

Jesuits in the Low Countries and Their Publications

The Jesuits in the Low Countries

The Jesuit Order (Brotherhood or Society of Jesus) came to the Netherlands in the 1540s, from the south and the east, to Louvain, where in 1542 a community had been founded consisting of eight men, banned from Paris, and a year later to Nijmegen, in the person of the first Dutch Jesuit Peter Kanis (Canisius), who had entered the Society at Mainz on 8 May of the same year. On 15 August 1556, two weeks after the death of the founder, Ignatius of Loyola, in Rome, King Philip II granted the Society legal recognition in the Netherlands. In 1564, a separate ‘province’ (*Germania Inferior*, later *Provincia Belgica*) was split off from the large German Province and comprised the Seventeen Provinces and the Prince Bishopric of Liège. In 1592, the *Missio Hollandica* was founded. Twenty years later, in 1612, the *Provincia Belgica* was subdivided into the *Provincia Flandro-Belgica* (Flemish Province) and the *Provincia Gallo-Belgica* (Walloon Province). The membership of the Walloon Province reached a record level in 1631 with 856 men, and the Flemish Province peaked in 1643 with 867 men.¹ At the height of the Catholic Reformation, there were in Belgium as many Jesuits as in Poland, which had a much larger surface and population. The number of 1,574 Belgian Jesuits in 1626 compares very favourably with 2,156 French, 2,283 German and 2,962 Spanish Jesuits.² In the eighteenth century, a decline set in, and in 1767, six years before the suppression of the Society, the Flemish and Walloon Provinces had respectively 542 and 471 members. This was not only due to the dwindling impact of the Jesuits in these areas, but also to the directions of the Jesuit Generals, who told the ‘Belgian’ Provincials not to accept more novices than the deplorable financial situation allowed.³

From the beginning, the members of the Flemish Province have been active in a wide variety of ministries, with education as their core business. In the Southern Netherlands, the Jesuits had the closest network of schools in Europe with no less than 34 colleges in 1640.⁴ Next to it, they developed new models of pastoral ministry, with religious education, Marian sodalities, preaching and administration of sacraments, and the devotion of saints – especially of the Blessed Virgin – as hallmarks. Missions overseas attracted many vocations: before the suppression of the Society, about 200 Jesuits from the Netherlands and the Prince Bishopric of Liège left for Asia, America or Africa, with a preference for Paraguay and China.⁵ But there were also the missions closer by, in the land army (*Missio Castrensis*) and in the naval forces (*Missio Navalis*), where about thirty Jesuits lost their lives.⁶ So far, ‘the ministry of the pen’ remained unmentioned.

¹ In the *Missio Hollandica* the highest number of Jesuits (95) was reached in 1659. See Paul Begheyn, *Gids voor de geschiedenis van de jezuiten in Nederland 1540-1850* (Nijmegen: Valkhof Pers, 2006), 25.

² Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal, 1540-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 66-67. These data differ from those presented in the book by Sandaeus (1647, see pp. 114-117).

³ Eddy Put, “De stichtingen in de Nederlanden en het prinsbisdom Luik,” in *De jezuiten in de Nederlanden en het prinsbisdom Luik (1542-1773)* (Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1991), 32-33.

⁴ Eddy Put, “Het onderwijs in de colleges,” in *De jezuiten in de Nederlanden en het prinsbisdom Luik (1542-1773)* (Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1991), 35.

⁵ Johan Verberckmoes, “De overzeese missies,” in *De jezuiten in de Nederlanden en het prinsbisdom Luik (1542-1773)*, (Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1991), 76.

⁶ Eddy Put, “Missioneringswerk in het leger,” in *De jezuiten in de Nederlanden en het prinsbisdom Luik (1542-1773)* (Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1991), 84-86.

