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Dutch test acts

Oaths, office holding, and the catholic nobility in the province of Utrecht, c. 1580-1700^{*}

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Although the particular form of religious tolerance that emerged in the Dutch Republic became renowned for the remarkable freedom it allowed to religious dissenters,¹ the liberties of religious minorities were curbed in some areas of life, one of which was the ability to hold ecclesiastical benefices and public offices. By issuing decrees that prohibited the appointment of Catholic officers and by formulating oaths of loyalty and religion, the secular authorities aimed to exclude Catholics from the political life of the Republic, although the speed with and the extent to which these measures were introduced were subject to varying provincial and even local circumstances.² Historians have mostly focused on the decrees of the local and provincial authorities without raising the question to what extent these decrees were policed and whether such oaths deterred Catholics from holding particular offices or from attending the meetings of the Provincial States or other political bodies.³ This article examines the offices and benefices held by Catholic noblemen living in the province of Utrecht in

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1 For an overview of different views on Dutch religious tolerance, see B.J. Kaplan, ‘“Dutch” religious tolerance: celebration and revision’, in: R. Po-Chia Hsia and H. van Nierop (eds.), *Calvinism and religious toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge, 2002) 8-26.

2 See W.P.C. Knuttel, *De toestand der Nederlandsche katholieken ten tijde der Republiek* (2 vols., The Hague, 1892).

3 H. Wassenaar, ‘Katholieke adellijke families in Gelderland en Overijssel, 1621-1814’, *Virtus*, I (1993-1994) 4-11; L.J. Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme in Noord-Nederland in de 16e en 17e eeuw* (3 vols., Amsterdam, 1946); Knuttel, *De toestand der Nederlandsche katholieken*.

the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and studies the stance of these nobles towards the measures of the authorities in order to provide a fuller account of Catholic office holding which includes the experiences of and the strategies employed by the elite members of this religious minority. Rather than perceiving Catholics as the passive targets of government policies, the way in which Catholics actively responded to some of the political, religious, and social changes with which they were confronted is the focus of this study.⁴

When aiming to understand Catholic behaviour regarding office holding, we should also take into account the official line of the Catholic church – as expressed by the leaders of the *Missio Hollandica*, the apostolic vicars – regarding Catholic involvement in government, rather than mainly focusing on the policy of the secular authorities. Ultimately, though, Catholic nobles had to decide for themselves which concessions they were willing to make when aiming to serve in public offices, and in order to understand their behaviour and their experiences, we have to examine the attitude of Catholic nobles vis-à-vis the policy of the secular authorities and the stance of the Catholic church. Thereby we have to consider the process of confessionalization and the emergence of confessional identities, and the extent to which this influenced the behaviour of Catholic nobles – e.g. did these developments lessen the willingness of Catholic nobles to serve in public offices as this invariably included interaction with Protestants?

In order to provide a fuller account of Catholic office holding, I have examined a group of 84 Catholic noblemen, consisting of nobles living in the province of Utrecht who appeared on the list of Catholic nobles composed by apostolic vicar Jacobus de la Torre in 1656, together with the Catholic members of ten noble families from Utrecht.⁵ The article focuses on the province of Utrecht, for prior to the Reformation the city of Utrecht was an Episcopal See and nobles were accustomed to hold ecclesiastical benefices in the numerous institutions of the Catholic church that had been established throughout this province over the course of several centuries.⁶ As a result

4 See, e.g. W. Frijhoff, 'Overlevingsstrategieën van rooms-katholieken in Zutphen na de Reformatie', in: E.H. Bary et al., *Lebuinus en Walburgis bijeen. Deventer en Zutphen als historische centra van kerkelijk leven* (Delft, 2006) 203-220; Chr. Kooi, 'Paying off the sheriff. Strategies of Catholic toleration in Golden Age Holland', in: Hsia and Van Nierop (eds.), *Calvinism and religious toleration*, 87-101.

5 The list of Catholic nobles living in the provinces Holland and Utrecht compiled by De la Torre is printed in: A. van Lommel S.J. (ed.), 'Relatio sue descriptio satus religionis Catholicae in Hollandia, etc.', *Archief voor de geschiedenis van het aartsbisdom Utrecht (AAU)*, XI (1883) 179-188. I have not been able to retrieve the names of all the nobles listed by De la Torre. The ten families that have been examined are: De Wael van Vronestein, De Wael van Moersbergen, Grauwert, Van Amstel van Mijnden, Van Gent, Van der Haer, Van Hardenbroek, Van Renesse van Baer, Van Renesse van der Aa, Van Zuylen van Nyevelt. The members of some of these families (e.g. Van Gent) lived in other provinces (mostly Guelders). Family members who lived abroad are not included in this study.

6 In the episcopal reorganization of 1559 the bishopric of Utrecht was upgraded to an archbishopric. M. Dierckx S.J., *De oprichting der nieuwe bisdommen in de Nederlanden onder Filips II, 1559-1570* (Antwerp-Utrecht, 1950). Just in the city of Utrecht itself there were five chapter churches and twenty-

of the religious and political upheavals this province experienced in the sixteenth century, the ecclesiastical institutions and their possessions were wrested from Catholic control by the authorities, and its revenues were employed, for example, to pay the salaries of the Reformed ministers with which the churches that formerly had belonged to Catholics were staffed.⁷ Moreover, in this province nobles were used to serve in political offices and were allowed, when living up to certain requirements, to attend the meetings of the knighthood (*ridderschap*), the political body which represented the nobility at the provincial level. However, this changed as well, as from around 1621 onwards throughout the Republic Catholic nobles were prohibited to attend the meetings of the knighthood.⁸ Yet in spite of these setbacks for the Catholic nobility and their church in this province, the city of Utrecht became a centre of mission activity and Catholic communities on the countryside were served by resident and itinerant priests, a number of whom enjoyed the protection and support of Catholic nobles.⁹ The cooperation between the laity and the Catholic missionaries resulted in the existence of a large Catholic community within the province of Utrecht, among whom a sizeable group of Catholic nobles (as witnessed by De la Torre's mission report). Because of this context I will focus on Utrecht, yet the article's scope is not strictly limited to this province, for the developments in other parts of the Dutch Republic that touch upon the topics studied here will be addressed in order to highlight general trends or to signify provincial and regional differences.

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Means of exclusion: oaths of religion

In an increasing number of circumstances the secular authorities of the Republic resorted to the use of oaths, reflecting a trend in early modern Europe. Although oaths were used in various profane contexts, the authorities were especially keen to employ oaths to test someone's political loyalty and to check someone's religious adherence, for oaths were seen as the 'strongest bond of conscience', as an oath was the 'individuals own sense of duty towards God'. At the same time an oath 'was an outward acknowledgement of the individual's obligation, and an opportunity for others

four monasteries. R.E. de Bruin et al. (ed.), *Geschiedenis van de stad Utrecht. 'Een paradijs vol weelde'* (Utrecht, 2000) 205. For nobles serving in ecclesiastical institutions, see S. Marshall, *The Dutch gentry, 1500-1650. Family, faith, and fortune* (New York-Westport-London, 1987) 78-81.

7 See for instance: C.A. van Kalveen, 'De nalatenschap van de S. Paulusabdij te Utrecht', in: H. ten Boom et al. (eds.), *Utrechters entre-deux. Stad en Sticht in de eeuw van de Reformatie, 1520-1620* (Delft, 1992) 43-66, and D.G. Rengers Hora Siccama, *De geestelijke en kerkelijke goederen onder het canonieke, het gereformeerde en het neutrale recht* (Utrecht, 1905).

8 Wassenaar, 'Katholieke adellijke families', 4. There was some provincial variation regarding the introduction of the measures which aimed to exclude Catholics from attending the meetings of the knighthood. See also note 62.

