

L.C.J.J. BOGAERS, *Aards, betrokken en zelfbewust. De verwevenheid van cultuur en religie in katholiek Utrecht, 1300–1600*. Levend Verleden Utrecht 2008, 2 vols. ISBN 9789090226910. €49.95 + 19.95.

This is a rich and important book. Rich because it is based on extensive, solid research, and important because it discusses topics and questions central to our understanding of the relation between religion and urban society in the later Middle Ages and the beginning of the Early Modern period. The strength of Bogaers's voluminous book lies in its scope and breadth, the staggering quantity of original sources the author has consulted, and her intrepid way of dealing with difficult research questions. Never satisfied with earlier answers or well-established opinions—on the central importance of *memoria* for instance—Bogaers returns to the primary sources and tackles them afresh. Her results are open to discussion but never dull or irrelevant.

Her research is ambitious. It mainly focuses on the town of Utrecht, see of the only diocese in the Low Countries north of the river Rhine (metropolitan see since 1559), and also the most populous town (20,000 inhabitants) in the Northern Low Countries until the rise of Amsterdam later in the sixteenth century. Home to a cathedral, four other important and rich collegiate churches, four populous parishes (the largest of which with some 8,000 souls), over twenty abbeys and monasteries, around 100 confraternities, and a large number of charitable institutions, this is a rich area for study indeed. At the outset Bogaers's research focused on the origins and the impact of the Reformation in Utrecht, including the Alteration of 1580 and its banishment of public Catholic services. Gradually, however, she recognised that she needed more insight into Catholic medieval Utrecht in order to understand the religious vicissitudes of the sixteenth century.

Bogaers includes chapters on the role of neighbours and the neighbourhood in social life; the liturgy in the main parish church (Buurkerk, literally the church of the neighbours); the care of souls; processions and markets; the financial conditions of the Buurkerk; confraternities and fraternities; charities and poor relief; obituaries and funerary monuments in the collegiate church of St. Peter; and last wills, burials, and memorial culture in the Buurkerk. Interspersed are some smaller chapters, often based on biographical research, dealing with the career of a churchwarden, a grain merchant-alderman and his daughter, and an extensive one on Utrecht's most famous recluse and mystic, *suster* Bertken.

The author is very outspoken in her method, aims, and views. Her aim is to give a voice to ordinary medieval men and women and to reconstruct how they

ordered their society and lived together. Since religion is such an important topic, and also due to the availability of sources, her approach results in socio-religious history, with a core vocabulary of words like values, community, care, solidarity, shared religious culture, purpose (*zingeving*), devotion, perception, involvement, pluriformity, tradition and renewal, pragmatism, piety, motives and motivation, memorial cult and salvation, status, and representation.

At least in two main points, the results of Bogaers's research go against the grain and are drastically opposed to two important, well-established views—one respectably old, the other more recent in origin. Since the Renaissance and the Reformation it has often been assumed that religion was in a state of crisis during the late Middle Ages, with rampant disorder, decay, and moral disintegration. Especially in the history of the Low Countries, the shadow of Huizinga looms large with his picture of fossilization and sclerosis, of a religion dragging on its last feet and lost in sterile symbols, empty words, and tragic tokens of outward appearances. Bogaers, following in Eamon Duffy's footsteps, paints a completely different picture of concerned parishioners; a clergy not too bad or depraved; priests from, and forming part of the community; a vibrant institutional scene with many new initiatives; and laity involved in their neighbourhood, in their own parish and its liturgy, in the urban processions and in poor relief. In short, far from a moribund religiosity.

In Part IV of her book Bogaers discusses a more recent axiom, the idea of the community between the living and the dead, with the former taking care of the dead in prayer, *memoria*, and mass. Painsstaking research in the archives, as well as in the church buildings, of the chapter of St. Peter and the main Utrecht parish church has shown a remarkably low number of parishioners investing money in funerary monuments or obits and memorial masses—only 205 perpetual memorial endowments in the Buurkerk, for example, between 1300 and 1580 (140 with a monthly requiem or an anniversary). Bogaers's bold conclusion: "From the perspective of the Utrecht community the memorial cult was a marginal affair" (p. 721). For her, Oexle's statement of "ein totales soziales Phänomen" misses solid ground. Strikingly, after 1520 fraternities stopped altogether the naming of the deceased brothers and sisters. Most bequests went anonymously into the communal purse of the parish church or the poor-fund. Moreover, the lack of explicit mention of salvation in pious bequests leads Bogaers to reject fear of death as a prime motivation, and to resist the idea of calculated piety (*gezählte Frömmigkeit*).

Other conclusions, in accordance with the general European trend, concern the elitization or gentrification of Utrecht society, with an enormous upswing in the sixteenth century, and an 'inward turning' or decreasing involvement of

its inhabitants—also the most prominent in the sixteenth century—resulting in less money donated to their parish church and a diminished care for poor relief. The breach in communal ethos and the resulting growing concern for personal monuments can especially be demonstrated inside the church buildings. This ‘personal possession’ of sacred communal space and the growing gulf between elite and general public can be found in a loss of enthusiasm for communal religiosity in fraternities, for instance, and finally resulted, according to Bogaers, in success for Protestant propaganda. Theology, politics, and their discourses cannot, in her view, be equated with the way people experienced or used religion.

