

Violet Soen, Dries Vanysacker and Wim François (eds.), *Church, Censorship and Reform in the Early Modern Habsburg Netherlands* (Turnhout: Brepolis, 2017, 350 pp., ISBN 978 2 503 56751 8).

This edited volume brings together twelve essays presenting recent research developments in the field of Catholic religious reform in the late fifteenth and sixteenth century Habsburg Netherlands. The two main themes that structure the book are ‘Censorship and Religion’ and ‘Church and Reform’. Both themes give insight into the complexity of responses to the religious and ecclesiastical challenges Catholicism faced in the early modern Low Countries. As the editors claim, this book demonstrates how scholarship has for the last few decades been moving far beyond the idea that Catholic reform in the Low Countries was largely implemented top-down in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It showcases the diversity of local responses to calls for censorship and the implementation of Catholic reform in the Habsburg Netherlands.

*Church, Censorship and Reform* does a splendid job at showing the complexity of Catholic Reform in the Low Countries. This is not a particularly new turn in historiography, however. Scholarship has long been divided in opinion over who drove Catholic reform in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the last few decades, alternatives to the top-down model, most importantly the experiences of lay Catholics, have dominated historiography. Very recently, for instance, Geert Janssen has suggested the importance of Catholic exiles for understanding the Counter-Reformation in the Low Countries, while Judith Pollmann and, among others, Anne-Laure Van Bruaene pointed out connections between religious identity, iconoclasm, and Catholic revival.

The major contribution of this volume is its approach of religious change in the Low Countries through the many layers in between the laity and higher ecclesiastical authorities, the go-betweens in religious change, including local bishops, printers, the legal system, and parishes. Focusing on censorship and the implementation of Tridentine reforms from this variety of angles, the volume contributes to our understanding of both religious reform in the Habsburg Netherlands and of the particular themes dividing the book. While the volume claims to ‘take a refreshing perspective’ on the theme of church and reform in the Habsburg Netherlands, I would suggest it does not offer one consistent, refreshing view but rather opens up a variety of avenues of research. The volume demonstrates that there is much work left to be done on the Catholic Reformation in the Low Countries.

The volume balances six chapters on repression through censorship with six chapters on the implementation of Catholic reform. These first six chapters examine the functioning of censorship in the Low Countries. Proceeding from a comparative perspective, Renaud Adam analyses the early regulations of the printing industry in the Low Countries and shows the gradual shift of authority over censorship from local institutions, such as guilds and universities, to state and ecclesiastical dominance with the spread of Lutheran thought. Grantley McDonald follows up on Adam's research in a chapter describing the influence of expertise and authority of ecclesiastical circles on censorship during the 1520s. He demonstrates that secular authorities increasingly relied on the expertise of theologians, particularly those of Louvain, in forming guidelines to control the book market. Arjan van Dixhoorn chronologically follows on from this in a study on expertise and knowledge communities shaping censorship between 1520 and 1560. He particularly considers the claims of expertise in religious life and censorship of rhetoricians of local 'chambers of rhetoric', an unexpected group claiming authority in religious matters. Els Agten then investigates the links between the nunciature of Flanders and book censorship by considering the thoughts on book censorship of the papal nuncio Ottavio Mirto Frangipani. As he resided in the Spanish Netherlands between 1596 and 1606 and formed a direct connection between Rome and the Habsburg Netherlands, Frangipani regularly pronounced his views on censorship and indexes of prohibited books in the Habsburg Netherlands. Contributing to the chronological examination of book censorship in the Habsburg Netherlands, Gerrit Vanden Bosch takes us further from 1559 to 1795 in his chapter on the archdiocese of Malines, showing the influence of particular authorities on the relationship between church and state concerning on the theme. Finally, César Manrique Figueroa's chapter demonstrates the various perspectives from which Hispanic books printed in Antwerp faced censorship in the sixteenth century through the case studies of Antwerp printers Nutius and Steelsius. This chapter provides an international context to censorship and the Low Countries.

In section two, a series of studies demonstrate the local responses of church authorities and communities to Catholic reform and attest to early initiatives of reform in response to the council of Trent. Violet Soen and Aurelie Van de Meulebroucke open this section with their chapter discussing the episcopacy of Robert de Croÿ (1519-1556) and the unexpected role of this noble bishop in the implementation of Catholic reform. The following chapter similarly considers the influence of bishops on the implementation of Tridentine reform, but this time after the Council of Trent, as Dries Vanysacker assesses the official printings of the church province of Malines. The focus next switches to Ghent, for which Michal Bauwens provides a study concerning reform in the parish community of St James, between 1561 and 1640. During this period, the parish faced hardship due to the Dutch

Revolt and Calvinist Republic, but parishioners soon after reformed and revived the parish. The subsequent chapter also reflects on the adoption of Tridentine reform in a community, but this time not a lay community. Annelies Somers discusses the ability of the Saint Pharahild chapter in Ghent to adapt to Tridentine ecclesiastical reform. The reactions on a local basis, as well as the opposition to some Tridentine changes, form a fascinating answer to Tridentine reform. Nicolas Simon's chapter smoothly transitions from Somers' as it shows the practical implications of Tridentine reform on the field of secular legislation in the Habsburg Netherlands between 1580 and 1598, creating an emphasis on order in society. Finally, the volume ends with another examination of the archdiocese of Malines, this time through Tom Bervoets' long-term assessment of the establishment and development of ecclesiastical courts, 'officialities', in competition with secular courts during the early modern period after 1559. It demonstrates the difficulties of archbishops in negotiating ecclesiastical court customs with regional political privileges.

One drawback to this volume is its density, making it easy to lose track of its central argument. Both the book and its individual chapters would also profit from a clearer positioning within the existing historiography. The volume is often rather dry, while some of the chapters could have done with more editing. This is a pity, as it obscures the genuine contribution the book makes to research in the field. Nevertheless, specialists will take pleasure in the robust research substantiating each chapter.

Silke Muylaert, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam