the successive English monarchs enforced upon their subjects in the 1530s through 1550s.³⁵

Although there is still considerable debate in this field, what clearly emerges from this new approach is the sense that a clear differentiation between catholic and protestant was something that needed time to be developed. A striking example is the recent study by Alexandra Walsham. She has shown that the first generation Elizabethan catholics had few qualms about outward conformity to the Anglican church. Not only did lay catholics often go to church as the law required, catholic priests explicitly condoned the practice. A number of them officially joined the Anglican ministry but continued to perform catholic services, including the sacraments. But also without access to such a ‘cryptocatholic’ priest, lay catholics were not held to compromise their conscience by churchgoing, as long as they used some discretion and did not partake in the protestant communion service. Under Elizabeth communion was not a legal obligation and non-participation did not carry fines. The Anglican establishment

³⁴ See John Bossy, *The English Catholic community 1570-1850*, London 1975 versus Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme* and P. Polman, *Katholieken in Noord-Nederland in de achttiende eeuw*,the comparison is mine and would merit a more detailed treatment than the scope of this article allows for.

³⁵ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations. Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors*, Oxford 1993, for the discussions surrounding this revisionism Patrick McGrath, ‘Elizabethan catholicism: a reconsideration’, versus Christopher Haigh, ‘Revisionism, the Reformation and the history of English catholicism’, with a reaction from McGrath, in *Journal of ecclesiastical history* 35 (1984), 414-428 and 36 (1985) 394-406

encouraged this so-called church papism or statute protestantism, because it swelled the ranks of the established church.

It was only from about 1580, when throughout Western Europe confessional identities hardened and the first generation of missionary priests, trained in the continental Counter-Reformation traditions began their ministry, that within the English catholic community conformity became a contested issue. Those who did from then on refuse to conform, and made the considerable sacrifice of paying the heavy fines that the penal laws exacted for separation from the established church into a visible catholic community, the so called recusants, were a tiny minority. Many conforming catholics appear to have been eventually incorporated into the Anglican church. They thus vanish from the historical record. The recusants are usually held to represent post-Reformation English catholicism.³⁶

Walsham's analysis of English church papism and recusancy suggests intriguing parallellisms with the position of Dutch catholics. The resignation of Wouter Jacobsz. at the inevitability that a victory for the rebels would leave lay people no alternative to conformity appears to belong to a broader pattern. The absence of any trace of indignance or condemnation even on the part of priests towards conformity of the laity to a new religion closely ties in to the observation implicit in the work of recent authors on the English Reformation like Eamon Duffy and Christopher Haigh that, even if people remained deeply attached to traditional beliefs and rituals, they were not prepared to fight for them.³⁷ Obedience to lawful authority came first. We should not let a hindsight shaped by later confessionalizations and pillarizations blind us to this sixteenth-century reality.

There is some support in contemporary sources for the assumption that many Dutch catholics, like their English co-religionists, did unprotestingly conform. Church records and letters of ministers of the reformed church, from the institution of the reformed church as a public church on, mention the 'liefhebbers' or 'lovers' of the church. The name seems to denote persons who did not apply for full membership of the reformed church but did attend services. Ample room is left for difference of opinion as to the depth of their love for the church. We do not know much about these people, but their position seems not so different from that of the English church papists.³⁸ The parallel even extends to the fact that both church papists and 'liefhebbers' were counted as belonging to the established church when it came to estimating the strength of its adherence among the population.

³⁶ Alexandra Walsham, *Church papists. Catholicism, conformity and confessional polemic in early modern England*, Woodbridge and Rochester 1993.

³⁷ Eamon Duffy, *The stripping of the altars. Traditional religion in England, c. 1400-1580*, New Haven 1992, Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations. Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors*, Oxford 1993.

³⁸ Traditional view on liefhebbers A.Th. van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen. Kerk en kerkvolk ten tijde van Maurits en Oldenbarnevelt*, Assen 1974, 128-130, cf. Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Calvinists and libertines. Confession and community in Utrecht 1578-1620*, Oxford 1995, 68-70. Wiebe Bergsma, 'Calvinismus in Friesland um 1600 am Beispiel der Stadt Sneek', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 80 (1989) 252-285, p. 269 quotes a contemporary who stated that among the liefhebbers were also 'papists'.

Unprotesting conformity to the new order can also be found in the biographies of ‘kloppen’. ‘Kloppen’ were catholic laywomen who led celibate lives and devoted themselves to the rebuilding of a catholic community in the Northern Netherlands. They cared for priests and churches, catechized children and adults, operated schools for girls and visited the sick. They were active in the Republic from around 1580 until well into the seventeenth century. Biographies, or rather, hagiographies, of members of a convent-like community of these women in Haarlem yield some information, albeit indirect, on the situation in the crucial 1570s. The kloppen themselves were a product of Counter-Reformation piety. They rejected conformity and condemned it in less principled catholics. In retelling the lives of those who had consciously witnessed Revolt and Reformation however there often is no sense of an abrupt change, of a clearly defined moment at which all catholics had been faced with confessional choice. Change there had been, and was, with seventeenth-century hindsight, heartily deplored. But sometimes it seems as if the moment at which this change took place had eluded those who had lived through it. In one of the lives it is said that ‘people went to sleep as catholics and woke up as protestants’.³⁹ This fits the developments described here: the political reformation redefined people from members of a catholic commonwealth into members of a protestant society overnight. At that moment the realization that those were two distinct confessional worlds, between which one could choose, still had to follow.

From the biographies it is obvious that the activities of the kloppen were part of a process of confessionalization that shaped the catholic community under the Republic. Their missionary efforts and the circulation of texts like the diary of Wouter Jacobsz. probably functioned for Dutch catholics in much the same way as did the dissemination of tracts rejecting church papistry for their English co-religionists. The first confronted the laxity of Dutch catholics, the second the conformity of English church papists, in order to inform them with a consciously Counter-Reformation religious identity. The introduction of Counter-Reformation ideals seems a necessary precondition to perceiving the low profile of the catholics who found themselves, from one day to another, under a protestant religious regime, as reprehensible in the first place. The education of traditional catholics in both England and the Netherlands into a religious community inspired by Tridentine piety again shows remarkable parallels. The catholicism of the post-reformation catholic communities in both countries was not the traditional religion preserved from the catholic past. Like protestantism it was a new phenomenon. Both had to be learned, and in both cases it took a generation at least, starting from the success of the Revolt and the political reformation, to do so. Political reformation and confessionalization should not be equated.

If the resigned catholicism of early Elizabethan England and the Netherlands during the Revolt is to be considered ‘normal’, this invites a closer scrutiny of the currently dominant view of the violent reaction of French catholics to factional strife and confessional division as a strong popular movement intent on purifying France from

³⁹ Extensive abstracts from these lives published by J.J. Graaff, ‘Uit de levens der “maechden van den Hoeck” te Haarlem’ and ‘De “Vergaderinghe der maechden van den Hoeck” te Haarlem’, *Bijdragen voor de geschiedenis van het Bisdom Haarlem 17-20 (1891-1895) and 29-36 (1905-1915)*, cf. Spaans, *Haarlem na de Reformatie*, 191-193.

the blemish of protestant heresy.⁴⁰ They may have been further advanced in the process of confessionalization, and thus equipped with a strong sense of communal identity. Factionalism may have caused the assumption of a confessional identity as a mark of distinction. The contrast between England and the Northern Netherlands over against France should make us wary of explanations of religious violence as an expression of popular feelings.

⁴⁰ Davis, 'Rites of violence', Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross. Catholics and Huguenots in Sixteenth-Century Paris*, Oxford 1991.