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Katholiek in de Republiek : subcultuur en tegencultuur in Nederland, 1570- 1750

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Being a Catholic in the Dutch Republic

Subculture and counter-culture in the Northern Netherlands, 1570-1750

Summary

From the beginning of the 1580s, the government of the Republic rapidly issued a number of anti-Catholic edicts. All forms of Catholic worship and all activities associated with Catholicism were banned. Catholics lost all rights to display their religious beliefs in any public forum, on pain of fines, imprisonment or banishment. Catholics were now only allowed to confess their faith in private settings; priests were no longer allowed to celebrate mass or administer the sacraments; churches and monasteries were either assigned to the Reformed Church or secularized; church property was confiscated. Despite these measures, Catholics did not disappear from the scene. On the contrary, after a period of great upheaval, the Catholic Church experienced a revival in the first half of the seventeenth century, both in terms of numbers of priests and numbers of believers. These Catholics kept their faith and culture alive in many imaginative and creative ways. The Reformation and the Dutch Revolt, however, had forced them to reconsider what it meant to them to be a Catholic. Living in a reformed context, they had to reflect, as a matter of urgency, on what they regarded as essential to their religious identity, and how they were going to express this, both within their own community and in the public arena. This thesis aims to bring to light how individual Catholics answered these questions in their everyday life, and how they reshaped their lived religiosity to accommodate a changing religious and political landscape.

In the wake of the lively historiographical debate on the nature and structure of the Catholic minority in England, the past decade has also seen an increase in academic research into Catholics in the Dutch Republic. This has led to a growing number of important studies. Up to now, however, there has been no systematic research into the question of what actually made a resident of the Dutch Republic a Catholic in his or her own eyes, and what distinguished him or her from non-Catholics. This thesis aims to change this. Through the lens of individual believers, and on the basis of their own literary and visual output, it investigates what mattered to Catholics in the early modern Northern Netherlands and how they understood themselves. To avoid the risk of an impressionistic view of the early modern Catholic experience, this thesis opts for a *longue durée* perspective. By studying a wide range

of individuals over a long period of time, on the basis of a variety of non-institutional sources, a representative view arises of what it meant to be a Dutch Catholic. Geographically, this thesis covers not only the northern provinces of the Dutch Republic, but includes the Generality Lands as well.

To research the early modern Catholic experience, two theoretical concepts are used. In order to gain insight into the multiple layers, the complexity and the dynamics of the Catholic community, the concept of 'subculture' is introduced. By analyzing how individual Catholics dealt with the transformation of a dominant into a subordinate culture, the complicated nature of early modern Catholicism in the Dutch Republic can be assessed. With the help of Pierre Bourdieu's habitus concept, the typical Catholic code of conduct and ritual repertoire are dissected: the tools with which individual Catholics entered the 'social playing field', and expressed that they regarded themselves as adherents of the Old Church. To do justice to these theoretical frameworks, this thesis consists of three parts, each organized around windows that represent new historical methods and concepts and that make it possible to reveal how individual Catholics manifested themselves, both in their own community and in the outside world, as mediators of Catholic identity and culture.

The chapters in part I cluster round the nature of the Catholic subculture. It discusses which individuals continued to feel Catholic after the Reformation, and why they did so. Thus, the layers within, and the boundaries of, the Catholic subculture are shown. The way in which the first generation of Catholics dealt with their social and religious transformation after the Revolt is the point of departure. By following the trail of three hardline Catholics and their families, it becomes clear that within the Catholic community very different paths were followed to adapt to the new social reality. How individual believers experienced and expressed their Catholicism differed from person to person. In order to preserve their social status, some individuals were prepared to make such far-reaching concessions to their faith that they were no longer considered to be Catholic by their (activist) fellow believers, even if these individuals continued to consider themselves to be, and experienced their lives as, Catholics. On the other hand, the religious identity of militant Catholics was not set in stone either: when their personal lives provided reasons to do so, even the most radical Catholics were prepared to sidestep their Catholic identity in order to give priority to other loyalties. The dividing lines between the different categories of Catholic believers were thus negotiable. There was, however, an absolute *sine qua non* of Catholic identity, in the sense that no Catholic was willing to forsake the last rites. Even the most accommodating Catholics returned to the Mother Church at the ends of their lives.

