



Charles H. Parker. *Faith on the Margins: Catholics and Catholicism in the Dutch Golden Age.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008. xiii + 331 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-02662-9.



Reviewed by Victoria Christman (Department of History, Luther College)

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Grassroots Reform: The Dutch Catholic Experience

In this study of the seventeenth-century Dutch religious landscape, Charles Parker offers an explanation for the extraordinary revival that took place in the Dutch Catholic Church in the years following the Revolt of 1572, when Catholicism existed only as an outlawed minority religion. In fact, his analysis produces a series of explanations for the remarkable tenacity of Dutch Catholicism, challenging recent scholarly assumptions regarding Dutch tolerance, confessionalization, and Tridentine reform.

Parker opens with the assertion that his is a study of “the collaboration between the laity and the secular clergy” in the northern Netherlands (p. xi). This is, indeed, one focus of his work, but his nuanced analysis encompasses many other important aspects of the post-Revolt Catholic experience as well. Some of his sub-themes reveal themselves as the introduction unfolds, and Parker admits that his goal is a “synthetic treatment of Dutch Catholicism and a historical analysis of Catholic religious identity in a Protestant republic” (p. 4). Moreover, the Dutch Catholic example serves, in Parker’s view, as a basis upon which to understand more broadly

“how religious minorities sustain their identity in a hostile environment” (p. 8). While Parker pursues both of these objectives throughout the book, the main thrust of his argument is a multifaceted and well-documented critique of the confessionalization thesis. Parker uses the Dutch experience as an example of the realized possibility of an institutional church reformed without the support or coercion of central authorities, temporal or religious. He reveals a Catholic Reformation in the Dutch Republic that took place under the determined oversight of a self-organized, local clerical hierarchy, with the vital cooperation of an engaged, demanding lay elite.

Parker bases his argument on two case studies: the Holland Mission, the “Catholic missionary organization for the Northern Netherlands” (p. 1), and the Haarlem Cathedral Chapter. The Holland Mission was manned by a series of apostolic vicars who sought to act in the stead of the secular clerical hierarchy, functioning essentially as bishops and archbishops for the region. The canons of the Haarlem Chapter similarly attempted to continue to function as pastoral caregivers, remaining in their posts long after they had been officially expelled by the Calvin-

ist authorities (p. 37). Parker's story also reveals the tensions that emerged between these secular clerics and the Jesuits, who came to the territory in the post-Revolt years. Their view of the Netherlands as a missionary field conflicted starkly with that of the secular priests, who saw themselves as a seamless continuation of the clerical hierarchy in the area, hoping and even expecting that the Catholic Church would be restored in the territory, long into the seventeenth century (p. 79). This fundamental difference in the outlook of the secular and regular clerics was a constant source of tension during the period under consideration and reappears frequently throughout the book.

The book itself is divided into five chapters. The first provides an overview of the religious landscape for Catholics in the Dutch Republic. Here, Parker explains the structure of religious oversight and details the conflicts between the secular clerics and Jesuits. He also considers the practical situation in which lay Catholics found themselves in the early years of the Calvinist Republic. The two chapters that follow lay out various aspects of clerical formation and practice in the territory. These chapters are followed by two more which focus on the importance of lay input in the rebuilding of Catholicism and the struggles faced by Catholics in this situation. Together, the chapters build a coherent story of the resurgence of the Catholic Church in the post-Revolt period, but the structure of these chapters does not reflect the specific elements of the argument Parker puts forward. Rather, he weaves his theses throughout each chapter, building evidence to support his contentions on a range of issues. Thus, although this is, as Parker initially claimed, a book about the interaction between the clergy and the laity, it contains forcefully argued theses on three main fronts: the influence of Trent on the post-Revolt Catholic Church; the importance of lay involvement in the rebuilding of that church; and the pragmatic nature of official policies of toleration in the Dutch context. A consideration of each of these arguments will provide a more complete description of the work than would a chapter-by-chapter analysis.

At the outset of the book, Parker asserts that scholars have failed to address the influence of Trent on the post-Revolt Catholic Church. This omission he describes as a result, in part, of the credence accorded Hugu Franciscus van Heussen's *Batavia Sacra* (1714), which painted a picture of Dutch Catholicism as national and un-Tridentine. On the contrary, his research affirms that the Catholic Church actually fashioned itself *more* closely along Tridentine lines than was the case in many Catholic terri-

ories. Despite their conflicts on other matters, both the Jesuits and the apostolic vicars of the Holland Mission were Tridentine in outlook, and managed to impose the stipulations of Trent on new clerics and their charges—no mean feat in a situation of religious choice, where parishioners were free to leave if they felt clerical oversight too stringent. Parker argues that Tridentine reform was possible for two reasons. First, the establishment of a clerical educational framework, in which incoming priests were required to attend seminary (at Cologne, then at Louvain, and eventually at their own specially founded institution after 1683) provided for the training of newly minted clerics in Tridentine Catholicism, the precepts of which they eventually passed on to the parishioners in their care. The second reason for the successful implementation of Trent was the fact that Dutch Catholicism was able to reform without the intervention of the “imperious state power” normally considered essential to the confessionalizing process (p. 16). Thus, Parker redresses previous scholarly oversight of Tridentine influence by insisting that it was in fact a central feature of Catholic reform in the Netherlands.

