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*Quo Vadis? Catholic Perceptions of Flight and the Revolt of the Low Countries, 1566–1609**

by GEERT H. JANSSEN

This article examines Catholic views of flight, exile, and displacement during the Dutch Revolt. It argues that the civil war in the sixteenth-century Low Countries generated a new imagery of exile among Catholics, a process that was to some extent similar to what had happened to Protestant refugees a few decades earlier. Yet the Dutch case also demonstrates that the contrasting outcomes of the revolts in the Northern and Southern Netherlands led to very different appreciations of exile in Catholic communities in both areas. Habsburg triumph and Tridentine militancy sparked a Counter-Reformation movement in the Southern Netherlands that glorified exile and presented refugees as exemplary forces of an international militant church. In the northern Dutch Republic the revolt created a more ambiguous Catholic identity, in which loyalty to an officially Protestant state could coincide with commitment to the Church of Rome.

1. INTRODUCTION

In January 1593 Pieter van Opmeer (1526–94), member of a distinguished Catholic family from Delft, drew up his will. In the presence of a notary and two witnesses he formally disinherited two of his sons, Pieter Jr. and Lucas. By way of explanation, Pieter van Opmeer added that both men were currently living in the Southern Netherlands, where they had “entered the service of the King of Spain, thereby choosing sides against the United Netherlands Provinces and particularly against Holland, their fatherland, where their father, brothers, and sisters are living, and their forebears are buried.”¹ The decision of the two sons to base themselves in Spanish-Habsburg territory thus marked a dramatic split in the Catholic Opmeer family. For students of the Dutch Revolt it is puzzling why this

*Please see the online version of this article for color illustrations.

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¹Erfgoed Archief Delft (EAD), Oud notarieel archief Delft, 1536, 10 (will of Pieter van Opmeer, 27 January 1593): “alsoe sijlijden hun in dienste vande Coninck van Spaengien begevende ende mitsdien contrarie partije houdende sijn tegens dese geunieerde nederlantsche provincien, ende principalicken tegens die van hollandt heur vaderlant, daer heur vader, broeders ende suster wonen, ende heur voerouders begraven sijn.”

should have been the case. First of all, the firm disapproval by Pieter Sr. contradicts the view that by the late sixteenth century the Dutch Revolt had turned into a confessional conflict in which commitment to the Church of Rome often overlapped with loyalty to the Habsburg regime.² The Catholic credentials of Pieter van Opmeer were immaculate, and yet he apparently refused to accept his sons' allegiance to the King of Spain.³ Secondly, his criticism is remarkable because Pieter van Opmeer had done something similar himself ten years earlier. When the town of Delft had opened its gates to the rebel troops of William of Orange in 1572, Pieter Sr. had escaped and moved to royal territory.⁴ Thus the case of the Opmeer family does not only present us with contrasting Catholic views on the issue of loyalty and flight during the Dutch Revolt, but also suggests that these views shifted in the course of the conflict.

This article seeks to explain these paradoxical responses by exploring the Catholic controversy over flight during the revolt in the Low Countries (ca. 1566–1609). While questions regarding the legitimacy and respectability of exile have been studied extensively among Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anabaptists in Reformation Europe, Catholic views on displacement have received little scrutiny.⁵ A notable exception concerns recent scholarship on Catholics in Elizabethan England, who were likewise confronted with the delicate issue of political loyalty and religious conformity. Scholars such as Christopher Highley, Alison Shell, and Alexandra Walsham have examined the various responses of English Catholics to the challenges of life in a Protestant state, and have shown how exile experiences fostered the development of a distinct Catholic culture in the British isles.⁶ However insightful this scholarship has been, few attempts have been made to compare these English examples with responses of Catholics elsewhere in Europe, including the Low Countries. Since Catholics in both areas faced similar dilemmas, we might expect that discussions about flight and displacement were no less challenging to Catholics in the rebellious Low Countries than they were to their coreligionists in England.⁷ Proceeding

²Israel, 205–20, 377–95; C. H. Parker, 24–58; Vermaseren, 1981, 37–50, 115–42.

³Pieter van Opmeer was, among other things, the composer of a book on Catholic martyrs: see Vermaseren, 1960; Vermaseren, 1981, 191–96.

⁴Opmeer returned to Delft in 1577: EAD, Oud archief Delft, 388 (register of returned refugees, 12 May 1577).

⁵The literature on Calvinist exile is particularly vast. Compare overviews in Benedict; Duke, Lewis, and Pettegree; Grell; Pettegree.

⁶Highley; Shell; Walsham, 1993.

⁷Compare *Catholic Communities in Protestant States*, in which the issue of flight is not addressed.

from this comparative perspective, this article will map the different views of exile that circulated among Netherlandish Catholics, and assess how and why these perceptions gradually shifted in the course of the Dutch Revolt. More specifically, I will investigate what drove Catholic men and women either to leave or to stay at home, and identify the different models available to those who pondered an escape from Protestant rule. These could vary from biblical paradigms of exile, recent examples of displaced Catholics from England, and even Protestant precedents. Finally, I will delineate how exactly such narratives were adapted to, and appropriated by, Catholic audiences in the Netherlands.

Addressing these questions is relevant, not only to modify the image of religious exile as an exclusively Protestant concern, but also to explain the transformation of Catholic culture in the sixteenth-century Netherlands. It is a commonplace that the Dutch Revolt eventually split the Habsburg Low Countries and created two contrasting states, the northern Dutch Republic and the southern Spanish-Habsburg Netherlands. This article shows how Catholic perceptions of flight also further our understanding of the development of different Catholic mentalities in these two areas. It will principally call upon texts — diaries, memoirs, poems, correspondence — produced by Netherlandish Catholics in three successive phases: 1566–79, 1580–85, and 1585–1609. Eclectic in nature, this source material allows us to recapture the voices of individual Catholics in the Dutch Revolt and to assess the forces that led them to change their views. While some of these texts have been published in the past, a significant number only survive in manuscripts that are kept in Belgian, Dutch, German, and Italian archives.