9 Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme*, I, 409-414. Ch.H. Parker, *Faith on the margins. Catholics and Catholicism in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2008) 154-156.

to oblige, discipline and coerce the conscience.¹⁰ Indeed, by formulating an oath in a specific way or by including certain words or statements, oaths could be used to detect people who exhibited deviant political and religious beliefs. The Dutch authorities deemed it to be important to detect Catholics, for the war with Catholic Spain, the treason of Count of Rennenberg (1580), and all kinds of rumours about subversive political ideas spread by Jesuits and other Catholic missionaries, led to the idea that Catholics constituted a fifth column that was ready to assist any foreign Catholic ruler.¹¹

Dominant opinion had it that the loyalties of Catholics were questionable at best and therefore Catholics could not be left in positions in which they were able to influence government policy. But although in the late sixteenth century the various provincial states of the newly-founded Republic introduced a number of oaths of loyalty – demanding obedience to the secular authorities – the majority of these oaths did not pry into the religious affiliation of the taker.¹² Over the course of the seventeenth century and especially in the years following the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), oaths which specifically targeted the religion of the oath-taker were formulated by the secular authorities – thereby introducing what the Catholic historian L.J. Rogier has called a ‘Test-Act practice’.¹³ A good example of this development are the oaths the members of knighthood of Overijssel were required to take. According to Js. Mooijweer, the oaths of 1598 and 1610 were formulated in such a way that they could be taken by Catholic nobles as well, whereas everyone who took the oath of 1621 had to vow that he ‘abhorred the Roman-Catholic religion’.¹⁴ In other provinces in the Republic a similar trend is visible: from 1621 onwards nobles who attended the meetings of the knighthood of Zutphen, Nijmegen, and the Veluwe for instance, had to ‘swear and promise (*sweren ende beloven*) that they would maintain the True Christian Reformed Religion [...] and confess (*bekennen*) to be of the aforesaid True Christian Reformed Religion and, on the contrary, to abhor the popish and other similar idolatries.’¹⁵ The authorities of the Dutch Republic thus decreed that the holders

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10 J. Spurr, “The strongest bond of conscience”. Oaths and the limits of tolerance in early modern England”, in: E. Vallance and H. Brown (eds.), *Context of conscience in early modern Europe, 1500-1700* (Basingstoke, 2004) 151. For the use of oaths in different circumstances, see idem, ‘A profane history of early modern oaths’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, XI (2001) 37-64.

11 M.G. Spiertz, ‘De katholieke geestelijke leiders en de wereldlijke overheid in de Republiek der Zeven Provinciën’, *Trajecta*, II, 1 (1993) 3.

12 There are some exceptions, such as oaths which had to be taken by magistrates in some cities in Overijssel and Guelders. Spiertz, ‘De katholieke geestelijke leiders’, 4.

13 Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme*, I, 480-482; II, 727.

14 Js. Mooijweer, “‘In Overijssel hatt die Ritterschaft grosse Prominenz”. De Ridderschap(pen) van Overijssel van 1424 tot 1622’, in: A.J. Mensema, Js. Mooijweer and J.C. Streng (eds.), *De Ridderschap van Overijssel. Le métier du noble* (Zwolle, 2000) 27. The oath of 1610 already included the provision that no other religion than the ‘true Reformed religion’ was allowed in the province.

15 W.J. d’Ablaing van Giessenburg, *Bannerheeren en Ridderschap van Zutphen van den aanvang der beroerten in de zestiende eeuw tot het jaar 1795* (2 vols., The Hague, 1877-1885), I, 10. The concept of

of certain offices and benefices as well as members of political estates had to be Reformed Christians. Although in general it was not necessary to be a full member (*lidmaat*) of the Reformed church in order to qualify for particular offices, one had to be a sympathizer (*liefhebber*) of the Reformed religion and one could not be a member of any of the rival churches that existed in the Republic.¹⁶ In some specific cases, however, it seems that the requirement of being a member of the Reformed church was eventually introduced. For instance, newly elected members of the city council (*vroedschap*) of Utrecht had to swear that they would only nominate and elect new burgomasters and members of the council who were ‘actual communicating members of the Reformed church’.¹⁷

Already in the 1580s, the Provincial States of Utrecht determined that the *geëli-geerden* – delegates from the formerly Catholic but secularized chapter churches – had to be Reformed Protestants,¹⁸ and over the course of the seventeenth century more offices were subjected to the same requirements, excluding Catholics from serving as sheriffs, bailiffs and members of local courts, for instance.¹⁹ The same Provincial States decreed in 1615 that benefices only could be held by Reformed Protestants, removing another source of income and prestige for Catholic nobles, as members of noble families had often been members of chapter churches or enjoyed a benefice in monasteries and convents.²⁰ In 1610, the Council of State decided that the knighthood of Utrecht would be expanded with ‘one of two qualified persons [...] known to be good patriots and Reformed Christians.’²¹ A number of times the knighthood itself repeated this requirement, yet its archive does not mention the exact wording of the

the oath put forward by the States General and approved by Utrecht’s town council included a similar phrase (namely: ‘to abhor of Popish and other errors’. This oath had to be taken by those who attended the meetings of the States of Utrecht (see note 23). In 1617, the States of Overijssel decided that people who practiced Catholic worship in their houses (or who allowed this practice) or who went to Oldenzaal to do so, were no longer allowed to attend its meetings. J. de Hullu, ‘Aantekeningen betreffende de katholieken in Twente en op het platteland in het ronde van Deventer (1583-1629)’, *AAU*, XL (1914) 45-46.

16 J. Spaans, ‘Violent dreams, peaceful coexistence. On the absence of religious violence in the Dutch Republic’, *De Zeventiende Eeuw*, XVIII (2002) 159.

17 Het Utrechts Archief (HUA), Stad Utrecht, secretarie 1577-1795 (SAII), inv.nr. 121-29, resolution of 17 July 1674. A similar oath was introduced in 1651. J. van de Water, *Groot placaatboek vervattende alle de placaten, ordonnantien en edicten, der Edele Mogende Heeren Staten ’s Lands van Utrecht* (3 vols.; Utrecht, 1729), II, 99-100. A number of cities in the central and eastern parts of the Republic, including large towns such as Utrecht, Arnhem, and Nijmegen, refused to grant citizenship to Catholics (although in some cases town councils modified earlier regulations). According to Prak, the constitutional particularities of these cities, which allowed for greater influence of citizens on local politics, was an incentive to exclude Catholics from acquiring citizenship. M. Prak, ‘The politics of intolerance: citizenship and religion in the Dutch Republic (seventeenth to eighteenth centuries)’, in: Hsia and Van Nierop, *Calvinism and religious toleration*, 162-163, 172-173.

18 Van de Water, *Groot placaatboek*, I, 184, 189.

19 For some examples, see Van de Water, *Groot placaatboek*, I, 396, 757; II, 1045; III, 99-100, 105.

20 Van de Water, *Groot placaatboek*, I, 218. An analysis of the benefices held by Catholic noblewomen is not included in this study.

