

Ton H.M. van Schaik and Karin Strengers-Older Kalter, *Het Arme Roomse Leven. Geschiedenis van de katholieke caritas in de stad Utrecht* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2016, 276 pp., ISBN 978 90 8704 578 4).

The history of poor relief in the Netherlands dates back to the twelfth century when the pace of urbanisation began to increase. Until the twentieth century, local charity was organised at the level of a town or urban district by a large variety of ecclesiastical, municipal and private initiatives. Ecclesiastical poor relief was the most significant, followed by municipal poor relief ('burgerlijke armenzorg'), while private initiatives were relatively small. Given the wide variety in location and type of organisation, it is logical to study poor relief in the Netherlands on the basis of the Boards of Guardians who were linked to different denominations depending on the city. Not surprisingly, this has often been done, as numerous monographs and commemorative books about the history of Catholic, Reformed and Jewish charitable institutions in the Netherlands attest.

Historians Ton van Schaik and Karin Strengers-Older Kalter have further continued in this historiographical tradition by studying the history and organisation of Catholic charity in Utrecht. Despite the common choice of topic, the significance of their study is greater than one might expect at first sight. The authors have chosen, firstly, to study Catholic poor relief in Utrecht in the context of religious life. The Catholic charity in Utrecht is interesting because this city served as the centre of Catholicism in the Northern Netherlands. The study provides insight into the way in which the Catholic community functioned as an inconspicuous minority after the rise of Protestantism. Moreover, Utrecht formed the main backdrop for the schism of 1723, between the Roman Catholics and the 'Old Catholics'. This schism had major consequences for the organisation of poor relief.

Secondly, the authors have chosen to study an extensive period of time: from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. This long-term perspective makes it possible to follow the development of poor relief and to identify key turning points. Every major organisational change, in particular the manner of governance, has been reason for the authors to add another chapter. The periodisation of the book is therefore based on the internal organisational dynamics of Roman Catholic poor relief in Utrecht.

The authors have based their research largely on the archives of the Katholieke Caritas der Stad Utrecht (Catholic Caritas of Utrecht). These include minutes from the board's notebooks, probate documents, correspondence, cashbooks and financial statements. They also extensively studied the archives of the De Boog brewery, because this company was

a major source of revenue for Catholic poor relief in Utrecht from 1764 onwards. The archives of the sisterhood, Zusters van Liefde, and the archives of the local Catholic parishes also provide information for the later periods of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The authors use a chronological structure, with the book beginning by describing the various foundations that were active from the Middle Ages distributing money and goods (bread, clothing and peat) to the poor and organising care for orphans. The Reformation in 1580 resulted in major changes, as afterwards the municipal government only recognised the Reformed Church. The Catholic Church was not banned, but merely tolerated. The city government then centralised poor relief of all denominations in the Stadsaalmoezenierskamer (City Board of Guardians). However, in 1672, the Stadsaalmoezenierskamer ceased to exist due to the poor financial state of the city government, resulting from the temporary occupation of Utrecht by the French army. The Catholic elite made use of this situation by creating a separate Catholic Aalmoezenierskamer in 1674.

The book pays greatest attention to the period from 1674 until the beginning of the twentieth century. The authors elaborate on the religious schism of 1723, which led to the Catholic Aalmoezenierskamer being split into the Old Catholic Aalmoezenierskamer and the Roman Catholic Armenkamer in 1746. In addition, they describe how the Catholic minority succeeded in continuing and extending poor relief, despite financial setbacks and regular outbursts of anti-Catholic agitation. Initially, citizens who were members of the Catholic elite organised their charity in seclusion. Later, in the nineteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy gained in influence, and from the 1840s onwards, parish priests and the Zusters van Liefde gradually took over the organisation of poor relief in Utrecht. The final chapters deal with the consequences of the Second World War and the changing function of Catholic charity as a result of the emerging welfare state.

The authors emphasise the binding nature of Catholic charity. Supporting the poor was considered a religious duty. Throughout the periods studied, the Catholic Church urged followers to make donations and this study shows that they were successful. The Catholic Caritas of Utrecht was largely self-sufficient and only turned to the municipal government for financial support in exceptional circumstances. Fundraising for the poor regularly took place in churches. Wealthy Catholic citizens, however, made the most significant contributions. They bequeathed capital, property, and in one case even a profitable brewery to the Catholic charity. The Board of Guardians used the income from fundraising and inheritances to finance alms, food, housing and care. In this way, the Catholic Caritas was able to support the poor for centuries.

*Het Arme Roomse Leven* provides much new information about the administrative conduct of the board. Van Schaik and Strengers-Olde Kalter describe in detail the issues discussed by the board members and the decisions

taken. The relationships within the board are also well covered. Board members were not paid to exercise their administrative duties; rather, board membership was seen as a religious duty, as well as a mark of respect in society. The authors pay close attention to financial issues, such as managing property and assets. In addition, board members spent much time organising care for orphans and the elderly, as well as financial grants to needy Catholics.

Compared to the attention paid to the board members, however, relatively little is paid to those in need. The authors provide little clarity on who was entitled to poor relief and on what grounds it was given. The information presented on poverty among Catholics and the number of needy in Utrecht is patchy and a systematic quantitative analysis of trends in poverty and poor relief during the different periods is lacking, despite the long-term perspective of the study. This brings me to another important shortcoming of the study. The rather one-sided focus on the internal organisational dynamics of the Catholic Caritas in Utrecht leads the authors to overlook an analysis of the relative significance of its work. It remains unclear how Catholic poor relief relates to that of the Reformed *diaconie*, the Old Catholic Aalmoedenierskamer and the municipality. The book gives the impression that there was nothing occurring outside the Catholic world.

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