



Geert H. Janssen, *The Dutch Revolt and Catholic Exile in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, xv + 218 pp., ISBN 978 1 107 05503 2).

Exile is one of many themes that ties the Dutch Republic to the broader history of Reformation Europe. What Heiko Oberman called the religion of the refugees was of special relevance for Calvinist communities, not just here but in France and Hungary and Scotland as well. Schooled in ‘stranger churches’ abroad, returning exiles shaped the nascent Dutch Reformed Church; for example, their backing was crucial for the emergence of a church organized along consistorial lines, rather than the ‘people’s church’ favored by some. Meanwhile, the stern doctrine espoused by William of Orange’s soldiers, unwilling to abide ‘idolatry’, provoked a new flow of Catholic exiles.

As Geert Janssen points out, this second wave of refugees was smaller than the first, and more closely tied to pre-Revolt elites, lay and clerical. In both cases, those contemplating exile faced a difficult choice. The Duke of Alba arranged for the sequestration of exile’s properties in the 1560s, and William of Orange did likewise in the 1570s. If Catholic exiles tended to be of higher social and economic status, they also had a strategy for minimizing losses. In many families in provinces where (from 1581) Catholic worship was officially prohibited, husbands left the homeland behind while wives remained. The argument Janssen develops has mainly to do with religious history: Catholic exiles, like their Reformed counterparts, helped shape the future of their chosen confession.

The Revolt that gripped the Habsburg Netherlands was a civil war, perhaps most clearly in the 1570s, when the rebels defended beachheads in the northern provinces of Holland and Zeeland, and cities like Amsterdam and Utrecht held out for the Catholic religion and the King of Spain. As Janssen observes, these town governments managed to prevent the flow of Protestant refugees, who elsewhere sparked an overthrow of the existing order. As other towns banned the Mass, conscientious Catholics moved to Amsterdam or Utrecht. But Janssen finds a ‘defeatist’ spirit among this early wave of refugees: for what sins had the Catholic faithful deserved such an upheaval, such a terrible punishment from God? Across the border, in Cologne, things were quite different. Catholics refugees in a Catholic territory had no reason to form stranger churches, as Reformed Christians had done in England and elsewhere, but city parishes were not very friendly to newcomers. On the other hand, Jesuit churches welcomed the foreigners, many of whom joined a new spiritual company, the Jesuit Sodality. In this

way the refugees also found their separate identity reinforced: local Catholics who disliked the new and more militant spirit of the Jesuits were not happy to see them gain new followers.

Between 1577 and 1580, amid a succession of Calvinist coups-d'état in the cities of Flanders and Brabant, a larger number of Catholics chose exile, often to centers beyond the Habsburg lands (like Cologne) or near the border (like Douai). In these new settings, Netherlandish-speaking Catholic refugees, whether affiliated with the Jesuits or not, were 'gradually confessionalized' (90). Meanwhile, Alexander Farnese, Duke of Parma, launched an offensive in Brabant and Flanders, and re-conquered one city after another for Philip II. As Farnese and his successors re-established town magistracies and filled other sensitive posts, they looked for Catholics of the right stamp; one could count on the exiles – who had abandoned their homes rather than abandoning the practice of their faith – as men of unimpeachable loyalty to the Church. In this respect too, their experience mirrored that of former Protestant refugees, who were disproportionately represented in positions of responsibility in the Dutch Republic. As fighting between the northern and southern provinces intensified, both governments took the steps that were suitable to a war that made political and religious loyalty hard to distinguish.

Along the Franco-Flemish border, Catholic refugees joined with exiles from England and Scotland to create an international Catholic culture; printing presses in Douai and Lille as well as Cologne turned out martyrologies and works of religious propaganda, mainly intended to harden the views of loyal Catholics for the long struggle that lay ahead. Janssen rightly finds in this development confirmation for a new picture of the Counter-Reformation that is emerging from studies of other countries: new-style Catholicism did not spring up from the lower social orders, nor was it merely imposed from above; it was borne along as well by the active contributions of people from the middling ranks of society, like these exiles.

The further broad point Janssen makes is that scholars are now turning a finer lens on the varieties within each confession, rather than stressing the sharp differences that separated them. This is why I regret that he does not carry his discussion much beyond the beginning of the Twelve Years' Truce (1609-1621). He thus misses an opportunity for more than marginal commentary on Dutch Catholicism during the early years of the Holland Mission, as conflict turned up here and there, often pitting Jesuits and others who represented a new perspective against a more home-grown strain of Catholic loyalty that claimed local roots.

Until the 1960s, people of the modern Netherlands arranged their social and political life in terms of 'pillars', each representing a religious confession or a world-outlook. Traces of this pattern could be found elsewhere on the Continent, but not so explicitly as here, and fittingly so, in light of the precocious pluralism of the Dutch Republic. Now that 'pillarization' is a

thing of the past, historians like Janssen are providing a broadly satisfying explanation of how the individual pillars were constructed. As Hegel said, the owl of Minerva flies at twilight.

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