Of course, concerning a book of such scope, there are many minor—and indeed broader—remarks one could make. Since finance and economy play such an important part in her book, be it backstage or centre stage, one would expect more technical mastery in questions of administration and monetary affairs, as well as more source criticism. A close scrutiny of her graphs, tables, and calculations might yield some contradictions or unwarranted conclusions. Bogaers’s book is probably the most convincing when she works ‘bottom up,’ starting from a wealth of biographical and archival detail. However, the complicated history of the book—its research has taken over 20 years—has resulted in an equally complex composition. Several chapters have been previously published in some form as articles. Some start in the thirteenth century, and others in the sixteenth, while some end in the early sixteenth century, and others in the eighteenth. This results in a certain unbalance: some subjects the description of which one would expect in such a book are never treated at all in the way they deserve—for instance monasteries or mendicant orders, the secular chapters and the bishop—but others return in more than one chapter. Religious anxiety and commitment are very prominent in the book, as is the question of the Reformation. Nevertheless, apart from a lot of tantalizing information, the topic is never treated fully or discussed coherently because a second volume is due to appear, which will focus on the origins, problems, and consequences of the Reformation in Utrecht. Worse yet, Bogaers’s treatment of a theme can be balanced and moderate in a chapter, whilst her conclusion, summary, or recapitulation can be far more one-sided or much more forcefully formulated.

Moreover, there is her method. We can safely assume that the author is a historian (otherwise acclaiming to be inspired by such diverse authors as Jung, Campbell, Tönnies, Weber, Chartier, Christian jr., Duffy, Habermas, and Oberman). She is convinced that, with the right amount of sources, studied properly and with an open mind, the only thing one has to do is to identify oneself with the protagonists and allow one’s mind to be carried back into the

past. Although imagination and sensitivity are assets, they can also backfire. One feels the author is passionately involved, sometimes too overly nostalgic or sentimental, stressing community feeling, neighbourhood, solidarity, reciprocal care, life on a human scale, and soberness. She is, of course, a far too good of a historian to deny or to downplay the violence, competitiveness, meanness, anxiety, insecurity, inequality, lack of control, and independence which were their counterpoints, but these latter elements certainly receive less attention.

This approach has its parallel in a certain lack of source criticism and equilibrium. The supposedly greater equality between citizens in the thirteenth or fourteenth century seems questionable to me. To give just one other example: she states several times that money allotted for memorial services or graves is not recorded in account books of benefited churches, and implies that this is due to carelessness, sloppiness, and lack of interest, without considering different options: are the records all-inclusive or are there separate funds (as so often happens in the construction of churches), or is the money otherwise spent or accounted for, e.g. in purchasing devotional objects? Can negligence or carelessness be equated with doubt in the uses of *memoria* or disinterest in it, or is this a simple fact of life: human frailty? Or could it be that the intended donation perhaps never materialized? A ‘perpetual’ commemoration could have been the intention of the donator or testator, but one has to keep in mind that the depth of religious commitment cannot be measured here: what has been recorded is a juridical act with legal consequences (in her conclusion Bogaers contrasts these elements as the natural versus the juridical definition of commemoration and salvation). It has always been implied that failure in funds would be the end of the contract. In addition, the donation could be used in time for other ‘good’ works. Donators and clerics were keenly aware that it would be impossible to continue indefinitely with innumerable memorial services. Change would occur and was acceptable. And of course, donators and testators tried to secure their ‘investment’ as best as they could, with continually evolving legal formulae or new adaptations—such as the institution of collective daily masses—which leaves us with a dynamic picture of the concern for *memoria*. Bogaers focuses mainly on perpetual memorial services and funerary monuments or tombstones. She does not consistently consider a broader approach to memorial culture. Consequently, it remains unclear to what extent poor relief (on which she writes an impressive chapter), one-time gifts and donations to building campaigns, short-term memorial services, private prayer (think of breviaries, devotional objects and images, rosaries, or books of hours with their pages on death, purgatory, and prayer) should be included in the discussion. Because salvation is not openly stated and underscored as a motive,

she considers these elements to be part of a ‘natural’ form of commemoration, as a kind of community service. But did salvation have to be mentioned explicitly, or was this so obvious and redundant that one could leave it out? Bogaers often confines herself by concentrating on—and opposing or confronting—a rather limited institutionalised, ‘juridical’ dimension of *memoria*.

On one hand this critical attitude to memorial practice is a very welcome element, demonstrating the relative importance of perpetual chantries and perpetual memorial masses—indeed, not everyone was thinking of death and judgement all the time—, and stressing the elitising elements in it. Bogaers also raises many important questions concerning institutionalised religion, developments over time, differences between chapters and parishes, and between elites and the masses, as well as the uses of the manifestation of religiosity in the gentrification of society and its consequences for a sense of community in the long run. On the other hand, downplaying the traditionally cited elements too much by overestimating the scope of her calculations or sources is to lose important elements of late medieval religion, culture, and public life.

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