2. CATHOLIC WORRIES

Commonly known as the Dutch Revolt, the civil war in the sixteenth-century Habsburg Low Countries was caused by a complex interaction of political and religious concerns. Discussions about the nature of Habsburg authority and the government's response to the rise of Protestantism led to the outbreak of open violence in the later 1560s. The military conflict that followed lasted for almost eighty years. Recent scholarship has emphasized that the Dutch Revolt was not an isolated or uniquely Netherlandish phenomenon, but an international religious war that showed some striking similarities with the French Wars of Religion.⁸ All the same, the conflict in the Low Countries was quite exceptional in the large number of religious refugees it generated, Protestant as well as Catholic. To some extent these

⁸Benedict, Marnef, van Nierop, and Venard; G. Parker; Pollmann, 2009b.

contrasting groups run parallel. While evangelical dissenters escaped persecution in royal Habsburg territory, Catholic clergy and officeholders left areas that were taken by rebel forces. Since both Protestants and Catholics generally shared a belief in the need for religious uniformity, religious dissenters on both sides had the option to conform, accept persecution, or to emigrate.⁹

Despite such parallels, it is clear that the Catholic diaspora in the Low Countries was much smaller in size than its Protestant counterpart. This discrepancy is explained by the ambiguous position of Catholics in the conflict. First of all, the revolt against Habsburg rule only gradually took on a dominant Protestant coloring. During the early stages of the rebellion, in the 1560s and early '70s, many Catholics did not perceive the revolt as a primarily religious struggle, but rather as a political dispute over monarchical authority and local privileges.¹⁰ Secondly, the legal position of Catholics in rebel territory was stronger, or at least more ambivalent, than that of evangelical believers in Habsburg lands. While the latter were confronted with royal placards that prescribed the death penalty for any form of religious heterodoxy, the former could often negotiate some form of religious accommodation. Rebel leader William of Orange (1533–84) initially even promoted biconfessional arrangements, although this policy of religious tolerance proved difficult to implement. Thus, in 1573 Catholic worship was suspended temporarily in rebel Holland and Zeeland. From 1581 this situation was confirmed when Catholic worship became officially forbidden in all rebellious provinces. The Union of Utrecht (1579), however, guaranteed a vaguely defined freedom of conscience. As a result, Catholics were generally allowed to practice their faith in private.¹¹

And yet, Catholics, both clergy and laity, could still have pressing reasons to consider migration during the Dutch Revolt. For some the decision to leave rebel territory simply concerned an escape from violence and aggression. During the civil war, priests and female religious regularly fell victim to harassment, rape, and murder. It has been estimated that between 1566 and 1591 about 130 clerics were killed by rebel troops.¹² For other Catholics the dilemma of political loyalty was particularly pressing. Magistrates who did not want to be involved with rebellious rule often preferred to base themselves in royal territory, confident that the military tide would turn soon. In addition, Catholic citizens started to leave rebel towns in the later

⁹Janssen, 2009; Kaplan, 156–61; Nierop, 2009, 176–85.

¹⁰Woltjer, 9–63.

¹¹Knuttel, 1:x–xi, 1–14; Kooi; C. H. Parker, 24–68.

¹²Gregory, 6.

1570s and '80s when it became clear that radical Calvinists gained a dominant role in local governments. Especially in southern cities such as Ghent, Brussels, and Antwerp, where so-called Calvinist republics were established, Catholics left in considerable numbers. Finally, there was a category of Catholic loyalists who were driven out by force. In the course of the civil war, urban authorities expelled members of religious orders, notably the Mendicants and the Jesuits, as well as Catholic citizens who were suspected of treason.¹³ Some of these refugees moved to remaining royalist strongholds such as Amsterdam, Utrecht, and Groningen in the northern provinces, and Douai and St. Omer in the south. Others escaped to Catholic safe havens abroad, including Cologne, Emmerich, and Liège.

3. BIBLICAL, CLASSICAL, AND JUDICIAL MODELS

In the *Conscriptio Exulum* (ca. 1584), a register of Catholic refugees from Friesland, the priest Hotzo Aecxma carefully listed the different categories of displacement just discussed. In an elaborately illustrated manuscript Aecxma indicated which Frisian Catholics had recently been “driven out” (*verdreven*), “expelled” (*verjaecht*), “banished” (*gebannen*), or had “escaped” (*gevluchtet*).¹⁴ The use of such classifications reveals that perceptions of contemporary exile were shaped by existing semantic categories and adopted classical, biblical, and judicial tropes. As scholars of the Protestant Reformation have stressed, early modern debates on flight were framed in a centuries-old Christian discussion, in which historical precedents served as common frames of reference.¹⁵ Such models were equally important to sixteenth-century Catholics. They enabled Hotzo Aecxma to link his own recent experiences to key narratives of the biblical and classical tradition. Similarly, when in 1582 the prolific Jesuit author Peter Canisius (1521–97) advised his relatives in Nijmegen about the option of exile, he naturally blended his analysis of the present situation in the town with examples from scripture.¹⁶ Like many of his contemporaries, Canisius was convinced that biblical precedents provided models of proper action in the present.

¹³Andriessen, 1987; Dewitte and Viaene; Knuttel, 1:1–45; Marnef; Nierop, 2009, 176–85; Viaene.

¹⁴Tresoar, Archief Eysinga-Vegelin van Claerbergen, 3370 (*Conscriptio Exulum Frisiae*). Available at <http://www2.tresoar.nl/digicollectie/object.php?object=215&zveld=&volg=0>. Accessed 2 January 2011.

¹⁵Schunka, 2008; Wright, 220.

¹⁶Braunsberger, 8:97–101.

Identifying parallels between past and present could also cause confusion, since the imagery of exile that could be drawn from ancient authoritative texts proved highly ambiguous. For example, some biblical tales, including the flight of Daniel and the story of the exiled Israelites, seemed to encourage migration for religious reasons and to glorify the experience of displacement. But other examples, such as the apocryphal *Quo vadis* narrative of the Apostle Paul, suggested that escaping persecution conflicted with God's providence. The latter reading was confirmed by the teachings of several patristic authorities, such as Augustine of Hippo, who had also been critical of flight.¹⁷ More positive interpretations of displacement could again be found in the notions of *peregrinatio* and *homo viator*, concepts regularly used by pilgrims and traveling academics. Authors of spiritual works, such as the pioneering Catholic reformer Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), similarly presented their journeys as a rewarding religious experience that had deepened their bond with God.¹⁸

In addition to biblical and pious guidelines, would-be refugees in sixteenth-century Europe found inspiration in classical writings, such as those of Ovid and Virgil. They did not so much provide immediate answers about the legitimacy of flight from persecution, but offered helpful reflections on the deeper meanings of exile. Several Catholic refugees, including Jacques de Slupere (1532–1602) and Gislain Bulteel (1555–1611) from Ypres, drew on this classical heritage in their poems, in which they reflected on their own experiences.¹⁹ Finally, images of exile were shaped by judicial frames of reference, in which banishment was often conceived as a purifying instrument that removed deviant elements from the community. It is typical that the expulsion of banished rebels by the Habsburg government in the Netherlands often coincided with the destruction of their dwellings and similar rituals of cleansing.²⁰ In his popular emblem book *Iconologia* (1593), the Italian humanist Cesare Ripa builds on this varied biblical, classical, and legal heritage by pointing out that there were two different forms of exile, thus reflecting its ambivalent imagery. The first concerned forced banishment, which could be applied by secular authorities. The second form was voluntary exile, which referred to those who preferred to live and die outside their *patria*. The latter type was represented more positively in Ripa's manual by the image of a pilgrim.²¹

¹⁷Wright, 222–26.

¹⁸Loyola, 29–38; Schunka, 2008, 189–95.

¹⁹Enenkel, 619–40; Bakelants, 67–74.

²⁰Janssen, 2009, 43–52.

²¹Ripa, 28.