Writing and Publishing in the Society of Jesus

In the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus, the writing and publishing of books by talented men is considered to be an apostolic ministry, which can have a positive influence.⁷ The unsurpassed bibliography of Jesuit authors by Alsatian Jesuit Carlos Sommervogel (1834-1902)⁸ records 30,000 titles for the period 1540-1773. The largest category of books belongs to theology, representing more than one-third of all books written by Jesuits (11,000 titles). The theological corpus represents merely a fraction of their total production. Nearly two-thirds of all books pertained to non-theological subjects, ranging from arts and sciences (3,600 titles), literary works (7,000 titles), to history and geography (8,000 titles).⁹

In the 'Old Society', about 600 Jesuits from the Provinces of the Low Countries have published books on a wide range of topics: religion (theology, exegesis, patristics, religious polemics, catechesis), spirituality, politics, eloquence, poetry, sciences, literature, and history.¹⁰

It is rather difficult to get an idea about the total number of Jesuit publications in the Low Countries. The very first bibliography of publications by Jesuit authors, *Bibliotheca scriptorum Societatis Iesu* (Antwerp 1643), mentions 1,590 authors, of whom 225 had their origin in the Low Countries (124 from the Flemish and 101 from the Walloon Province) – as many as the Jesuits from France and only superseded by those from Italy (278) and Spain (290). And in the *Bibliotheca Belgica* (Louvain 1643) by Valerius Andreas, the Jesuits clearly have a numerical preponderance over other authors in 'Belgium'.¹¹

According to the *Bibliotheca Catholica Neerlandica Impressa*,¹² 700 Jesuits had their books published in the Netherlands between 1500 and 1727, the year in which the period of the Vicars Apostolic ends. Two reservations have to be mentioned here. First, not only Dutch and Flemish Jesuit authors are included in this overview, but also Jesuits from other countries, whose works were published in these areas. Second, the *Bibliotheca Catholica Neerlandica Impressa* is a repertory of spiritual literature then printed in the Low Countries. The term 'spiritual literature' must be taken to mean everything that was printed for the Christian life. Works of purely scientific nature and of interconfessional controversy have not been included. The *Bibliotheca Jesuitica Neerlandica Impressa*,¹³ an inventory in the making listing all books by Jesuits, printed on Dutch soil, thus far records 1,163 different publications for the period 1540-1773.

In our research, all books are included that were printed on the soil of present-day Belgium and the Netherlands, and also those which were printed in areas that were lost during the period of 1540-1773 – like four houses in the Flemish Province (Belle, Sint-Winoksbergen [Bergues], Cassel and Dunkirk) that, in 1667, were annexed by the French King, Louis XIV, and, in later years, nine houses in the Walloon Province.

⁷ *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, VII.4.11 [653].

⁸ Robert Danieluk, *La Bibliothèque de Carlos Sommervogel: le sommet de l'œuvre bibliographique de la Compagnie de Jésus (1890-1932)* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2006).

⁹ Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*, 180-182.

¹⁰ Alfred Poncelet, *Nécrologe des Jésuites de la province Flandro-Belge* (Wetteren: Jules De Meester et Fils, 1931), CXIX-CXXVIII.

¹¹ Jos Andriessen, "Apostolaat met de pen. Intellectuele en artistieke activiteiten," in *De jezuiten in de Nederlanden en het prinsbisdom Luik (1542-1773)* (Brussels: Algemeen Rijksarchief, 1991), 61.

¹² *Bibliotheca Catholica Neerlandica Impressa* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1954), mentions 18,754 titles.

¹³ Paul Begheyn, *Bibliotheca Jesuitica Neerlandica Impressa 1540-1773* (work in progress).

More than once, Catholic books destined for the Dutch market and printed there, carried a false imprint of a Flemish or German editor/publisher. The reason for this was, on the one hand, the assurance that the book in question was a real Catholic book, and on the other hand, to avoid troubles from the government's censors. More than eighty years ago, author Maurits Sabbe (1873-1938) – not his theologian namesake (1924-2004) whose name was given to the theological library in Louvain – was already interested in this phenomenon.¹⁴ There are several examples from the seventeenth century: Nicolaas Braau from Haarlem had fake addresses in Antwerp and Louvain (1674-1699); Philips van Eyck from Amsterdam used Antwerp (1657-1676); Frederick van Metelen from Amsterdam used Antwerp, Brussels and Louvain (1681-1699); and Joannes I Stichter from Amsterdam used Antwerp (1683-1699).¹⁵ In some cases, only research on the basis of ornamental letters and other ornaments can decide who the real printer of a book is.¹⁶

