

Genji Yasuhira, *Catholic Survival in the Dutch Republic: Agency in Coexistence and the Public Sphere in Utrecht, 1620-1672* (Studies in Early Modernity in the Netherlands, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2024, 425 pp., ISBN 9789048558452, <https://doi.org/10.5117/9789048558452>).

The religious landscape in post-reformatory Utrecht has been well researched by historians. This is not surprising: before the Reformation, Utrecht was the ecclesiastic capital of the Northern Netherlands and an important bishopric; after the Reformation it became the headquarter of both the *Missio Hollandica* (the organisation of the illegal Catholic Church in the Republic) and, partly in response to it, of Reformed orthodoxy. This unique position has led to important studies on confessional interaction and rivalry in the city. In line with the recent ‘Catholic turn’ in religious history, the past decade witnessed a growing scholarly interest in the dynamics of the Catholic minority in early modern Utrecht. Historians such as Bertrand Forclaz and Jaap Geraerts have published excellent studies on Catholic identity and religious coexistence in the multi-confessional context of Utrecht, respectively titled *Catholiques au défi de la Réforme* (2014) and *Patrons of the Old Faith* (2019). To this historiography, Genji Yasuhira has now added a new monograph, *Catholic Survival in the Dutch Republic* – the commercial edition of his dissertation from 2019.

Yasuhira’s aim is to rethink early modern religious coexistence from the bottom-up perspective of Utrecht’s Catholics during the period 1620-1672. In order to achieve this goal, he reassesses the public/private distinction, first conceptualised by Jürgen Habermas. To understand religious coexistence, Yasuhira argues, scholars should not position Dutch Catholicism in the private sphere, as recent historiography inspired by Willem Frijhoff and Benjamin Kaplan does; instead, they should emphasise the *public* sphere and the strategies employed by the Catholic minority to redefine the concept of publicness in their favour. Examining Catholic engagement with the process of ‘delimiting the public’ (20), as Yasuhira labels this new approach of the public/private distinction, demonstrates Catholic agency in the history of religious coexistence. It reveals that, rather than withdrawing in their homes as passive recipients of toleration or victims of reformed prosecution, Catholics actively participated in drawing the borders of publicness. Consequently, they contributed significantly not only to their survival as a religious minority, but also to the shaping of the Dutch multi-confessional society.

The book’s methodological framework combines qualitative with quantitative approaches. Utrecht’s position as both a Protestant and a Catholic bastion and the numerous ensuing conflicts have produced a wealth of

archival sources, especially legal records. One of the most impressive features of *Catholic Survival* is the author's unparalleled research of this primary source material. Yasuhira has uncovered no less than 105 criminal proceedings against Catholics in Utrecht in the period under scrutiny. In addition, he has identified the names of 94 recognised and 19 connived priests and of 100 defenders of prosecuted Catholics. His thorough archival work has enabled the author to apply both close and distant reading to his sources, a fruitful and quite innovative approach in the field of religious studies, which leads to interesting results.

*Catholic Survival* is divided into two parts. The first discusses the Reformed governing strategies to uphold the medieval ideal of the *corpus christianum*, the supra-confessional civic unity: repression (chapter 1) and toleration (chapter 2). Pushed by the Reformed Church, the city magistrates and the Provincial States attempted to expel Catholics from urban public life through anti-Catholic legislation. At the same time, the political authorities publicly recognised and non-publicly connived Catholic presence in the public domain. These particular instruments of 'social engineering' in the urban context, and the extent to which they were effective, have been extensively researched. Yet, Yasuhira's quantitative perspective further refines and expands our knowledge, especially as to the (limited) public recognition of the Catholic presence in Utrecht. Utrecht's magistrate, for example, *officially* recognised Catholic presence (in hospices, canonries or public office) on a much larger scale than previously thought. Also, to the chagrin of the Reformed Church, nearly 75 per cent of foreign Catholics' applications for citizenship were granted.

However, it is part two of this book (chapters 3 to 5), on Catholic survival tactics, that yields the most interesting insights. Here, Yasuhira convincingly argues that through spatial practices and in discourses of self-representation, the Utrecht Catholics managed to secure a presence in the civic community. Again, Yasuhira's archival work pays off as he uncovers the foundational infrastructure that was crucial to stretching the boundaries of the urban landscape. Prominent Catholics, such as nobles, canons and lawyers, mobilised their social status and exploited their social and professional networks to ensure further liberties for their coreligionists. Not only did these elites support Catholics financially, their close connections with the Reformed elite were vital for Catholic survival as well. Analysing Catholic rhetoric in multiple criminal cases and civil lawsuits, Yasuhira also shows that Catholic survival tactics reflected both continuity with the medieval past *and* adjustment to the post-Reformation multi-confessional reality. Catholics remained stakeholders in their medieval sacred spaces, for instance, but simultaneously created new ones in their private homes; in civil and court petitions, they invoked medieval laws on jurisdiction, but just as easily referred to the new concept of freedom of conscience.

The book's conclusion positions the Utrecht case study within the history of religious coexistence in early modern Europe. Zooming out to similar cases elsewhere, Yasuhira concludes that the concept of delimiting the public is a useful analytical tool for future (comparative) research on early modern religious coexistence in a wider context. Obviously, such research should distinguish between states with and without compulsory membership of the public church.

The most important quality of *Catholic Survival* is its rethinking of publicness in combination with opening up the Utrecht archives on an unprecedented scale, which enriches our knowledge of Catholic participation in communal life. The combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis adds to the merits of this book, in the sense that it translates anecdotal information into broader conclusions. Yet, such an ambitious book inevitably invites some criticism. A minor point is that the density of information – especially in chapter 2 – affects the book's readability. More importantly, the author's claims are at times too strong. The case for Catholic agency in the Northern Netherlands has definitely been made before. Charles Parker, Judith Pollmann, Christine Kooi and myself have all shed light on the multiple forms of Catholic activism and the creative ways in which the Catholic community created a public presence for itself. The conclusion that Catholics were active agents instead of passive victims is therefore not a new one.

The aforementioned scholars have also studied Dutch Catholicism from the perspective of Catholics themselves, steering away from top-down institutional source material. Besides, one could question to what extent Yasuhira, who 'attaches great significance to the legal records of criminal cases tried in the city court of Utrecht' (37), really offers a bottom-up perspective. Such records, including the legal defences and petitions filed by the Catholic defendants, reflect the demands of the judicial processes and institutions that were dominated by the Reformed authorities. In other words, legal proceeding and discourse were controlled from above, not below. These critical remarks, however, do not in any way diminish Yasuhira's important, innovative contribution to the scholarship of early modern religious coexistence, opening up ground for interesting new research.

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