Considering this intellectual background, it is somewhat surprising that the Catholic refugee crisis in the Low Countries did not spark a noticeable public debate about the legitimacy and respectability of flight. Apart from a few scattered examples, little printed material produced by, or pitched at, displaced Catholics has survived.²² This absence is all the more remarkable since persecuted Protestants had previously written a great deal about the meanings of exile. It would be misleading, however, to read this contrasting response as proof of limited Catholic interest in the issue. Recent scholarship on English Catholics has revealed a considerable number of contemporary publications devoted to the question of whether flight was morally justifiable, or even divinely sanctioned.²³ The apparent reluctance of Netherlandish Catholics to reflect publicly on the controversy may perhaps be better explained by the challenging circumstances of civil war. As will be shown, numerous Catholics — men and women, clergy and lay — struggled with the question of migration, but few had the means to address these dilemmas publicly via the printing press. We therefore need to shift the focus of attention to a number of alternative sources that largely survive in manuscript.

4. 1566 TO 1579: ENCOUNTERING EXILE

While forced religious migration was a well-known phenomenon in Reformation Europe, there is no doubt that the notion of flight was an entirely new, confusing, and humiliating experience for Netherlandish Catholics. The Augustinian friar Wouter Jacobsz (ca. 1522–95) reflected on his flight in a diary he started in Amsterdam, one of the few towns in Holland that remained loyal to the Habsburg government in the 1570s. Originally prior of the monastery of Stein near the town of Gouda, Wouter had escaped to Amsterdam in 1572. His experiences in the center of Catholic asylum inspired him to compose a memoir in which he recorded his daily activities and also tried to make greater sense of the dramatic turn in his life.²⁴ On 17 February 1573 Wouter recorded how a deep sense of despair was overwhelming him: “I was in two minds and contemplated where I should go. One day I pondered Cologne, the other day Louvain. At some moments, I thought about moving to Italy, at others I considered Flanders . . . yet I felt I was too old to wander through the country. . . . And as

²²Vermaseren, 1981; Andriessen, 1957; Viaene.

²³The phrase “divinely sanctioned” is adapted from Highley, 33. For Catholic-exile printing culture, see Shell; Walsham, 2000.

²⁴An analysis of the diaries is offered in Eeghen; Nierop, 2009.

a result I saw no other comfort than in our dear Lord alone.”²⁵ Wouter Jacobsz’s doubts exemplify the dilemma that numerous Netherlandish Catholics faced in the 1570s and ’80s, when they were confronted for the first time with rebellious rule, public Protestant worship, and the intricate question of what it actually meant to be Catholic.

Against this backdrop it becomes understandable why reservations against migration and exile initially dominated the Catholic mindset. Various sources allow us to trace the origins of this negative imagery. First of all, it is clear that some Catholics were receptive to the dogmatic principle that escaping was an act of defiance against divine providence. Brad Gregory has shown how all denominations in sixteenth-century Europe hailed martyrdom, rather than exile, as the ultimate way to prove one’s steadfastness, piety, and sacrifice. The choice to die for the faith and hence imitate Christ, Gregory provocatively argues, should be understood “not as fanaticism of the fringe, but as exemplary action.”²⁶ A telling case in point of this attitude is offered by the anonymous author of the *Fondatieboek* of the Poor Clares in Antwerp. The author of this chronicle, which was probably composed in the seventeenth century, claimed that during the Calvinist regime several nuns had refused to leave the city, both because of their vows of enclosure and a shared “desire for martyrdom.”²⁷ Crucially, the Tridentine movement, which sought to rejuvenate Catholic piety in the second half of the sixteenth century, triggered a renewed interest in early Christian martyrdom. Thus, as Catholics were encouraged to revisit this ancient legacy, contemporary victims of rebel violence could easily be interpreted as reenactors of a long Catholic tradition.²⁸ Priests and magistrates who were killed during the Dutch Revolt indeed became the object of passionate Catholic veneration, and continued to serve as role models throughout the seventeenth century.²⁹

Such appreciations of martyrdom were related to commonly held views that fleeing was an act of cowardice and treason. In May 1567 a number of Catholics returned to Amsterdam after they had escaped the town during the

²⁵Eeghen, 1:188: “Ende ontfinck hierdoer verscheyde gedachten, waermede ick mij oefende, gepeynsende waerwerts ick mij keeren soude. Op deen stonde sach ick nae Coelen, op dander nae Loeven. Somtijts docht mij ick wilde nae Ytaliën, somtijts waende ick in Vlaenderen . . . alsoe ick mijn natuer wel kende ende mij ombequaem vonde om in mijn oude dagen doer tlant te dwaelen. . . . Ende en sach gheen ander troost dan an ons lieve Heer aleen.”

²⁶Gregory, 8.

²⁷Quoted by Schoutens, 73: “uijt begeerte van de martelie-croon.”

²⁸Gregory, 251.

²⁹Arblaster, 2004; Gregory, 274–314; C. H. Parker, 181–82; Vermaseren, 1960.

iconoclastic fury the previous year. The local Franciscan priest Hendrik van Biesten flatly condemned this conduct in his analysis of the troubles: "One cannot regard [these refugees] as pious citizens, who in times of trouble and crisis leave their town and escape from where they were born."³⁰ A couple of years later, van Biesten lamented the passivity of the magistrates, parish priests, and monks who had left Hoorn after the invasion by rebel troops: "[They] arrived in Amsterdam with all they could carry with them and let the beggars [i.e., rebels] break the town, without doing anything, as it has turned out to be."³¹

Van Biesten was not alone in arguing that flight conflicted with the role of clerics as protectors and shepherds. In February 1578 Baudouin Delange (1535–1601), provincial of the Society of Jesus, warned his subordinates in the Netherlands not to leave their posts unless they were driven out by force or were given explicit orders from the government. After all, he reasoned, a voluntary migration of clerical leaders would only facilitate the implementation of a heretical order.³² For secular clergy the decision to move was particularly sensitive, since the decrees of the Council of Trent had recently affirmed a strict duty of residence. It is illustrative that many exiled bishops and parish priests took great pains in justifying their conduct. For example, the later Bishop of Roermond, Willem Lindanus (1525–88), exaggerated the violence in The Hague in 1566 in an attempt to defend his dubious and hasty flight.³³ Several sources confirm that in 1566 and 1572 Lindanus and other escaped clerics were received rather coolly in host towns.³⁴

It thus appears that, in the early stages of the revolt, it was often considered more honorable for priests to hide than to leave their flock.³⁵ Notably, female religious tended to be hesitant about migration. In a society in which women living independently were regarded with suspicion, and nuns were bound to rules of enclosure, displacement was a sensitive issue. This gendered dimension of exile is confirmed by evidence from rebellious towns, where female religious often stayed in their convents while male religious moved away. Records of interrogations that were later undertaken

³⁰"Vervolg," 421: "men mag se voor geen vroomme Burghers achten, die in tyden van Last ende noodd uit haer stad vaeren en vluchten van daar sy syn gewonnen en gebooren."

³¹*Ibid.*, 440: "quamen almeede tot Amstelredam met Lyff ende goet, al wat sy uit der stad konden krygen en lieten de geusen de stad houwen, sonder een hand daarvoor uit te steecken als gebleeken is."

³²Andriessen, 1957, 13.

³³Beuningen, 192–94, 396–97. Similar examples in Brom and Hensen, 251, 260, 289.

³⁴Beuningen, 398–99; Fruin, 114; Eeghen, 1:370–71.

³⁵Prims, 48; Smet, 70; Schoutens, 79.

by ecclesiastical authorities mention that some female religious sought refuge with local relatives, since they regarded this to be the best strategy to protect their sexual honor and religious respectability.³⁶ It is typical that those women who did eventually opt for exile later had to prove their impeccable conduct during their stays in refugee centers. In 1583 Françoise de Hezin and Josine de Tourne from the Cistercian monastery of Groeninghe had to provide the authorities with attestations listing their daily activities, the extent of their enclosure, and their clothing habits during their exile in Douai.³⁷

Outside these ecclesiastical spheres, objections against exile often had political backgrounds. Contrary to the situation in the Holy Roman Empire, the *ius emigrandi*, the permission to emigrate for religious reasons, was not an officially recognized privilege in the Habsburg Low Countries. In the early stages of the conflict, quite a few royalist officeholders were in doubt about whether they were actually allowed to leave areas that formally belonged to the King of Spain. Members of the Court of Holland explicitly asked the Duke of Alba in 1572 for permission to base themselves in the royalist safe haven of Utrecht.³⁸ Some Catholics even argued that escaping magistrates damaged the royalist cause. The polemicist Frans van Dusseldorp (1567–1630) later pointed out in his *Annales* that fleeing officials in 1572 had in fact facilitated the establishment of the new, rebel regime in Holland.³⁹ In the northern Catholic stronghold Groningen, the local town secretary Johan Julsing (ca. 1545–1604) rejected exile for entirely different reasons. Apparently inspired by classical and neo-Stoic philosophy, he argued in his private diary that migrating was no real solution. *Apatheia*, or eradicating emotional responses to external turmoil, was the best strategy to deal with the current problems. Julsing's recordings characteristically contain references to the *De Constantia*, the popular treatise that the humanist scholar Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) had published in 1584.⁴⁰

It is more difficult to assess how far such academic arguments guided the actual behavior of common Catholics. Some may have referred to abstract principles and biblical teachings to explain their conduct, but it is not always clear if this self-justifying rhetoric had been the cause, or rather the result, of

³⁶Examples in Algemeen Rijksarchief Brussels (ARAB), Archief van Staat en Audiëntie (Audiëntie), 911 (St. Marguerite, fol. 109); ARAB, Audiëntie, 912 (Bijloke, fols. 2–3); Schoutens, 52. Compare Schunka, 2009, 50.

³⁷ARAB, Audiëntie, 911 (Groeninghe, fols. 51–98).

³⁸Smit, 192–93.

³⁹Fruin, 113, 131.

⁴⁰Broek, esp. 113. An analysis is in Nierop, 2006, 44; see also Schunka, 2008, 185–86.

their decision to stay. There is no doubt, however, that the large majority of those who considered themselves Catholic never contemplated exile in the 1570s and '80s. Two concerns seem to have been particularly relevant to them. First, most common Catholics could not afford to go into exile. From studies of religious migration elsewhere in early modern Europe it has become clear that the degree of one's financial independence, possibilities of work elsewhere, and extent of social networks largely determined whether migration was a realistic option.⁴¹ It is typical that the Catholic refugee communities of Cologne, Douai, and Liège largely consisted of citizens belonging to the urban middling sort. Merchants, entrepreneurs, and artisans who were not bound to local guild restrictions were particularly overrepresented.⁴²

Apart from financial restrictions, a second consideration concerned the implications of living under rebellious, Protestant authority. Especially during the 1570s, Catholic citizens often saw no harm in staying in rebel areas. Jan Sweerts, for instance, lived in the village of Zevenbergen, which was regularly occupied by rebel troops. In 1573 he told royal officials that his life under rebel rule had never interfered with his loyalty to the Catholic Church and the King of Spain. A letter from a local priest served to confirm his integrity.⁴³ In other cases it appears that Catholic believers were actually prepared to conform outwardly to Protestantism, or even to accommodate elements of evangelical belief. In recent decades scholars have emphasized the malleable, fluent, and shifting nature of religious identities in the sixteenth-century Low Countries.⁴⁴ Even priests could be willing to adapt to the new circumstances. In rebel Antwerp in the early 1580s it was recorded that monks had started schools to compensate for their loss of income, while others continued to preach in local churches that now served Protestants.⁴⁵ If religious divisions could be gradual for priests, we may expect the same applied for laypersons. Although it is difficult to recapture the mindset of individual "protestantizing Catholics," to use the phrase of J. J. Woltjer, it is telling that more confessionalized Catholics were highly critical about the supposed passivity and weakness of these religious middle groups.⁴⁶ Wouter Jacobsz was shocked by stories he heard about priests in Holland who had recently started businesses, married, and occasionally preached in Protestant

⁴¹Kaplan, 156–61.

⁴²Donnet, 6–7; Viaene.

⁴³ARAB, Raad van Beroerten, 3 (fols. 66–81, dossier Jan Sweerts, 1573).

⁴⁴Duke, 2003 and 2009; Pollmann, 1999; Woltjer.

⁴⁵Prims, 123–47.

⁴⁶Woltjer, 14, "protestantiserende katholieken."

churches.⁴⁷ In 1578 the exiled Bishop Willem Lindanus argued that the troubles in the Low Countries had mainly been caused by “feeble” officeholders whose Catholic faith was “eroded” by heretical ideas.⁴⁸

5. 1580 TO 1585: EMBRACING EXILE

These internal disputes show how, by the late 1570s, Catholic views about the revolt were shifting, and simultaneously how leading Catholics started to reconsider the role they had to play. This development was especially visible among those who had initially sympathized with the rebellion and who were confronted with a gradual Calvinization of the revolt. In August 1580 Frans van den Bossche, member of the Norbertine abbey of Drongen near Ghent, wrote a letter of complaint to the Habsburg government about the prelate of his congregation. Van den Bossche pointed out that the prelate and several monks had based themselves in rebel Ghent, where they enjoyed a pension from the local Protestant government. By contrast, Van den Bossche and his fellow brothers had opted for exile, and now suffered in poverty.⁴⁹ Around the same time an argument broke out between members of the illustrious abbey of St. Michael in Antwerp. While one faction stressed the need for Catholics to move to royal Habsburg territory, another one rejected exile and saw no harm in maintaining relations with the rebel authorities.⁵⁰

Judith Pollmann has recently shown how the polarization of the Dutch Revolt in the late 1570s and early '80s encouraged the construction a more self-conscious Catholic identity.⁵¹ As a consequence, perceptions of exile changed as well. Early examples of this may be found in the writings of Catholics who stayed in refugee centers. The same Hendrik van Biesten who had been critical about the flight of Catholics in 1567 expressed a very different view in a poem he composed some time after 1572.⁵² This time he glorified the role that Amsterdam had played as an asylum for Catholic refugees. “Displaced priests have been received by her,” van Biesten notes with approval: “Its gates have been opened early and late; to host the faithful.” Once skeptical about the integrity of exiles, Van Biesten now

⁴⁷Egghen, 1:300, 2:669.