21 HUA, Huis Linschoten, inv.nr. 587.

oath which new members had to take before being admitted to its meetings.²² There are signs that oaths similar to those formulated in Overijssel and Guelders were introduced in Utrecht as well, for in 1649 the city council of Utrecht approved the concept of the oath designed by the States General, which read that those who attended the meetings of the Provincial States had to swear ‘to abhor (*affkeer hebben*) the popish [religion] and other errors’.²³

Oaths were not always necessary in order to discern someone’s religious affiliation, for this was often known to other people. In 1640 Frederick Henry, the prince of Orange, demanded the expansion of the knighthood in Utrecht and as part of their response the existing members of the knighthood sent him a list of nobles who were Reformed Christians and did qualify to be admitted in the knighthood. Another list compiled by the members of the knighthood consisted of fourteen knightly estates without the names of their owners, as they did not qualify to become a member because some of them were ‘papists’ (among other things).²⁴ In other cases people had to prove their eligibility to hold an office or benefice by showing their religious affiliation by means of written statements. Members of the Teutonic Order in Utrecht, for instance, drew up testimonies in which they stated to be Reformed Christians and included attestations of Reformed ministers which proved they had attended Reformed services. The minister Bernardus Busschhof, for example, testified that Alexander Emanuel van Renesse ‘sympathized’ with the Reformed religion and attended the ‘public sermons’, whereas another minister confirmed that Hendrik Sloot ‘frequently (*neerstig*) went to Reformed services and also attended the Lord’s Supper’.²⁵

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The stance of the Catholic church

The use of oaths by secular authorities to prevent Catholic from holding public offices and benefices was noticed by the apostolic vicars. In his mission report of 1617, Philippus Rovenius wrote that ‘everywhere Catholics are excluded from the execution of civil offices and the holding of benefices, unless they wish to vow obedience to the Reformed religion [...]’.²⁶ Both Rovenius and his predecessor Sasbout Vosmeer

22 The wording of the oath is not mentioned in the archives of the Utrecht knighthood. New members did have to take an oath. HUA, Archief Staten van Utrecht 1581-1810 (ASU), inv.nr. 734-1, 7 July 1642. Unfortunately, the records of the Utrecht knighthood covering the years 1618-1630 could not be consulted due to the physical state of this source.

23 HUA, SAIL, inv.nr. 121-23, resolution of 10/11 Apr. 1649.

24 HUA, ASU, inv.nr. 734-1, 22 Feb. 1640. Six of the fourteen estates are recorded on De la Torre’s list. With the same apparent ease the classis of Rhenen and Wijck identified Catholic bailiffs and aldermen in Houten and ‘t Goy. HUA, Provinciale kerkvergadering van Utrecht (PKU), inv.nr. 42 (1 Aug. 1667).

25 HUA, ASU, inv.nr. 484, declarations of Alexander Emanuel van Renesse and Hendrik Sloot.

26 ‘Passim Catholici ab omni administratione officiorum civilium et perceptione beneficiorum excluduntur, nisi jurare velint in reformatam religionem.’ G. Brom, ‘Verslag over de Hollandsche Missie ten jare 1617’, *AAU*, XVII (1889) 459.



Sasbout Vosmeer, the first apostolic vicar to the Holland Mission (engraving, c. 1602-14; coll. Het Utrechts Archief)

exhorted Catholics not to align themselves to the heretical government by holding offices or to participate in the Dutch East India Company.²⁷ Indeed, these apostolic vicars argued that any contact or interaction with heretics should be avoided.²⁸ Vosmeer thought it unacceptable for Catholics to vow loyalty to a state which was at odds with their religion and therefore prohibited Catholics from taking oaths of obedience. Catholic students at Leiden University, for instance, were therefore not allowed to vow obedience to the university's rector.²⁹ Moreover, responding to the question of a missionary priest whether Catholics were allowed to be registered (*ingeschreven*) at the 'heretical' university of Leiden, Vosmeer, after his brother had consulted a professor from the University of Louvain, argued that it was not permitted for Catholics to be registered at Protestant universities. Catholics who violated this decree, were not allowed to receive the sacraments.³⁰ Vosmeer enjoyed the support of Pope Clement VIII, according to whom Catholics who were registered at a Protestant universities were 'schismatics' who were all suspect of faulty interaction with heretics.³¹

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However, Vosmeer's and Rovenius's view did not go unchallenged and Catholic laypeople objected to what they perceived to be impossible demands, arguing that if absolution was refused to Catholic students at heretical universities, absolution should be withheld from all Catholic citizens for they had to obey the local magistracy.³² A number of missionaries, mostly regulars, parted from the policy advocated by the apostolic vicars and continued to administer the sacraments to Catholics who were registered at heretical universities.³³ In the second half of the seventeenth century, the apostolic vicars' policy changed as Johan van Neercassel and Petrus Codde advocated loyalty to the Dutch authorities,³⁴ making it at least easier for Catholics to take oaths of obedience. However, even though Van Neercassel allowed Catholics to align themselves with the Dutch state politically, they were certainly not allowed

27 Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme*, 1, 32.

28 J. Visser, *Rovenius und seine Werke. Beitrag zur Geschichte der nordniederländischen katholischen Frömmigkeit in der ersten Hälfte des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Assen, 1966) 157.

29 P.A.M. Geurts O.F.M., 'Het gewetensconflict van katholieke studenten aan de Leidse universiteit, ca. 1600', in: H.F.J.M. van den Eerenbeemt et al. (ed.), *Voor Rogier. Een bundel opstellen van oud-leerlingen de hoogleraar bij zijn afscheid aangeboden* (Hilversum-Antwerp, 1964) 65-66. This oath of obedience, formulated after complaints from (foreign) Catholic students, replaced an earlier oath in which students had to vow their support for the faith that was taught at Leiden university.

30 Geurts, 'Het gewetensconflict', 67-68; W.L.S. Knuif and R.G.S. Smeets, 'Sasbout Vosmeer', *AAU*, XLIII (1917) 179.

31 Geurts, 'Het gewetensconflict', 69-70.

32 Idem, 72-73; W. Frijhoff, *La société néerlandaise et ses gradués, 1575-1814. Une recherche sérielle sur le statut des intellectuels à partir des registres universitaires* (Amsterdam, 1981) 53. In the late sixteenth century, some members of the Haarlem chapter differed from Vosmeer as they advocated obedience to the secular authorities. Spiertz, 'De katholieke geestelijke leiders', 4.

33 Geurts, 'Het gewetensconflict', 76-77. Rovenius still complained about this in this missionary report of 1640. G. Brom, 'Vier missie-verslagen, van 1635 tot 1645 door Rovenius te Rome ingediend', *AAU*, XVIII (1890) 56.

34 Spiertz, 'De katholieke geestelijke leiders', 7, 13; Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme*, 1, 202.

to do so religiously. Van Neercassel regarded involvement in the government and the honour related to office-holding as the ‘bait’ (*lock-aes*) by which Catholics were lured into Protestantism, and opposed those who argued that it was allowed for Catholics to participate in the rituals and church services of Reformed Protestants in order to keep their offices.³⁵

Policing the decrees

70 Even though a part of the Catholic community was willing to vow obedience to the secular authorities, this still fell short of meeting the (religious) requirements attached to holding certain offices and benefices – that is, if the decrees of the government were carried out to the letter. For the extent to which the decrees of the government against Catholic office holding were carried out by those responsible for doing so remains to be seen. According to the Catholic lawyer and priest Franciscus Dusseldorpius, it certainly did occur that the decrees of the authorities were applied less strictly by government officials.³⁶ Willem van Renesse van Baer, for instance, gave up his benefice rather than sign an act by which he promised to become a Protestant, but in the end he was admitted to the Teutonic Order.³⁷ One of his family members, Lodewijk van Renesse van Baer, was appointed canon in the chapter church of Oudmunster in Utrecht in 1608 and held this canonry until 1638.³⁸

As the following examples will show, however, often the unlawful possession of offices and benefices by Catholics was policed. In 1652, for instance, the sheriff of Utrecht, Anselm Boll, Lord of Rijnestein, questioned the legitimacy of a prebend (a canonry) in the Dom church held by the nobleman Willem van Merode. Willem had been a Reformed Protestant but he converted to Catholicism and thereby violated, according to the sheriff, the decree which stipulated that benefices could only be held by Reformed Protestants.³⁹ Moreover, his father had declared in 1624 that he would raise Willem ‘in the Reformed religion’, so that in time the prebend could be transferred to his son (if Willem would have remained a Reformed Christian).⁴⁰ The case,

35 Van Neercassel, *Bevestigingh in't geloof en troost in vervolgingh* (Brussels, 1670) 385; C. Deelder, *Bijdragen voor de geschiedenis van de roomsch-katholieke kerk in Nederland* (2 vols.; Amsterdam 1888-1892), II, 21.

