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Gerard van Gulp. *Reformatie in Brabant: Protestanten en katholieken in de Meierij van 's-Hertogenbosch, 1523–1634*.

Hilversum: Verloren, 2013. 272 pp. €29. ISBN: 978-90-8704-356-8.

The Dutch province of Noord-Brabant has long suffered from an inferiority complex. Torn away from its southern counterpart during the Dutch Revolt, it was governed directly by the States-General, instead of taking its rank as duchy. Predominantly Roman Catholic, it linked its self-image to the Catholic revival of the nineteenth century. Only recently has historiography freed itself from myths concerning financial exploitation and strong religious suppression. This left more leeway for a balanced view of the Reformation in Brabant as a whole, which, for that matter, was equally absent in the Protestant historiography of the Netherlands.

Van Gulp's book is a most valuable building stone. He complements studies about Antwerp and Malines, Bergen op Zoom, Breda, and 's-Hertogenbosch by concentrating on the rural parts of the east. To this task he brought a thorough knowledge of the social-economic background of the area. The Meierij van 's-Hertogenbosch is situated to the south of Den Bosch, the short name for this city, which was one of the four capital cities of the duchy of Brabant. It comprises the poor rural environs of Eindhoven, Helmond, and Tilburg. To the north the river Meuse is the border to the provinces of Holland and Gueldres.

Van Gulp's aim is to give an overall picture of the Reformation in the Meierij from 1523 to 1634. This works out very well because there were at least four stages: in the first half of the sixteenth century, after 1566, between 1576 and 1579, and from 1629 onward (when Prince Frederic Henry captured Den Bosch). Van Gulp meticulously assesses the results of each wave in the

reactions of the political and religious authorities and in the interaction between city and environs. The very short supply of sources concerning the reformed communities is used to advantage, just as the available literature plays a relatively important part in completing the picture.

Within this framework Van Gorp focuses on the “description of the reformation as a history of people and their activities in the formation of religious communities” (12). Before 1565 some pockets of Protestantism existed both in Den Bosch and in the Meierij. Then reformed communities emerge in Den Bosch and Eindhoven. Van Gorp points to both international trade and cultural climate as an explanation, together with the attitude of the authorities. In Den Bosch the government was divided and indecisive and in Eindhoven the local lord, William of Orange himself, left margins for Protestant action. The central government in Brussels, however, was never slow to react and to impose its rules. Van Gorp concludes that people in these circumstances made their own choices. He therefore endorses the view of Peter Blickle and Willem Frijhoff that the Reformation was a bottom-up movement.

After the iconoclasm of 1566 reformed consistories were established in Den Bosch and Eindhoven. Governor Margaretha suppressed them and many people fled to Wesel and Goch. Yet in the Meierij it proved possible to start Calvinist worship again, with those who remained and with fugitives who returned. Between 1576 and 1579 there was another short spell of Calvinist life in Den Bosch, with several ministers employed. But the military forces of Philip soon prevailed and again thousands fled the city. Van Gorp shows how this time they went to the north, especially to Dordrecht, Gorinchem, and Haarlem. Motives were religious but the choice of the place of settlement was usually made according to economic opportunities. After that the Meierij, where

individual Calvinists remained within the Catholic communities, was ravaged by the war. In 1629 these people became the core of newly established reformed churches, which were destined to remain small in numbers.

Van Gurp duly pays attention to the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation in its propaganda, reeducation, and renewal of religious life. Altogether his work is very valuable for the understanding of the ambivalent position of small cities and rural areas in both the development and the strong decline of Calvinism in Brabant. It also shows how important military actions and their results were for the actual religious development of a region.

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