⁴⁸Brom, 1892.

⁴⁹Valvekens, 146.

⁵⁰ARAB, Audiëntie, 910 (St. Michael, fols. 2–20, 305–311).

⁵¹Pollmann, 2009a.

⁵²Published in Amsterdam in 1572 or 1573 by the printer Willem Jacobsz. Reprinted in Teylingen, 219–28; “Liedeken.”

predicted that Amsterdam would “flourish with honor” just because it had turned itself into a bastion of displaced Catholics.⁵³

Van Biesten’s shifting views were illustrative of a change of mentality that became conspicuous among Netherlandish Catholics in the early 1580s. As it became clear to them that the survival of Catholicism required action from individual believers, exile received more positive connotations as well. In 1580 Johannes Costerius, a priest from the Flemish town of Oudenaarde who had taken refuge in Douai, published a booklet, the *Institutio necessaria*. He meticulously countered the arguments against flight that circulated in the Catholic community, and instead promoted exile as an admirable strategy by which committed Catholics could show their true allegiance to the Church of Rome and to the King of Spain.⁵⁴ Other prominent refugees, including the expelled bishops Willem Lindanus (1525–88), Johannes Strijen (d. 1594), and Cunerus Petri (ca. 1530–80) similarly developed narratives that presented migration as a respectable option.⁵⁵ Yet it was not just the polarization of the Dutch Revolt that triggered this new rhetoric. The changing perception of exile was equally informed by the militant spirit of international Catholicism that became conspicuous around 1580. Especially in Catholic asylum centers such as Cologne and Douai, where Netherlandish exiles interacted with English and Irish counterparts and had access to recent Tridentine media, a new Catholic discourse emerged. Five recurring arguments became especially fashionable among these pioneering defenders of Catholic exile.

First, it is clear that the increasing radicalism of Calvinist regimes in Brabantine and Flemish towns convinced hesitant Catholics that flight was necessary to ensure salvation. For example, in 1581 authorities in Antwerp and Brussels started to compel members of religious orders to attend Reformed services, and forced them to wear common clothes and to alter their hairstyles.⁵⁶ In Flanders mock processions were organized, during which objects most sacred to Catholics, such as the Eucharist and the holy water, were ostentatiously offered to animals or thrown on the street.⁵⁷ Local chroniclers, such as Guillaume Weyts in Bruges and Jan de Pottre in Brussels, wrote with outrage about these humiliating rituals, and noted how they triggered an exodus of Catholic citizens.⁵⁸ These may also have been

⁵³“Liedeken,” 548–49: “Verdrevē priesters heeft zy ontafen // Haer poorten laet en vroegh opgedaen / Om de vroomen te logeeren.”

⁵⁴Costerius. On Costerius, see Viaene, 16, 30.

⁵⁵Andriessen, 1957; Vermaseren, 1981; Viaene.

⁵⁶Knuttel, 1:3; Schoutens, 85; St. Genois, 91.

⁵⁷Varenbergh, 14, 31–32; Verberckmoes, 172.

⁵⁸Varenbergh, 40–41; St. Genois, 94–96, 106–08, 113; Smet, 69–74; Dewitte and Viaene, 12–17, 88–92.

encouraged by recent polemical publications, such as the above-mentioned booklet of Costerius: this latter text sought to persuade Catholics in rebel towns that exile was the only strategy to save their soul. Even the most steadfast believers, Costerius argued, could not do without regular access to the sacraments and the spiritual guidance of priests.⁵⁹ Traces of this narrative can also be found in the *Apologie* published in Rheims in 1581 by the exiled English Cardinal William Allen. He likewise pointed out that migration from Protestant rule was a necessary condition if English Catholics were to preserve their spiritual wellbeing.⁶⁰ While scholarship has tended to study the publications of Allen and other English exiles as responses to specific English concerns, it is clear that the construction of a new interpretive framework of exile was in fact an international process, in which Catholic refugees from England, Ireland, and the Low Countries interacted with and continuously inspired each other.

Those who started to promote exile in the early 1580s exploited a second, related argument. The rebellion against Habsburg rule had not just deprived individual Catholics of their religious essentials, they asserted, but had also “polluted” and “poisoned” local communities. The notion of religious dissent as an infection of the body social was, of course, a commonplace in sixteenth-century Europe.⁶¹ Petrus Canisius urged his relatives in Nijmegen in 1580 to stay loyal to their faith by avoiding any physical contact with heretics: if social isolation turned out to be impossible, they had better leave the town.⁶² A similar metaphor was used by Jacob Buyck (1545–99), parish priest of the Oude Kerk in Amsterdam, who had moved to Kalkar after the invasion of rebel troops in 1578. “From a pure virgin,” his native city had now turned into “a filthy and tainted girl.”⁶³ Conversely, the connection between religious dissent, sexual chastity, and physical health could be used to praise Catholic asylum centers. Van Biesten claimed that by resisting rebel pressure and accommodating refugees Amsterdam had initially remained “unspoiled.”⁶⁴

The accuracy of such views could be advanced by pointing to well-known precedents, a third strategy employed by supporters of exile. Obvious biblical role models included Abraham and the exiled Israelites. Johannes Costerius frequently used their example to convince refugees they were on

⁵⁹Costerius, chap. 1 (n.p.).

⁶⁰Allen; discussed in Highley, 33–34.

⁶¹Davis.

⁶²Braunsberger, 7:562–68; 8:97–101, 160.

⁶³Alberdingk Thijm, 48: “Van reine maagd werdt gij een deerne vuig en veil.”

⁶⁴“Liedeken,” 548: “onbesmet.”

the right track. He also countered opposing dogmatic views that regarded flight as less heroic than martyrdom, such as the tale of the early Christian author Cyprian. These examples were aptly reinterpreted by Costerius, or declared unfit as a frame of reference for the current situation in the Netherlands.⁶⁵ In his *Schildt der Catholijcken* (1591), a popular manual for Catholics in dangerous times, the Jesuit Frans Coster (1532–1619) employed the power of precedents as well. Coster explained that the harassment and expulsion of Catholics was in fact an old strategy of heretics.⁶⁶ He presented the current Catholic diasporas as mere repetitions of similar events under Arian and Waldensian tyranny. In this context, it could be particularly clarifying to point to England. Johannes Costerius compared the situation in England and the Low Countries to show Netherlandish Catholics the terrifying fate that Protestant rule would eventually bring. In addition, he stressed that the presence of English exiles in the Low Countries since the early 1560s proved that fleeing was “not wrong nor new” for Catholics.⁶⁷