The second argument Parker makes is that this confessionalization process not only occurred without overbearing temporal enforcement, but actually relied on the extensive input of lay elites. Parker claims that the extent of lay involvement in the reconstruction of Dutch Catholicism has been overlooked in the past, and one of his central objectives in this book is to reinsert the laity into this story. It was not only possible, he argues, but vital, that the Dutch laity involve themselves in the church's reconstruction efforts. The confiscation of church property in the years following the Revolt meant that the Catholic Church and its Dutch clergy became entirely dependent on the financial help and patronage of Dutch Catholic elites, who paid salaries, bribed hostile local authorities, endowed secret schools, and donated generously to clerical education. Without them, the church would surely have failed to reemerge as strongly as it did. Their presence affirms Parker's foundational claim that confessionalization was not at all top-down in the Dutch case, but that “lay aspirations overlapped those of the clergy, local traditions continued to shape religious identity, and revival took place at the grassroots level” (p. 150).

The fact that Catholicism was able to flourish in a Calvinist territory is often assumed to be the result of an organic toleration that began to build in the northern Netherlands during this period. Parker's third argument takes issue with this view, adding his voice to

the recent chorus of scholars that includes Benjamin Kaplan and Joke Spaans, who roundly criticize the standard nineteenth-century view of Dutch religious tolerance as founded on post-Enlightenment notions of religious freedoms and innate human rights. Instead, Parker argues that whatever religious freedom Dutch Catholics experienced was merely “a respite from prosecution” (p. 3). He provides convincing evidence that contemporary Catholics perceived their treatment at the hands of the Calvinist rulers as persecution, and contends that official policies of toleration were merely “an effective means for managing religious conflict in a multiconfessional society” (p. 57), employed by the ruling “pragmatic, profit-driven elites” (p. 53). Moreover, Parker finds that Calvinist officials pursued a policy of sporadic religious violence, directed primarily against Catholic priests, as a way to remind Catholics of their political subordination (p. 48). No priests were executed in this period, but they were frequently arrested, incarcerated, and eventually ransomed, thereby crippling the Catholic community practically and financially. Such policies Parker interprets as a conscious form of pragmatic societal management in a volatile period in which harsher governmental action could well have resulted in civil war (p. 57).

Although this study focuses on a very specific geographic and chronological period, Parker clearly aims for a broader appeal. To realize that objective, and make his story accessible to those unfamiliar with Dutch Reformation history, he is careful to include comprehensive introductory narratives for each of his chapters, in which he reviews the literature pertinent to the Dutch case, as well as similar studies focused on other European localities. Following his overview of the secondary literature, he poses a series of questions which the chapter then goes on to answer. This format is somewhat formulaic, but does achieve its purpose of providing a lucid synopsis of the issue at hand, an overview of current scholarship, and a clear outline of the discussion to come. In terms of the Dutch situation, much of Parker’s secondary information comes from the nineteenth-century scholarship of historians such as R. R. Post, or earlier twentieth-century work on Dutch Catholicism by L. J. Rogier. The fact that his secondary source base is rather dated is a reflection on the state of research into Catholicism in the Dutch Republic. Scholarly focus has long centered on the Reformed Church in the United Provinces, and Parker is one of the few to attempt a synthetic analysis of the Catholic experience.

One reason for scholarly reticence on this count is the dearth of primary source material. For his part, Parker is

consistently transparent in explaining lacunae in his own sources. Although the geographic focus of his story is limited to Utrecht and Haarlem, he mines the sources of those locations thoroughly, including documentation of correspondence between clergy and laity as well as clerical records and official reports by members of the presiding clergy. Parker explains that, because his focus is on “lay-clerical interaction” (p. xi), he will omit all of the religious orders, with the exception of the Jesuits, because the other orders left little evidence of their interaction with the laity. Much of his ensuing discussion, however, focuses on the structure of the underground Catholic Church, and the tensions it fostered between the secular and regular clergy. Occasionally, other religious orders creep into the narrative, but Parker’s overall argument would have benefited from a consideration of the Catholic community as a whole, given that his aim was to provide a “synthetic treatment of Dutch Catholicism” (p. 4) for the period.

The religious orders are not the only group that receives short shrift in Parker’s account. Less sketchy, but somewhat shallow nonetheless, is his treatment of women as a lay force in this story. Parker is careful to mention the importance of women in the Catholic revival, particularly in terms of their role as wealthy patrons. But his coverage of this issue is in no way systematic. If lay women were as important as Parker suggests, then their story might have merited a dedicated section of the book, rather than merely a series of asides throughout the narrative. This would enable him to include a more comprehensive consideration of the details of female involvement in the reconstruction effort.

Parker’s study is also limited geographically, in that he chooses to focus on Utrecht and Haarlem. His reasons for doing so are justifiable (these are the areas with the most surviving sources), but this choice prevents him from providing a true synthesis of the situation as a whole. In actuality, he has produced a local study, a micro-history of Catholicism in a persecuting society. Yet, this limitation does not negate the value of the book. Parker’s analysis is complex, answering broad questions accessible to wide audiences, while at the same time incorporating sophisticated theses, critiquing and amending accepted historical theories. His work represents a significant step in piecing together the lived realities of the Catholic revival of the early seventeenth century. He rightly claims that the extensively researched insights he proffers on the basis of the Dutch experience may have much broader implications for scholars of the Reformation and historians of all geographic stripes.

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