36 R.J. Fruin, *Uittreksel uit Francisci Dusseldorpii Annales 1566-1616* (The Hague, 1893) xiii-xiv.

37 A.E. Rientjes, *Het kerspel Jutphaas* (Maarsse, 1947) 120. See also J.A. Mol, ‘Trying to survive. The military orders in Utrecht, 1580-1620’, in: J.A. Mol, K. Militzer and H.J. Nicholson (eds.), *The military orders and the Reformation. Choices, state building, and the weight of tradition* (Hilversum, 2006) 201.

38 HUA, Kapittel van Oudmunster te Utrecht (KOU), inv.nr. 249.

39 See note 20.

40 HUA, ASU, inv.nr. 2095. For other examples of this practice, see HUA, Notarissen in de stad Utrecht 1560-1905 (NSA), notary F. de Width (136), deed nr. 233, 5 July 1698; deed nr. 240, 24 Nov. 1698 (both deeds in inv.nr. U112a001). According to Van der Ven, Gerard van Merode was appointed canon in 1606 and was a Catholic. A.J. van de Ven, *Over den oorsprong van het aartsbisschoppelijke kapittel van Utrecht der oud-bisschoppelijke clerezy* (Utrecht, 1923) 49.

which had become more complex because Willem had already transferred the prebend to someone else, was closed when Willem passed away. Another Catholic nobleman from Utrecht, Bitter van der Marsche, wrote to the Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith that he, as the owner of a chaplaincy, could not preside over its income or appoint a Catholic chaplain, for Catholicism was outlawed and the States, when learning of the existence of the chaplaincy, would never allow that its income would be granted to a Catholic.⁴¹ In this case the fear of losing the revenue of the chaplaincy as a result of the policy of the authorities compelled Bitter to write to Propaganda to find a solution to his problem.

When analysing the offices held by the group of 84 Catholic nobles, we should take into account that there was a trend, at least in Holland, among nobles to voluntarily stop to attend the meetings of the knighthood and cease to hold public offices.⁴² We therefore should be careful of attributing the lack of offices held by Catholic nobles solely to the policies of the authorities. Yet, as I will show below, Catholics nobles often desired to hold offices and benefices and to attend meetings of the knighthood, and the fact that only four of these 84 Catholic nobles served in public office, was largely the result of the government's policies. Moreover, of all the nobles who were eligible to attend the meetings of a knighthood, only one of them was actually able to do so: the former Remonstrant Peter van Hardenbroek, who converted to Catholicism probably at some point in the late 1620s, continued going to the meetings of the knighthood and even became its president after he had converted.⁴³ A couple of other nobles held lower public offices, such as Adriaen van Camons, who was pawned with the sheriff's office of the small town of Dalfsen.⁴⁴ It occurred more often that Catholics served as sheriffs and bailiffs, especially in small towns and villages in the countryside, because Catholic owners of seigneuries appointed Catholic officials or simply because there were no qualified people to fill the vacancies.⁴⁵

41 J.M.D. Cornelisse, *Romeinsche bronnen voor den kerkelijken toestand der Nederlanden onder de apostolische vicarissen 1592-1727. Deel I: 1592-1651* (The Hague, 1932) 561.

42 H.F.K. van Nierop, *Van ridders tot regenten. De Hollandse adel in de zestiende en de eerste helft van de zeventiende eeuw* (2nd edition, Amsterdam, 1990) 172, 182.

43 *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek (NNBW)* (10 vols., Amsterdam, 1911-1937), VI, 707. Also: D.E.A. Faber, 'Dirck van Baburen, his commissioner and his motifs', in: R. Klessmann (ed.), *Hendrick ter Brugghen und die Nachfolger Caravaggios in Holland* (Braunschweig, 1988) 143-150. Of these 84 nobles, three of them lived more or less permanently in the Southern Netherlands and held political offices there (e.g. Gerard de Horion, member of the council (*raet*) of the prince of Liège). Some nobles held non-public offices: three nobles were *erfkamerheer* of the County of Zutphen and the Duchy of Guelders.

44 E.D. Eijken, *Repertorium op de Overstichtse en Overijsselse leenprotocollen 1379-1805* (Zwolle, 1995) no. 1051 (1632 Nov. 18); online version: www.historischcentrumoverijssel.nl/files/leenrepertorium.pdf (last accessed on 2 March 2014).

45 A.C. Duke, *Reformation and revolt in the Low Countries* (London-Ronceverte, 1990) 237, 239; L.J. van der Heijden, *Het kerspel Loenersloot* (Utrecht, 1913) 15-17; W.M. van de Pas, *Tussen Vecht en Oude Rijn. Beschrijvende geschiedenis van Noord-West Utrecht, naar aanleiding van het eeuwfeest der R.K. parochie Kockengen* (Utrecht-Antwerp, 1952) 107-108; Knuttel, *De toestand*, I, 321. The existence of

Gijsbert Grauwert was the bailiff (*landdrost*) of Weerdestein and Quintijn van der Noot was a dikereef (*dijkgraaf*) in the lands of Vianen, both of them benefiting from the relatively tolerant religious policies of Johan Wolfert van Brederode, Lord of Brederode, Ameide, and the free seignury of Vianen.⁴⁶ It happened that Catholic nobles served as dikereefs and especially in the adjacent province of Guelders this occurred more often, sometimes because this position was pawned to a noble family.⁴⁷ Catholics in Guelders could profit from the somewhat more liberal policy of the States of Guelders regarding Catholic office holding during the seventeenth century, as Catholics were allowed to become members of dike boards or have a seat in local courts of justice (the so-called *ambtsjonkercolleges*).⁴⁸

Attempts to hold public offices by Catholic nobles

72 It appears that if Catholics were able to occupy public offices, these were mostly lower offices in smaller cities or in towns and villages in the countryside. There were some exceptions to this pattern, such as the aforementioned Peter van Hardenbroek and the non-nobleman François de Wit, the latter being appointed as the substitute of the field-marshal of the *Overkwartier* in 1681.⁴⁹ Catholic nobles, who found themselves betwixt and between the requirements of the Protestant state, the restrictions placed upon them by the Catholic church, and the dictates of their own conscience, nevertheless tried to find a way to secure offices and benefices. The Catholic nobleman Gerard de Wael van Vronestein for example, wanted his son (Willem) to become a member of the Teutonic Order in Utrecht when coming of age, but he had two problems with the requirements of the secular authorities. The first problem was that Gerard himself had to vow that he would raise his son 'in the Reformed religion', which ran contrary to 'his disposition (*gemoed*) and his conscience' for he was a Catholic.⁵⁰ His son eventually had to face a similar problem, for at some point he had

Catholic officials aroused the complaints of Reformed consistories and classes. See, for instance: HUA, PKU, inv.nr. 42: meetings of 2 June 1629, 26 Oct. 1629, 10 Aug. 1651, 1 Sept. 1667, 8 Sept. 1693.

46 F.E.J.H. Hoeck, *Schets van de geschiedenis der Jezuïeten in Nederland* (Nijmegen, 1940) 64; Nationaal Archief, The Hague (NA), Familie Heereman van Zuydtwijck 1360-1880 (FHZ), inv.nr. 934; H.L.Ph. Leeuwenberg, 'De religiepolitiek van Johan Wolfert van Brederode', in: A.J.M. Koenhein (ed.), *Johan Wolfert van Brederode, 1599-1655. Een Hollands edelman tussen Nassau en Oranje* (Zutphen, 1999) 57-68. According to Voets, Gijsbert was the bailiff of Ameide. B. Voets, 'Katholiek Cothen in de branding der eeuwen', *AAU*, LXVIII (1949) 198.