A fourth recurring argument suggested that staying in rebel territory implied that one accepted the legitimacy of rebel rule. In 1578 Pope Gregory XIII (1502–85) threatened Catholics who collaborated with the rebel administration with excommunication. In this way he confronted them with a dilemma that English and Irish Catholics had faced since the papal bull *Regnans in Excelsis* (1570), in which his predecessor Pius V (1504–72) had declared Queen Elizabeth a heretic and had absolved her subjects from allegiance to her.⁶⁸ In the Low Countries the issue of political loyalty became especially sensitive in 1581, when the rebel States General formally abjured King Philip II. Officeholders, and in some cases members of religious orders and common citizens, were now required to swear a new oath of loyalty to the rebel regime. Although scholars have pointed out that the abandonment of Philip II only confirmed the status quo, there is little doubt that the modified oath formula provoked resistance.⁶⁹ Even those who had been supporting the rebellion were divided about its legitimacy. In Haarlem in October 1581 the town’s publican Pieter van Drijl was fired because he refused to take the oath.⁷⁰ The magistrate of Antwerp sought to enforce obedience by threatening hesitant citizens with the penalty of exile.⁷¹ A

⁶⁵Costerius, 11–16.

⁶⁶Coster, 1591, 19.

⁶⁷Costerius, 16: “non gravem aut novum.”

⁶⁸Brom, 1895, 429–39.

⁶⁹Arnade, 309; Mout, 47–49.

⁷⁰Temminck, 221.

⁷¹Brandt, 1:687; Andriessen, 1987, 67–70.

number of Antwerp citizens indeed decided to leave the city in the course of 1581–82. In Bruges Guillaume Weyts recorded how turmoil broke out after the local government had compelled its officials to abjure the King of Spain. One of them, Jan Spestael, declared he “would rather leave the town, than to take such an oath.” Spestael was expelled with other nonconformists.⁷² In the meantime, the Spanish-Habsburg governor Alexander Farnese (1545–92) was keen to kindle these internal disputes by inviting hesitant officeholders to take seat in his royalist administration in exile.⁷³ Going into exile, once seen as an act of cowardice against the lawful Habsburg regime, thus became a means by which committed Catholics could assert their allegiance to the king.

The growing respectability of exile was further enhanced by social sentiments. Had Calvinist attempts to redefine the urban social fabric shocked traditional Catholics, the appointment of *homines novi* to public office made things even worse. Although the degree of political renewal varied from place to place, and rebel officials were generally recruited from traditional magistrate families, opponents of the revolt were eager to stress the incompetence of the new regime. Religious heresy was traditionally linked to notions of social disorder, and the rebel administration was frequently accused of blurring social distinctions. Wouter Jacobsz wrote with dismay about the dubious social profile of some new Leiden magistrates, and typically likened rebel society to that of Sodom and Gomorra.⁷⁴ To local chronicler Zeghere van Male it was clear that the economic decline of Bruges was directly linked to the arrival of a heretical and socially inferior regime.⁷⁵ It was not just the changing confessional coloring of the public church, but also the social transformation of the urban community that came with it, that made traditional Catholics anxious about the credibility of the new order.

In this polarizing climate, committed Catholics finally developed a fifth argument in which the experience of exile was presented as a blessing in disguise. English exiles seem to have been the first to exploit this reading. In his *Consolatorie Epistle to the Afflicted Catholikes* (Louvain, 1580), exiled priest Thomas Hide pointed out that “the godly christian cannot be banished from Christ wherever he be, in Christ there is no banishment, and without Christ all is banishment.”⁷⁶ In the same year, Johannes

⁷²Varenbergh, 41–42: “hij zeyde lyever hudt de steede te gaene, dan zulken heedt te doene.”

⁷³Aerts.

⁷⁴Egghen, 1:47, 339; C. H. Parker, 27. See also St. Genois, 112, 128; Varenbergh, 44.

⁷⁵Dewitte and Viaene, esp. 42–60.

⁷⁶Quoted by Highley, 31.

Costerius's *Institutio* declared that displacement was, in fact, a liberation. He knew from his experience in Douai that exiled Catholics were generally happy to have left "spiritual slavery."⁷⁷ While the exile manual of Costerius thus stressed the "purifying" effects of displacement, Peter Canisius similarly interpreted exile as an honorable punishment. After all, he argued, history has shown that God seeks to test his chosen people.⁷⁸ Canisius's view of exile as an assessment of faith, and hence an act of obedience to God, was remarkably close to what John Calvin and other Protestant reformers had been arguing in previous decades.⁷⁹ This parallel appears to have been part of a deliberate rhetorical strategy. Catholic polemicists with Jesuit links, including Jan David (1546–1613), Frans Coster, and Johannes Costerius, skillfully appropriated well-known Protestant narratives in an attempt to shape contrasting, more self-conscious Catholic identities. This technique of reversal might also explain the title of Costerius's book, *Institutio necessaria*, which echoed the works of several Protestant reformers, notably Calvin's *Institutes*. While the latter had styled Protestant exile as a variant to the experience of the chosen people of Israel, the former turned this imagery by using the "exitu[s] aegypti et fuga babilonis" as a role model for displaced Catholics.⁸⁰

How very effective this strategy was becomes clear in the writing of refugees themselves. "Do not grieve about exile, [or] the loss of office or wealth," Jacob Buyck reminded himself in a poem of around 1580, "because Christ will be my reward."⁸¹ Biblical blueprints that had formerly been used by Protestants now became popular in Catholic refugee communities. The author of the *Conscriptio Exulum* (1584) was keen to compare Frisian Catholics in exile with those who had been "with Abraham living in strange countries."⁸² Wouter Jacobsz noted in his diary how he felt "strengthened by the miraculous liberation of Israel's children, of whom we were mindful."⁸³ In an attempt to make more sense of their experiences, exiles thus composed "personal" narratives that fitted semantic schemes from popular treatises. In

⁷⁷Costerius, 23.

⁷⁸Braunsberger, 8:99–100. See also Coster, 1590, 38, 41.

⁷⁹Gordon, 42–44.

⁸⁰Costerius, title page; Gordon, 57–58.

⁸¹Bont, 48: "Treur niet om ballingschap, verlies van ambt noch schat // Want Christus is mijn loon."

⁸²Tresoar, Archief Eysinga-Vegelin van Claerbergen, 3370 (*Conscriptio Exulum Frisae*): "sich ontholdende mit Abraham in vremen landen." Available at <http://www2.tresoar.nl/digicollectie/object.php?object=215&zveld=&volg=0>. Accessed 2 January 2011.