The Revolt forced Catholics not only to determine their course in the present, but also to question their past. Now that their natural *milieu de mémoire* was lost, Catholics had to choose which memories of the Catholic past they wanted to keep for posterity. This study demonstrates that memory cultures had multiple functions. First of all, they helped Catholics to give meaning to the traumatic religious upheavals that they, or their ancestors, had experienced. At the same time, the past inspired activism in the present. Older memory practices were adapted and important Catholic *lieux de mémoire* were frequented to openly confront the new religious environment. The written documentation of iconic memories also reflected hopes of a future Catholic restoration. Should this scenario indeed prove true, future generations of Catholics could simply pick up the Catholic thread again with the help of these scripted memories.

Local memory cults are an excellent example of how much the religious identity of Catholics was intertwined with their local loyalty. By remembering the local past they tried to restore the broken relationship between their faith and their city. In this way they sought to reclaim their (legal) position as full citizens of their hometowns. This thesis reveals that local allegiance and loyalty regularly took precedence over religious identity, even in the case of militant Catholics. Some Catholics even went so far as to ignore their medieval past in order to participate in more recent, reformed memory cults, choosing to remain stakeholders in local history. This strategy is also visible on a 'national' level. Especially in periods when the Dutch Republic was in danger, such as in the Disaster Year of 1672, many Catholics were eager to profile themselves as a 'good fatherlander'.

Catholics across the spectrum – from accommodating to activist – cherished the same types of memories. They were especially keen to remember and commemorate those elements of the Catholic past that were fiercely contested and condemned by the Calvinists. This created an us-them feeling that supported Catholic identity. This strategy was further fueled by keeping alive the memory of the (in Catholic eyes) unlawful confiscation of churches and church property until well into the eighteenth century. There was less agreement about the *manner* in which events from the Catholic past should be commemorated. Especially from the late seventeenth century onwards, the gap grew between Catholics who wanted to keep memory practices private and fellow believers who wanted to express them openly and exuberantly.

In Part II, the emphasis shifts from the Catholic subculture to the Catholic habitus. The typical Catholic code of conduct that was self-evident before the Reformation had to be reconsidered after 1572. Rituals and repertoires that had not been questioned for centuries

now had to be re-examined. In this process of recalibration, some elements of the Catholic habitus lost significance whilst others gained importance. The platforms from which the Catholic habitus is viewed – material culture and soundscapes – illustrate that Catholics purposely cultivated those parts of their habitus that were detested and ridiculed by the Calvinists, but to which the Calvinists, at the same time, remained receptive.

The medieval church was always driven by materiality and music. After the Reformation the significance of devotional objects, holy bodies, sacred places and religious soundscapes only increased. Material and musical culture were areas where Catholics sharply distinguished themselves from Calvinists, who categorically rejected these forms of religious expression. Moreover, both forms of devotion spoke a typical Catholic language that could not escape Protestant eyes and ears. This turned music and *materia* into pre-eminently suitable Catholic instruments, not only to shape individual Catholics' religiosity and strengthen Catholic cohesion, but also to manifest themselves publicly as Catholics, challenging the reformed order. Because ordinary Calvinists – contrary to the teachings of their church – continued to be attracted to certain forms of materiality, such as exorcisms, and remained receptive to the emotional appeal of soundscapes, these types of devotion were also important stimuli for Catholic conversions. Catholics were aware of and exploited these pull factors toward Catholicism.

In a hostile context where traditional paths to divine mercy were closed off, objects and music offered individual Catholics an alternative path to God. Material and musical devotion offered ordinary believers in particular, the possibility of confessing their faith even if there was no priest available. Where Catholics could not express their faith vocally in the public religious debate, they let their clothes or their bodies speak for them. In this way, objects determined their experience of Catholic religion. This 'agency of things' not only defied the Calvinist opponent, but also caused tensions within the Catholic subculture itself, especially in the case of relics: in the heated discussions about their hiding places (under the care of the clergy or at lay people's homes, in the Calvinist Dutch Republic or in the Catholic territories abroad), Catholic believers gave these sacred objects their own voice. Agency thus proves to be a fruitful concept to study the material aspects of Catholic experience.