47 E.g. the Catholic Johan Frederik van Isendoorn à Blois was the dikereef of the Veluwe. S.W. Verstegen, 'Heren en vrouwen van de Cannenburch uit het geslacht Van Isendoorn à Blois', in: D.J.G. Buurman (ed.), *De Cannenburch en zijn bewoners* (Zutphen, 1990) 156.

48 H. Cannegieter and W. van Loon (eds.), *Groot Gelders placact-boeck* (3 vols., Nijmegen, 1701-1740), II, 337-339; Wassenaar, 'Katholieke adellijke families', 7.

49 The Reformed synod of Utrecht was quick to voice their complaints about François' appointment to the States of Utrecht. HUA, PKU, inv.nr. 42, fol. 191r (letter from the provincial synod).

50 NA, FHZ, inv.nr. 780, letter from the Stadtholder Frederick Henry, 1632.



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Knightly mansion Vronestein in Jutphaas, near Utrecht, c. 1660-70 (coll. *Het Utrechts Archief*)

to swear that he was a Reformed Christian in order to be admitted to the Teutonic Order. However, as a way of partly conceding to the requirements of admission, Gerard told the States of Utrecht that taking the oath of fidelity (*eet van getrouwicheyt*) was not a problem, which shows that the religious part of the oath was the real obstacle.⁵¹

As a Catholic, Gerard found the oath of religion highly troublesome, but he was willing to take an oath of loyalty, something which was dismissed by Vosmeer, Roventius, and pope Clement VIII. According to Geert Janssen an 'ambiguous Catholic identity' emerged in the Dutch Republic, 'in which loyalty to an officially Protestant state could coincide with commitment to the Church of Rome.'⁵² This is exemplified

⁵¹ NA, FHZ, inv.nr. 783, letter from Gerard de Wael van Vronestein to the States of Utrecht, 1636. The prince approved of Gerard's request to dispense him and his son from having to take an oath of religion. NA, FHZ, inv.nr. 780, letter from Frederick Henry, 1632. In 1640 the States of Utrecht agreed to grant a dispensation to Willem de Wael van Vronestein. NA, FHZ, inv.nr. 785, letter from Gerard de Wael van Vronestein to the States of Utrecht, 1640.

⁵² G.H. Janssen, 'Quo vadis? Perceptions of flight and the revolt of the Low Countries, 1566-1609', *Renaissance quarterly*, LXIV, 2 (2011) 494.

by Gerard de Wael van Vronestein and shows that a part of the Catholic community made a distinction between oaths which directly ran contrary to their religion, and oaths which only targeted their religion indirectly (by vowing obedience to a heretical regime).

Gerard was by no means the only Catholic nobleman who craved to hold offices and benefices and on January 21, 1642, the knighthood of Utrecht noticed that several nobles endeavoured to be admitted to its meetings, among whom nobles who 'were suspect, either because of having Catholic wives, or in another way.'⁵³ The members of the knighthood resolved – with the notable exception of the Catholic Peter van Hardenbroek – that none of the suspect nobles would be admitted, unless they would do profession of the Reformed faith for the period of two or three years.⁵⁴ The Catholic nobleman Berent van Rysenburg experienced that the knighthood was earnest in upholding its decision, for when trying to be admitted to the knighthood he had to live up to these requirements and he had to leave the army as well (for soldiers were not allowed to appear in the meetings of the knighthood).⁵⁵ Herman Peter van Hardenbroek was more successful as he managed to be allowed to hold a seat in the board of the Admiralty of Noord-Holland. However, his initial nomination was rejected for he was of minor age and a Catholic. Somehow he managed to convince Utrecht's town council that he was a Reformed Protestant (perhaps this was the influence of his father Peter) and in the end his nomination was accepted.⁵⁶

Johan van Oostrum, a Catholic according to Jacobus de la Torre's list, wanted to become a member of the knighthood as well, and stated that he was a Remonstrant,

53 HUA, Familie Van Hardenbroek, inv.nr. 254.

54 Ibid. Reformed nobles with Catholic wives were admitted to the meetings of the knighthood. Apparently an earlier decision was mitigated, for a document from 1641 reads that Reformed noblemen who were married to Catholic wives would be admitted on the condition that 'they would convert their women to the Reformed religion and that they would do profession of this' (*sij hare vrouwen tot de gereformeerde religie bekeerden ende daer van professie deden*). HUA, ASU, inv.nr. 744, reglement voor augmentatie (19 Feb. 1641). About the term 'doing profession', see A.T. van Deursen, *Bavianen en slijkgeuzen. Kerk en kerkvolk ten tijde van Maurits en Oldebarnevelt* (Assen, 1974) 128.

55 HUA, ASU, inv.nr. 734-1, 26 Jan. 1642. This probably was too much for him to overcome, for I have not encountered him as a member of the knighthood. Berent's father Justus stressed that he and his son were Reformed Christians, but he was not able to convince the knighthood. HUA, Huis Zuilen, inv.nr. 730, meetings of 26 Jan. 1642 and 15 Feb. 1642.

56 HUA, SAIL, inv.nr. 121-24, 3 Nov. 1652, 17 Nov. 1652. He is not listed as one of the members of the board of Admiralty in Noord-Holland. See the *Repertorium van ambtsdragers en ambtenaren, 1428-1861*, available at www.historici.nl. Other sources do mention Herman Peter as a member of the board. See HUA, Klapper transporten en plechten, transport Peter van Hardenbroek to Peter Herman van Hardenbroek (26 Sept. 1655) and E.J. Wolleswinkel, 'Een zeventiende-eeuws kwartierwapenboek van Joost van Atteveld', *De Nederlandsche Leeuw*, CXXVII (2010) 18. A member of the board of this admiralty had to take an oath of religion at some point (although the exact date of this oath is unknown, it is telling that none of the oaths required of the holders of other positions within the admiralty included religion). NA, Archief Admiraliteitscolleges, inv.nr. 2986, Eed van de Raaden ter Admiraliteit, fol. 2r-3r.

just like his wife Catharina Anna de Wael van Moersbergen. There were some lingering doubts about his religious affiliation, among other things, but finally, after receiving a dispensation for being an officer in the army, he was admitted into the knighthood but for unknown reasons never attended its meetings.⁵⁷ It is possible that Johan van Oostrum converted to Catholicism at a later point in life – the conversion of Remonstrants to Catholicism is a well-known phenomenon in the Dutch Republic – but De la Torre did not mention him as a convert on his list. Another possibility is that Johan, and perhaps Herman Peter as well, were so-called church papists, Catholics who outwardly conformed to the Protestant church and to the religious requirements of the state. Historians of English Catholicism such as Alexandra Walsham and Michael Questier have showed that it was a strategy that was practiced by many an English Catholic.⁵⁸ Of course, in England people were liable to punishment when not heeding to the laws which decreed attendance at the religious services in the Church of England to be mandatory, something which made the need for conformity much more pressing in England than in the Republic, where church attendance was voluntary. This difference as well as the fact that only public offices were subjected to requirements regarding the religious affiliation of the office holder, made acts of (occasional) conformity unnecessary for the biggest part of the Dutch population – the people who were because of their socio-economic position not eligible for public offices anyway – and probably church papistry was far less widespread in the Republic than it was in England.⁵⁹

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Having said this, the knighthood of Utrecht did deem it necessary in 1642 to decree that ‘suspect’ noblemen who wanted to attend its meetings had to do profession of the Reformed religion for at least two years, clearly ruling out act of occasional conformity and forcing noblemen to conform over a prolonged period of time. Moreover, some catechisms stressed the need for Catholics to openly profess their faith when being inquired about their religious affiliation. Petrus van den Bossche’s *Den Catholycken pedagoge oft Christelycken onderwijser inden Catechismus* (1685) responded negatively to the question whether it was allowed for Catholics ‘to behave like a heretic but to be a Catholic in heart’. If a Catholic was required by law (*wettelick*

57 HUA, ASU, inv.nr. 734-1: meetings of 22 Nov. 1642, 21 March 1643, 10 Apr. 1644.

58 A. Walsham, *Church papists. Catholicism, conformity, and confessional polemic in early modern England* (Woodbridge, 1993) and her “Yielding to the extremity of the time”. Conformity, orthodoxy and the post-Reformation Catholic community’, in: P. Lake and M.C. Questier, *Conformity and orthodoxy in the English church, c. 1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000) 211-236. In the same volume, see M.C. Questier, ‘Conformity, Catholicism and the law’, 237-261.