⁸³Eeghen, 1:161: "gesterckt doer die wonderlicke verlossinge der kinderen van Israël, dies wij hier indachtich werden."

the *Fondatieboeck* of the Poor Clares from Antwerp the experiences of the nuns in the 1580s were aptly modeled after biblical stories such as Joseph and Mary's search for a place in Bethlehem. In addition, the author suitably recorded a number of spectacular miracles the nuns had encountered on their dangerous road to Trier. All this was proof that God had preserved his elect children.⁸⁴

6. 1585 TO 1609: EXILE LEGACIES IN THE SOUTH AND NORTH

In March 1594 Johannes Roorda, a young Frisian student who had been staying with the Jesuits in Cologne and Douai, wrote to his father how "pleased" he was to be a child of Catholic parents who had preferred to leave and lose their possessions rather than their faith.⁸⁵ In the later sixteenth century, flight from Protestant rule had developed into a firm marker of Catholic pride and respectability in the Habsburg camp. Exiles themselves were keen to exploit this heroic self-image and styled themselves as protagonists of a refashioned Catholic order. Some of them consciously signed their letters as "exules," including the former Delft priest Christiaan van Adrichem (1533–85) and the expelled burgomaster of Gouda Johannes Gerritsz Stempelse, who both lived in Cologne.⁸⁶ Other displaced Catholics, such as the exiled parish priest Jacob Buyck from Amsterdam, noted the year of their exile in newly bought books.⁸⁷ Correspondence to the Habsburg administration confirms that in the later sixteenth century former refugees in search of money, jobs, or patronage stressed their exile credentials as a matter of cause.⁸⁸

The royal government showed itself receptive to this changing rhetoric. While the Habsburg authorities in the 1560s and '70s had done remarkably little to support Catholic refugees, Alexander Farnese identified exiles as

⁸⁴Schoutens, 66–80, 90–104.

⁸⁵Tresoar, Archief Eysinga-Vegelin van Claerbergen, 2954 (Johannes Gerbranda van Roorda to Hans Roorda, 28 March 1594).

⁸⁶Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Epp.Germaniae, 136–II (322, Johannes Gerritsz Stempelse to the General, 9 August 1575); (ARSI), Epp.Germaniae, 156 (248, 262, Johannes Gerritsz Stempelse to the General, 20 and 31 January 1578); Historisches Archiv Cologne (HAC), Bestand Jesuiten, A52, A52a (List of Membership of the Marian sodality in Cologne); Utrechts Archief (UA), Archief Oud-Katholieke Kerk Nederland (OKN), Verzamelde stukken, 455 (Christiaan van Adrichem to Willem Lindanus, 23 May 1584).

⁸⁷Hogeman, 189: *Daniel Propheta commentariis pro concione explicatus*, Antwerp 1576, with inscriptions by Jacob Buyck: copy of Jacobus Veldius. University Library Amsterdam, sign. 273 G 20.

⁸⁸ARAB, Audiëntie, 1718/2 (Lindanus to Don Juan, 24 July 1578); ARAB, Audiëntie, 1806/1; Brom and Hensen, 281 (Lindanus to Farnese, 9 January and 10 April 1581).

useful role models. During his successful military campaign of the 1580s, the governor-general deliberately appointed returning refugees to key positions in recaptured cities.⁸⁹ Catholics who moved from the Dutch Republic to the southern Habsburg Netherlands also found their status as exile martyrs could be useful. Some of them were offered alternative jobs in the royal administration, received pensions, or benefited from other forms of patronage.⁹⁰ The government's identification with the heroic victimhood of refugees coincided with a growing international appreciation of exile in Catholic Europe. Encouraged by Pope Gregory XIII, King Philip II distributed his patronage generously among Irish and English émigré communities and offered pensions to radical French Catholics who fled to the Southern Netherlands in the 1590s.⁹¹

At the same time, the memory of the exile experience was deliberately kept alive in the recaptured Southern Netherlands. For example, in Antwerp in 1592 Mass was celebrated in the city's cathedral on the feast of Epiphany to honor the hospitality of the citizens of Cologne in the previous decade.⁹² Families of former refugees were particularly eager to cultivate their exile background. After the death of Caspar van der Cruyce (1555–93), canon of Antwerp Cathedral and formerly in exile in Cologne, his relatives commissioned a large triptych for the church (fig. 1). It showed Christ on the cross, flanked by a portrait of Caspar on the left and that of Ursula, Cologne's patron saint, on the right. When the triptych's wings were closed, a representation of the three Magi became visible: a clear reference to Cologne's foremost relic.⁹³ In a similar fashion could funeral monuments in the re-Catholicized Habsburg Netherlands serve to memorialize the heroic exile past. As late as 1607 the remains of Bishop Martin Rythovius (1511–83), who had died in exile in St. Omer, were solemnly transferred to his former see in Ypres. His newly erected tomb honored him as a quasi-martyr.⁹⁴ In the same town, the funerary epitaph of former magistrate Henricus de Codt reminded churchgoers that he had once been an exile.⁹⁵

The growing appreciation of the exile-martyr fitted well within a larger Tridentine campaign that glorified Catholic suffering in heretical lands. It is therefore hardly surprising that in the northern Dutch Republic a similar

⁸⁹Janssen, 2011.

⁹⁰Brom and Hensen, 706; Durme, 1:431; Dudok van Heel, 1985; Arblaster, 2009.

⁹¹Descimon and Ruiz Ibañez, 135–53, 261–73; Tellechea Idigoras, 12, 15–16, 21–22, 79; García Hernán; Schüller.

⁹²Blanckwalt. I am grateful to Judith Pollmann for this reference.

⁹³Velde, 6.

⁹⁴Schrevel, 763–64.

⁹⁵Foppens, 163–64.

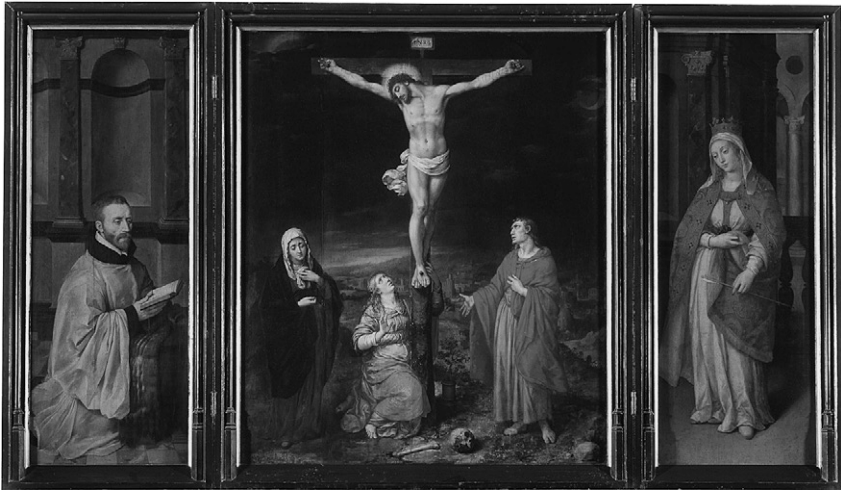


FIGURE 1. Anonymous, *Triptych with Christ at the Cross*, ca. 1593. Antwerp, Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekathedraal. © Lukas-Art in Flanders vzw.

heroic imagery of exile prevailed among Catholics. Indeed, refugee credentials served as a clear marker of esteem in correspondence with the *Missio Hollandica*, the underground ecclesiastical organization in the United Provinces. When in 1642 Diederick van Pallaes received noble status from the German emperor, his certificate noted that Diederick's grandfather "had suffered a great deal for the sake of religion and was many years in exile in Emmerich."⁹⁶ Equally illustrative of their social prestige was the leading role that former exiles fulfilled in underground Catholic communities in the north. Evidence from Gouda, Amsterdam, and Haarlem confirms that returning refugees became the founders of Catholic house churches, collectors of relics, and distributors of polemic print.⁹⁷ Among the collections venerated were spiritual texts recalling the exile experience, such as the diary of Wouter Jacobsz and the Frisian *Conscriptio Exulum*. Manuscripts composed by exiles, including books of martyrs by Christiaan van Adrichem and Pieter van Opmeer, circulated in these communities as well.⁹⁸ This exile cult suitably confirmed the collective self-image of Dutch Catholics as an

⁹⁶Dudok van Heel, 2008, 1:102: "veel moeten lijden omt geloof, ende lange jaeren uutlandich waeren t'Emmerik."