Before the suppression of the Society in 1773, the Jesuits in the Low Countries never had their own printing presses. But they did have close connections to several printers, as can be seen in some examples from the seventeenth century, when printers and editors referred to the Jesuits as their neighbors or otherwise. In Antwerp, Gerrit Boutman presented himself in 1650 as printing 'Behind the Jesuit church', the Cnobbaert family and Franciscus Muller between 1622 and 1691 as 'Near the professed house of the Society of Jesus' (see title-page, p. 182), the widow of Joris I Willemsens between 1683 and 1700 as 'Near or behind the Jesuit tower', with the sign 'In Saint Ignatius', and Joannes Paulus Robyns, between 1704-1724, lived 'on the Jesuit Square in St. Joseph' (see title-page, p. 249). In 1649, Jan van den Horick gave 'Across from the church of the Jesuit Fathers' as his location in Brussels, and in Gent, Jan Danckaert was active, between 1687 and 1693, 'Near the Jesuit fathers'.¹⁷

Jesuit Books in the Low Countries: the Selection Explained

From the collection of the Maurits Sabbe Library in Louvain, seventy-eight books have been chosen that can give an impression of the importance and variety of its *Jesuitica* collection, which is unequalled in the world.¹⁸ They are presented in seventy essays by specialized scholars from Belgium, the Netherlands and abroad, in chronological order, from 1558 until 1766.

The chosen books can be subdivided in several ways: according to topics, to design (illustrations), to rarity, to former owners, etc. In many cases, it will be a combination of these.

¹⁴ M. Sabbe, "Mag Pieter Jacobsz. Paets onder de Antwerpsche drukkers gerekend worden?," *Het Boek* 13 (1924): 73-78; "Wat voor een landsman was V.N. Braau?," *De Gulden Passer* 4 (1926): 153.

¹⁵ J.A. Gruys & C. de Wolf, *Thesaurus 1473-1800: Nederlandse boekdrukkers en boekverkopers. Met plaatsen en jaren van werkzaamheid* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf Publishers, 1989); J.A. Gruys & J. Bos, *Adresboek: Nederlandse drukkers en boekverkopers tot 1700* (The Hague: Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 1999); Koen de Vlieger-de Wilde, *Adresboek van zeventiende-eeuwse drukkers, uitgevers en boekverkopers in Vlaanderen* (Antwerp: Vereniging van Antwerpse Bibliofielen, 2004).

¹⁶ Paul Dijstelberge, *De beer is los! Ursicula: Een database van typografisch materiaal uit het eerste kwart van de zeventiende eeuw als instrument voor het identificeren van drukken* (n.p.: Stichting A D & L, [2007]), and the database TORAD: Typografische Ornamenten Repertorium van Antwerpse Drukkers (1541-1600), a project initiated by the Plantin-Moretus Museum in 2008.

¹⁷ De Vlieger-de Wilde, *Adresboek*, passim.

¹⁸ Some other important *Jesuitica* collections can be found in Amsterdam (University Library), Buenos Aires (Colegio Máximo), Boston MA (Burns Library), Brussels (Bollandists), Frankfurt am Main (Sankt Georgen), Namur (CDRR), Prague (Klementinum), Rome (Gregoriana), Washington DC (Georgetown).

A first section deals with the *organization or history of the Society* –, a beautifully illustrated life of Saint Ignatius by Pedro de Ribadeneira¹⁹ (1610, pp. 12-17); a copy of the *Litterae Annuae* of 1604, with reports on the activities of the Jesuits (1618, pp. 36-39); a life of Jan Berchmans, the only canonized Flemish Jesuit (1629, pp. 74-76); an official edition and a pirate edition of the Jesuit Institute (1635, pp. 86-91); a biography of the Flemish Jesuit Leonardus Lessius in consideration of his never materialized beatification (1640, pp. 104-107); two jubilee books for the celebration of the first anniversary of the Society of Jesus (1640, pp. 100-103; 1642, pp. 108-110); a poem in hexameters on Saint Ignatius as a mystic (1647, pp. 118-120); a history of the Jesuits (1647, pp. 114-117); a unique copy of a manual for the examination of conscience (1654, pp. 140-143); the history of the English Jesuit Province, whose members lived in exile in Belgium (1660, pp. 162-165); the illustrated *Spiritual Exercises* (1673, pp. 196-201); a devotional book with ten Fridays in honour of Saint Francis Xavier (1698, pp. 224-228); and a book with prayers to Jesuit saints (1761, pp. 280-283).