59 There are cases of Catholic noblemen who were willing to conform to the political and religious regime to some extent. Johan van Wassenaer van Warmond, for instance, was seen to be pragmatic in matters of state and religion, and was termed to be a ‘political lord’ (*politycq heer*). W.J.J.C. Bijleveld, ‘De Van Wassenaer’s van Warmond en hunne kerk’, *Bijdragen voor de geschiedenis van het bisdom Haarlem*, LIX (1941) 168; S. Groenveld, ‘Terug naar Wassenaar. De stijging van de Duvenvoirdes (1523-1665)’, in: H.M. Brokken (ed.), *Heren van stand. Van Wassenaar 1200-200: achthonderd jaar Nederlandse adelsgeschiedenis* (The Hague, 2001) 138.

ghevraecht) to state his or her religion, Catholics had to profess their religion, even when this endangered their material possessions (*Goedt*) and their lives (*Bloedt*). Only when Catholics were not required by law to declare their religious affiliation, they were allowed to be quiet about their faith and keep it ‘covered’.⁶⁰ So even if occasional conformity was not a widespread practice in the Republic, these two examples show that on either side of the confessional divide there were some concerns about Catholics hiding their faith. The fact that a number of Catholic nobles were willing to attend the meetings of political bodies and to hold offices shows that they did not object to violate the decrees of the secular authorities as well as the rulings of the Catholic church.

Catholic strategies and experiences

76 Catholics nobles opted for different strategies when dealing with the policies of the authorities and the requirements attached to holding public office and benefices, as we already have seen. The majority of the Catholic nobles were reluctant or outright unwilling to take an oath by which they had to repudiate their faith. The Frisian nobleman Sixtus van Emmingha refused to do so in order to secure high political offices, for he did not want to be disloyal to ‘God or his Catholic king’.⁶¹ Comparable to what happened in Utrecht, Catholic nobles in other provinces of the Dutch Republic refused to attend the meetings of the knighthood after they were required to take oaths of religion.⁶² It is possible that some Catholic nobles were willing to go a step further and to take an oath of religion – e.g. the Catholic nobles who wanted to be admitted to the knighthood of Utrecht – but in the end found it impossible to overcome additional requirements – such as having to do profession of the Reformed religion over a prolonged period of time. Another option for Catholic nobles was to find a measure of accommodation with the authorities, for instance by trying to get a dispensation for the oath of religion or by replacing such an oath in favour of an oath of loyalty, as Gerard de Wael van Vronestein successfully did. Catholic nobles who held public offices could also opt to negotiate the extent to which one was involved

60 P. van den Bossche, *Den catholycken pedagoge oft christelycken onderwyser in den catechismus, verdeelt in vyf deelen* (Antwerp, 1685) 34.

61 J. Spaans, *De levens der maechden. Het verhaal van een religieuze vrouwengemeenschap in de eerste helft van de zeventiende eeuw* (3 vols., Hilversum, 2012), II, 72v.

62 Mooijweer, ‘De ridderschap(pen) van Overijssel’, 27; D’Ablaing, *Bannerheeren en Ridderschap van Zutphen*, I, 26-27. After 1620 a number of Catholic nobles, among whom Joost and Derick van Stepraedt and Reinier van Dorth, did no longer attend the meetings of the knighthood of the Veluwe. In the knighthood of the Veluwe the discussion what to do with its Catholic members veered from allowing Catholics to hold office as long as they conformed to the decrees (*plakkaten*) issued by the same States (1640), to replace Catholics by Reformed Protestants after their death (1649), and to removing them from office immediately (1651). W.J. d’Ablaing van Giessenburg, *De Ridderschap van Veluwe of Geschiedenis der Veluwsche jonkers* (The Hague, 1859) 43.

in making decisions that would damage the interests of their co-religionists in any way. Peter van Hardenbroek for instance, did not want to support certain measures to prevent Catholic nobles from being admitted to the knighthood. Another example is Hendrik van Brienen, a Catholic nobleman from Guelders, who in 1619 refused to attend the meeting of the Provincial States in which the oath of religion was scheduled to be discussed (fifteen Catholic nobles did go to this meeting and voted against the introduction of this oath).⁶³

For the nobles and other members of the Catholic elite who did not give in to the demands of the government, the experience of not holding any offices could be bitter. Rovenius deplored the replacement of the old Catholic aristocracy by a new (Protestant) elite, and the Catholic patrician Johan de Witt lamented the fact that ‘virtuous and praiseworthy men, who are qualified because of their birth and virtue to govern, are excluded and removed from all public offices.’⁶⁴ For elite families whose members were used to govern and whose honour was partly based upon holding office, the exclusion from offices jeopardized their identity. These families wanted to govern, as witnessed by the swift return of Catholic nobles in the knighthood of Overijssel in the period 1672-1674, when Bernard van Galen, the bishop of Munster, re-allowed Catholic nobles into the knighthood after he had conquered parts of Overijssel.⁶⁵ For nobles admission to the knighthood was a source of status and honour, for being a member of the knighthood was a way to distinct oneself from the non-noble part of society (that became increasingly influential).⁶⁶

Moreover, the exclusion from the knighthood as well as from public offices and benefices meant a loss of income which could lead to financial hardship. Johan van Neercassel, writing about the impoverished noble family Van Zuylen van Nyevelt, pointed to the fact that ‘religion secluded them from all offices in which the bene-

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- 63 K.M.H. Mars, ‘Segeer Stevens Sueck’, *Archief voor de geschiedenis van de katholieke kerk in Nederland (AGKKN)*, XVIII (1976) 140; J. Barten S.J., ‘Het proces van jonker Arent thoe Boecop S.J., hagiograaf en martelaar (vervolg)’, *AGKKN*, IV (1962) 50-51. In 1622 Hendrik argued that he was allowed to attend the meetings of the knighthood, but the States of Guelders, although not disputing his loyalty, required him to take the required oath of religion. D’Abiaing, *De Ridderschap van Nijmegen* (The Hague, 1899) 34. According to J. Barten S.J. the entry in the *NNBW* mistakenly dates Hendrik’s death in 1620. J. Barten S.J., ‘Het proces van jonker Arent thoe Boecop S.J., hagiograaf en martelaar’, *AGKKN*, III (1961) 293.
- 64 W.L.S. Knuijff and J. de Jong, ‘Philippus Rovenius en zijn bestuur der Hollandsche Zending’, *AAU*, L (1925) 142; H. van Rijn, *Historie ofte beschryving van’t Utrechtsche bisdom* (Leiden, 1719) 337. See also P.S. Beuning and Abraham Hulshoff, ‘Brieven van Johannes de Wit aan Arend van Buchel en anderen’, *Bijdragen en mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap*, LX (1939) 169-170.
- 65 Mooijweer, ‘De Ridderschap(pen) van Overijssel’, 85. For more information about Catholic nobles in this period, see J. den Tex, *Onder vreemde heren. De Republiek der Nederlanden, 1672-1674* (Zutphen, 1982) 132-134, 137-138, 162-164.
- 66 C. Gietman, *Republiek van adel. Eer in de Oost-Nederlandse adelscultuur (1555-1702)* (Utrecht, 2010) 97-100. For a discussion of the Dutch nobility and their instruments of distinction, see R. De Bruin, ‘De Ridderlijke Duitse Orde Ballije van Utrecht. Een adellijk distinctie-instrument in de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden gedurende de achttiende eeuw’, *Virtus*, XVI (2009) 34-53.