⁹⁷Fruin, 337, 436; Dudok van Heel, 2008, 1:87–117; C. H. Parker, 29–46; Vermaseren, 1981, 85; Tracy, 563–64.

⁹⁸UA, OKN, Verzamelde stukken, 456 (book of martyrs by Christiaan van Adrichem); Spaans, 1999, 159–63; Vermaseren, 1960; Fruin, I–lii, 225, 479.

embattled community of true believers. Charles Parker's recent assessment of Catholicism in the Dutch golden age has demonstrated how their self-image of a persecuted minority enabled Dutch Catholics to forge a distinctive confessional identity.⁹⁹

Still, there may be some reasons to question the representative value of this widely exploited and rather monolithic imagery among northern Catholics. Since these examples have mainly been based on ecclesiastical records, they predominantly represent the views of senior clergy and particular religious orders, and may not do full justice to the variety of Catholic cultures that emerged in the United Provinces after 1585.¹⁰⁰ Following the turmoil of the 1570s and '80s, living conditions for Catholics in the nascent Dutch Republic had in fact significantly improved. In recent years scholars have shown how local authorities in the emerging northern state sought to accommodate Catholic minorities by advocating a public city culture that transcended religious divisions in society. Thus, while in the 1580s Calvinists in Flemish and Brabant cities had tried to redefine society in exclusive confessional terms, Dutch authorities after 1585 consciously promoted a more inclusive, religiously neutral body social that allowed Catholics to participate.¹⁰¹

The success of this strategy was reflected in the attitude of many northern Catholics toward the officially Protestant Dutch state. Despite efforts by Habsburg and Tridentine propagandists to forge a natural connection between allegiance to the Church of Rome and the Spanish-Habsburg monarchy, Dutch Catholics generally preferred to separate religious faith from political loyalty.¹⁰² Numerous sources demonstrate a strong Catholic commitment to the United Provinces. For instance, the above-mentioned will of Pieter van Opmeer from 1593 exemplifies how even undisputed Catholics who had fled in the 1570s deliberately rejected exile two decades later. For them emigration was no longer an honorable, let alone necessary, option. In May 1588, a citizen from Delft named Hendrik van der Burch asked his sister Katrijna why she was still living in exile in Cologne. He criticized the mentality of many remaining exiles who claimed that life in the United Provinces was unbearable for Catholics. "You people believe that it is better to serve God there than here," Van der Burch argued, "which I think is a mistake." He asserted that "here in these lands, there are many people of your kind who also strive for salvation though do

⁹⁹C. H. Parker.

¹⁰⁰Compare Frijhoff, 2009, 7–12.

¹⁰¹Frijhoff, 2002, 27–52; Spaans, 1989.

¹⁰²Andriessen, 1957, 99, 256; Knuttel, 1:15; Nierop, 2002.

not feel the need to leave the country.” Contrary to the wisdom spread by some priests, Van der Burch stressed that in present-day Holland Catholics could “lead a peaceful life.”¹⁰³

Such statements go a long way toward explaining why Catholic migration from the northern Dutch Republic to the southern Habsburg Netherlands remained a relatively marginal phenomenon throughout the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁴ While affluent Catholics in the north may have sent their children to Catholic schools and universities in the south, most of them did not deem a permanent move to Habsburg territory preferable. Extensive records of so-called alimentionation payments, which members of religious houses could claim after the appropriation of their possessions, confirm that even religious often favored arrangements in the United Provinces over life in Spanish-Habsburg lands.¹⁰⁵ This is not to suggest that northern Catholics were indifferent about the religious transformation of Dutch society, but rather, that opinions about the appropriate response to this dramatic development differed within the Catholic community. For the majority of common Catholics, who had to negotiate life in a religiously mixed society, exile at best received a symbolic meaning. By portraying themselves as “internal exiles,” some crafted a self-image that carefully balanced their daily experiences and the memory of their heroic forebears.

7. CONCLUSION: SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS

While exile has long been considered a typically Protestant concern in Reformation Europe, Catholic sources from the Dutch Revolt show that discussions about migration were equally pertinent to those who opposed Protestant regimes. This article has argued that the military conflict in the Low Countries generated a new imagery of exile among Catholics, a process that was to some extent similar to what had happened to evangelical refugees a few decades earlier. These shifting Catholic perceptions were partly prompted by the changing course of the war in the Netherlands, and partly by the international Tridentine campaign, which encouraged Catholics to

¹⁰³UA, OKN, Verzamelde stukken, 615 (Hendrik van der Burch to Katrijna van der Burch, 30 May 1588): “dat ghijluijden meent godt aldaer beters te mogen dyenen als hier is naer mijnen bedunckens nyet dan een misverstant, want hier te landen zijn al wel personen van u gesintheede die oock naar haer salicheyt trachten ende nochtans nyet uyt den landen en trecken.”

¹⁰⁴As suggested in Briels; Israel, 307–15; Lottum; Obdeijn.

¹⁰⁵Gemeentearchief Leiden (GAL), Stadsarchief II, 3384 (alimentionation payments, 1576–1628); GAL, Kloosters, 1669, 1670 (alimentionation requests, 1576–1613); UA, Archief Kartuizerkloosters Nieuwlicht, 36, 385; Wagenaar, 4:28, 84; Spaans, 1989, 72–73.

reinvent themselves and develop a more pronounced confessional identity. Yet the Dutch case also demonstrates that the contrasting outcomes of the revolt in the Northern and Southern Netherlands led to very different appreciations of exile in Catholic communities in both areas. Habsburg triumph and Tridentine militancy sparked a Counter-Reformation movement in the Southern Netherlands that glorified exile and presented refugees as exemplary forces of an international militant church. In the north, the revolt created a more ambiguous Catholic identity, in which loyalty to an officially Protestant state could coincide with commitment to the Church of Rome. The controversy over flight thus allows us to appreciate the diversity of religious cultures that emerged in the Habsburg Netherlands and the Dutch Republic in response to civil war and the process of Catholic renewal.

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