Parts I and II of this thesis demonstrate that the theoretical concepts of subculture and habitus are closely linked. On the one hand, the Catholic community in the Dutch Republic can be characterized as a subculture because it had its own habitus. On the other hand, these typically Catholic practices and rituals were a consequence of the fact that Catholics felt connected to each other as a group. The starting point of part III is that both concepts,

subculture and habitus, were not static but dynamic; subject to developments over time and to movement and change.

By drawing a comparison with the Generality Lands, the thesis examines what it meant for the nature of a subculture if it metamorphosed into a subordinate minority at a relatively late stage. At the time of the reduction of the Generality Lands, the Counter Reformation programme was already firmly anchored. As a consequence, the efforts to implement the reformation in the southern provinces largely failed. The Catholic community always retained a large numerical superiority. In addition, the Catholics in the Generality Lands were able to benefit from the proximity of the Catholic countryside and the nearby Habsburg Netherlands, where they could freely exercise their faith. This situation created a self-conscious and sometimes explicitly militant Catholic community, which more often than in the North made the transition from sub- to counterculture. As far as religious instruments are concerned, however, there are significant similarities between the Northern provinces and the Generality Lands. In this respect, the Generality Lands profited from the fact that the Northern regions had preceded them. The script for their new role was already there at the moment of their reduction. This thesis further shows that, similar to their co-religionists in the Northern provinces, Catholics in the Generality Lands often linked their religious and local identity. In times of rising political tensions, some Catholics prioritized their local loyalties and portrayed themselves as patriotic citizens of the Dutch Republic.

The dynamics within the Catholic subculture are further revealed by focusing on Catholic conversions and the schism between the Roman Catholics and the Jansenists (or Old-Catholics) in the first decades of the eighteenth century. These renegotiations about membership of the Catholic subculture, affected both its character and its ritual repertoire. Firstly, the dynamics of conversion are analyzed. The question of what prompted Dutch Protestants to exchange their comfortable position at the center of society for an existence on the sidelines has been answered from the perspective of existing Catholics. Approaching the attraction of Catholicism to non-Catholics in this way, illustrates what Catholics themselves considered to be the most important ingredients of their faith. This results in a deeper understanding of the Catholic habitus.

The long-standing internal quarrels between the Jansenists and the Roman Catholics, which emerged with particular intensity at the end of the seventeenth century and which in 1723 resulted in the so-called Schism, forced the Catholics to renegotiate their position in relation to each other. For the first time, the consequences of the Schism are analyzed through the eyes of Catholic laymen. Both parties regarded themselves as the true heirs of the Old

Church; to move from one to the other was regarded as an actual conversion. The Schism thus adds a new dimension to the already complex structure of the Catholic subculture. In order to legitimize themselves as the true representatives of Catholicism, both the Roman Catholics and the Jansenists relied on the traditional Catholic repertoire, with which the reformed enemy had previously been attacked. Despite their reservations with regard to certain forms of devotional display, such as miracles and relics, the Jansenists nevertheless reverted to these instruments to undermine the Roman Catholics. In addition, new elements were added to the Catholic habitus, which, remarkably, were taken directly from the anti-Catholic repertoire of the Calvinists. Moreover, not only the Jansenists but also the Roman Catholics called in the help of the reformed to undermine the other party.

Studying the Catholic mindset of individual believers over a period of two centuries, including, for the first time, the Catholic subculture in the Generality Lands, gives justice to the complex experience of what it meant to be a Catholic in the Dutch Republic. This research brings to light, among many other things, that early modern Dutch Catholics were a far cry from the passive victims that earlier generations of historians had turned them into. In a variety of ways, they managed to circumvent the limitations imposed upon them and transform them into creative opportunities to support Catholicism in the reformed context of the early modern Northern Netherlands. Together, their actions support the broader contention that Catholics were able to turn the straitjacket which the Dutch reformed authorities had forced upon them into a source of creativity that contributed to the (re)construction of Catholic identity and the restoration of Catholicism in the Dutch Republic.