fits of the non-Catholic nobles have been restored [...].⁶⁷ The experience or the prospective of financial difficulties could have serious consequences: Rovenius noted that even though it 'was required to abstain from offices and benefits,' Catholics 'have started to defect, out of fear from poverty.'⁶⁸ In his book *Bevestiging in't geloof en troost in vervolgingh*, Van Neercassel prompted Catholics to be steadfast in their faith, even in times of persecution. In the last chapter of this book the apostolic vicar tried to comfort those of his flock who resented the fact that they could not hold offices by arguing that involvement in government easily led to sinful behaviour. Catholics living in the Dutch Republic should therefore be thankful for their exclusion from government – which was a 'special generosity from heaven' – for because of this exclusion Catholics were tempted less by particular sins and were more prone to follow Christ and to be good Christians.⁶⁹

78 For some Catholic nobles, the loss of income, the lack of career perspectives, and the fact that they could not worship openly, moved them to emigrate to Catholic territories such as the Southern Netherlands or to (parts of) the Holy Roman Empire, as members from the noble families Van Zuylen van Nyevelt and De Ridder van Groenestein did.⁷⁰ Rogier attributed the dwindling numbers of the Catholic elite to emigration, mixed marriages, and to conversions to Protestantism that were the result of 'social and economical self-preservation'.⁷¹ J.A. de Kok and other historians have argued that especially in the second half of the seventeenth century members of the Catholic elite converted to Protestantism, as the peace of Munster (1648) shattered the hope of a swift restoration of Catholicism in the Dutch Republic, and the Great Meeting (*Grote Vergadering*) of 1651 articulated the need for Reformed Protestant office holders.⁷² How-

67 HUA, Apostolische Vicarissen van de Hollandse Zending (OBC), inv.nr. 240, letter of Johan van Neercassel to the papal nuncio in Brussels. 5 Apr. 1680 (O.S.). Also reprinted in: R.R. Post, *Romeinse bronnen voor den kerkelijken toestand der Nederlanden onder de apostolische vicarissen 1592-1727. Deel II, 1651-1686* (The Hague, 1941) 699-700: 'et dum fides atque religio ipsos arcet ab omnibus dignitatibus in quibus acatholicorum nobilium emolumenta reposita sunt. Sunt ergo cum generis claritate inopes, tantum magis miserandi, quantum magis semoti ab istis artibus atque officiis ex quibus lucra provenire solent.'

68 G. Brom, 'Verslag over de Hollandsche Missie ten jare 1617', *AAU*, XVII (1889) 459, 471.

69 Van Neercassel, *Bevestiging in't geloof*, 385-432, esp. 414, 418-419, 432. In 1686 Van Neercassel ordered some priests to send this book to the Lord of Cannenburg (Marten Albert van Isendoorn à Blois). HUA, OBC, inv.nr. 254; letter from Johannes van Neercassel to Van Haeren (28 Feb. 1686).

70 J. Gaillard, *Maison de Zuylen. Histoire et généographie* (Bruges, 1863) 120, 124; F. van Dycke, *Recueil heraldique de familles nobles et patriciennes de la ville et du fanconat de Bruges* (Bruges, 1851) 538-9. B. Olde Meierink et al. (eds.), *Kastelen en ridderhofsteden in Utrecht* (Utrecht, 1995) 206. Willem Vincent van Wittenhorst lived in Utrecht before buying the seignury and house Ter Horst, which enabled him to have a seat in the knighthood of the Overkwartier. The Overkwartier was controlled by the Spanish Habsburgs at that time. See A. Steffens, *Geschiedenis der aloude heerlijkheid en der heeren van ter Horst* (Roermond, 1888) 89.

71 Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme*, I, 482-483.

72 J.A. de Kok, *Nederland op de breuklijn Rome-Reformatie. Numerieke aspecten van protestantisering en katholieke herleving in de noordelijke Nederlanden, 1580-1880* (Assen, 1964) 182; J.C.A. Hezenmans, 'Nieuw Herlaer in verval', *Taxandria*, V (1898) 251, 255; O. Hilhorst, 'Het kerspel Schalkwijk', *AAU*, XII (1884) 21. See also J.A. Alberdingk Thijm, 'Het Amsterdamsche geslacht der Dommers', *Dietsche warande*, VIII (1869) 202, and Rogier, *Geschiedenis van het katholicisme*, I, 471-472, 483.

ever, rather than perceiving the Peace of Munster and the *Grote Vergadering* as the final blow to Catholic office holding and a major cause of the conversion to Protestantism by members of the Catholic elite, my own research suggest that the exclusion of Catholics from offices started in the late sixteenth century and continued throughout the seventeenth into the eighteenth centuries. Already in the first half of the seventeenth century the vast majority of Catholic nobles did not hold any public offices anymore but for the nobles analysed in this study this did not prove to be a reason to convert.

Religious segregation?

This study of the offices held by Catholic nobles also sheds light on the discussion to what extent the different religious confessions living on Dutch soil became increasingly segregated. Simon Groenveld argued in his *Huisgenoten des geloofs* that interaction between members of the different confessions steeply decreased over the course of the seventeenth century and that Dutch society became thoroughly ‘pillarized’ (*verzuild*).⁷³ Groenveld’s thesis prompted the response of several scholars, among whom Benjamin Kaplan, who stressed the need to examine interconfessional interaction in various spheres of life.⁷⁴ The data presented in this article suggest that in this particular sphere of life interaction between members of various confessions was limited, for only a small number of Catholic nobles held public offices and only in some exceptional cases Catholic nobles attended the meetings of the knighthood. Groenveld attributed the decrease of interconfessional interaction to emergence of various religious confessions, a process to which historians often refer with the term ‘confessionalization’.⁷⁵ Because of confessionalization the boundaries which separated the various confessions gradually solidified as they were strengthened by various means, ranging from the (religious) education of laypeople (mapping and explaining the differences between the confessions) to concerted efforts of church and state to prohibited certain activities which transgressed these boundaries.⁷⁶

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73 S. Groenveld, *Huisgenoten des geloofs. Was de samenleving in de Republiek der Verenigde Nederlanden verzuild?* (Hilversum, 1995) 71.

74 B.J. Kaplan, ‘Integration vs. segregation: religiously mixed marriage and the “verzuiling” model of Dutch society’, in: idem et al. (eds.), *Catholic communities in Protestant states: Britain and the Netherlands c. 1570-1720* (Manchester, 2009) 62.

75 Groenveld does not use this term as he reflects on the religious history of the Republic from the perspective of the *verzuiling* (pillarization) of Dutch society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The literature about confessionalization is vast, for a recent overview see U. Lotz-Heumann, ‘Confessionalization’, in: A. Bamji, G.H. Janssen, and M. Laven (eds.), *The Ashgate research companion to the Counter-Reformation* (Farnham-Burlington, 2013) 33-54.

76 E.g. the steps taken against mixed marriages by the Reformed state and the secular authorities in Utrecht. B. Forclaz, ‘Le foyer de la discorde? Les mariages mixtes à Utrecht au XVIII^e siècle’, *Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales*, LXIII, 5 (2008) 1101-1123. In its classic formulation confessionalization denoted the cooperation between church and state whereas more recently scholars have propounded other variants of confessionalization. R.C. Head, ‘Catholics and Protestants in Graubünden. Confessional discipline and confessional identities without an early modern state?’, *German history*, XVII (1999) 321-345.

Especially in the older historiography the process of confessionalization has often been presented as going into one direction or having one outcome, namely the formation of increasingly solid confessional boundaries and the emergence of confessional identities, as a result of which people did not want to interact with members of other confessions anymore or at least endeavoured to limit this kind of interaction as much as possible. More recently, historians have raised the question how confessional identities were experienced by individuals and how this influenced the interaction with other people in daily life, showing the complexity of confessional identities.⁷⁷ Moreover, the emergence of confessional identities did not have to rule out the willingness to interact with people of different faiths in all spheres of life: Catholic nobles, as we have seen, were inclined to hold public offices, to attend meetings of the knighthood, and to hold benefices even though this meant interaction with Protestants. In Guelders, to give another example, Catholic nobles made use of the possibility to have a seat in local courts of justice, where they rubbed shoulders with their Protestant peers.⁷⁸

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The willingness of Catholic nobles to interact with Protestants in this sphere of life seems to stand in shrill contrast to the number of offices they actually held, but can be explained when pointing at the complexity of confessional identities. For people avoided interaction with members of other confessions which could jeopardize their confessional identity and interconfessional interaction was restricted to those areas of life in which it was relatively harmless. Some figures suggest, for instance, that at least by the eighteenth century mixed marriages were rather rare,⁷⁹ because this kind of interaction was potentially very harmful to the religious identity of people and their possible offspring. Catholic nobles were willing to hold public offices and for most of them taking an oath of obedience would not have been a problem, for the Catholic identity that emerged in the Republic combined loyalty to Catholicism with obedience to a Protestant state.⁸⁰ Yet, the changing requirements demanded of those who held offices and benefices, such as the replacement of oaths of loyalty with oaths of religion, made that securing an office or attending meetings of political bodies such as the knighthood became a direct threat to the confessional identity of Catholic nobles. For vowing obedience to a heretical regime was

77 F. Volkland, *Konfession und Selbstverständnis. Reformierte Rituale in der gemischtkonfessionellen Kleinstadt Bischofszell im 17. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2005) 9-12; J. Pollmann, *Religious choice in the Dutch Republic. The reformation of Arnoldus Buchelius, 1565-1641* (Manchester, 1999).

78 The Catholic Thomas Walraven van Arkel took place in the local court of Vaassen, together with the Protestant nobles Coenraedt van Dedem, Otto Gansneb (called Tengnagel), and Wijnandt van Renesse tot de Pol (who attended the meetings of the knighthood of the Veluwe. GA, Huis Cannenburg, inv.nr. 121, letter of 10 May 1676, fol. 1r. D' Ablaing, *De Ridderschap van Veluwe*, 314, 318, 326.

79 Kaplan, 'Integration vs. segregation', 48-66. About the religious endogamy of the Catholic nobility in the Dutch Republic, see Gietman, *Republiek van adel*, 15; idem, 'Katholieke adel in een protestants gewest, 1621-1795', in: C.O.A. Schimmelpenninck van der Oijje et al. (ed.), *Adel en ridderschap in Gelderland. Tien eeuwen geschiedenis* (Zwolle, 2013) 180, 190, 205, 208. I would like to thank Dr. Gietman for sending me the manuscript of his article prior to publication.

80 See note 52.



Willem Vincent van Wittenhorst 1613-1674, a Catholic nobleman who lived in Utrecht before he moved to his castle Ter Horst in Limburg in 1665. He was an ardent collector of paintings and supported the Holland Mission. He was first married to Wilhelmina van Bronckhorst and later to his cousin Catharina Cecilia van Bocholtz. (*portrait by Bernard Zwaerdecroon, seventeenth century; coll. Museum de Kantfabriek, Horst*)

one thing, but swearing to abhor Catholicism was an entirely different matter. In this sphere of life, then, the real obstacle of interconfessional interaction for Catholic nobles were the requirements that were demanded by the secular authorities, not the interaction with Protestants itself. The confessional identity of Catholic nobles did rule out taking oaths of religion, but did not preclude interaction with Protestants as a result of serving in public office.

Conclusion

As the secular authorities in the Dutch Republic stepped up the requirements that were attached to the holding of offices and benefices as well as attending the meet-

ings of political bodies such as the knighthood, Catholic nobles were no longer able to be involved in the political life of the Dutch Republic.⁸¹ In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries Catholic nobles held public offices and attended the meetings of the knighthoods as they were not reluctant to align themselves to the Dutch state by taking oaths of loyalty. By introducing oaths of religion the Dutch authorities found a means to exclude Catholic nobles from offices, as these oaths were impossible to overcome for the vast majority of Catholic nobles. Moreover, the decrees of the authorities were policed and the credentials of the holders of offices and benefices were checked, as a result of which the vast majority of the group of 84 nobles examined in this article did not hold offices or attend political meetings, and only in some rare cases Catholic nobles managed to do so. However, in spite of the increasingly stringent measures against Catholic involvement in government, Catholic nobles did not simply accept their changing fortunes but tried to obtain certain offices and benefices, and were keen to serve in offices from which they were not (yet) excluded.

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The decreasing interaction between members of different confessions has been attributed to the emergence of confessional identities and the establishment of solid boundaries between various confessions. This article has shown that it was not so much that Catholic nobles were not willing to interact with people of different faiths anymore, but that they were unwilling to do so when it jeopardized their religious identity – which was the case when having to take oaths of religion, for instance. It shows that confessional identities did not simply rule out interaction with members of other confessions in its entirety, but that, at least in the case of Catholic nobles, confessional identities were complex and allowed for interconfessional interaction in particular spheres of life and in specific circumstances. It should therefore not be a surprise that into the eighteenth century Catholics rubbed shoulders with Protestants because of serving in public offices.⁸² The willingness of Catholic nobles to interact with their Protestant peers by virtue of holding offices and attending meetings of political estates, also makes clear that, at least potentially, interconfessional interaction could move beyond the daily fraternizing which Willem Frijhoff has called ‘everyday conviviality’.⁸³ Ironically, when Van Neercassel and other leaders of the Holland Mission started to advocate obedience to the Dutch state, taking an oath of loyalty was not sufficient for Catholics anymore to secure offices and benefices or to be admitted to the meetings of the States. As a result, interconfessional interaction in this sphere of life remained limited.

⁸¹ According to Conrad Gietman this exclusion contributed to the emergence of a Catholic noble sub-culture. Gietman, ‘Katholieke adel in een protestants gewest’, 208.

⁸² See Cannegieter and Van Loon, *Groot Gelders Placaet-Boeck*, III, 337-339.

⁸³ W. Frijhoff, *Embodied belief. Ten essays on religious culture in Dutch history* (Hilversum, 2002), chapter II.

Jaap Geraerts

Dutch test acts

Oaths, office holding, and the catholic nobility in the province of Utrecht,
c. 1580-1700

This article investigates the public offices held by a group of Catholic noblemen living in Utrecht and Guelders in the seventeenth century, and shows that these nobles hardly served in public office as a result of the policy of the provincial and local authorities. For Catholic nobles did not mind taking oaths of loyalty, yet they did not want to take so-called oaths of religion which were required to hold public offices, as these oaths were thought to be harmful to their religious identity. A number of Catholic nobles, however, tried to accommodate with the state in order to hold public offices and benefices, and Catholic nobles served in public offices when they could, a clear sign that they were not unwilling to interact with Protestants in this sphere of life. The article thus sheds light on the way Catholic nobles reacted to the particular form of religious tolerance in the Dutch Republic, demonstrating how members of a religious minority endeavoured to negotiate their position in a society in which they were increasingly marginalized because of their faith. It also makes clear that the religious identities that emerged were highly complex and did not preclude the interaction of members of different confessions in all areas of life, thus providing insight into the nature of interconfessional interaction in the Dutch Republic.

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