A second section deals with *theology* in all its aspects, namely: Jan David's combat of superstition, devils and witches (1602, pp. 4-7); Juan de Polanco's handbook for confession (1613, pp. 22-25); Lodewijk Makeblijde with his spirituality for busy lay people (1618, pp. 33-35) and the homilies of the very productive Frans de Coster (Franciscus Costerus) (1618, pp. 40-43) and Hendrik Engelgrave (1654, pp. 144-149); a treatise on predestination – a hot theological issue in those days – by Peter Wadding (1621, pp. 44-47); a meditation book on the life, passion and death of Christ by Jean Bourgeois, in a Latin and a Dutch edition, with engravings by Schelte a Bolswert (1623, pp. 48-53); the history of the miracles surrounding a Marian statue, originally in 's-Hertogenbosch, by Otto van Zijl (1632, pp. 77-80) and a life of Mary, with woodcuts by Christoffel II van Sichem (1629, pp. 70-71); meditation books on the vows, intended for women religious and '*kloppjes*' (1626, pp. 64-66), and books on pious 'Jesuitesses' (1691, pp. 212-215) – especially popular in the Dutch mission; a posthumous edition of meditations on the suffering Christ by Carlo Scribani, with his impressive portrait by Anthony van Dyck (1629, pp. 72-73); illustrated works on the Blessed Sacrament (1638, pp. 92-95), the Sacred Heart (1659, pp. 157-161) and Divine Providence (1710, pp. 244-248); an intelligent attack on Protestant theology by Jodok Kedd (1646, pp. 111-113); exercises for Holy Week – a unique copy (1673, pp. 191-192); an apology for the *Acta Sanctorum* by Bollandist Koenraad Janning (1695, pp. 220-223); a treatise on the atrocity of deadly sin (1702, pp. 229-232); an edition of works by Saint Augustine, partly tied up with strings by ecclesiastical censors (1703, pp. 133-236); and finally two Dutch editions of the extremely popular prayer book by Wilhelm Nakatenus (1740, pp. 270-276). A history of Christ, in Persian, printed in black and red, and written by a relative of Saint Francis Xavier (1639, pp. 96-99) also deserves special mention. Three editions from this section are not mentioned in Sommervogel's bibliography: a book with prayers by the influential Augustijn van Teylingen in Amsterdam (1628, pp. 67-69); a publication on the Cross in Italian (1650, pp. 129-132); and a devotional book on the guardian angels (1711, pp. 249-251).

¹⁹ For the spelling of the names of Jesuit authors, we mainly follow the 'Bibliography on the history of the Society of Jesus', published by László Polgár, S.J. and presently by Paul Begheyn, S.J., (*AHSJ*). Names of artists from the Low Countries are spelled according to Pieter Groenendijk, *Beknopt Biografisch Lexicon van Zuid- en Noord-Nederlandse schilders, graveurs, glaszchilders, tapijtwevers et cetera van ca. 1350 tot ca. 1720* (Utrecht, 2008).

Many books were connected to *Jesuit education*: a very rare Dutch translation of the catechism by Peter Canisius, the only canonized saint among Dutch Jesuits (1558, pp. 1-3); a handbook for the Marian Congregation by Frans de Coster (1607, pp. 8-11); a collection of 4,425 Greek proverbs by Andries Schott (1612, pp. 18-21); mathematical works by Willem Boelmans (1634, pp. 81-85) and André Tacquet (1707, pp. 237-243); and two very popular school books, the dialogues by Antoon van Torre (1657, pp. 150-152) and the syntax for college students by Manuel Álvares (1766, pp. 284-286). A procession from Antwerp (1685, pp. 202-205) and events from Mechelen have been chosen (1716, pp. 252-256) as examples of school theatre in Jesuit colleges.

Since the Society of Jesus sent many of her members, from the beginning, to *mission territories* in America, Africa and Asia, information from those parts of the world came to Europe and was distributed there in often spectacular publications: letters from China (1615, pp. 26-29), an atlas (1662, pp. 166-169) and a history of China (1673, pp. 193-195), followed by the life of an exemplary Chinese Christian woman (1694, pp. 216-219); the natural history of South America (1624, pp. 54-57); the lives of the Hurons in Canada (1651, pp. 133-136) and the ‘savages’ in America (1731, pp. 257-260); a report on a journey to Siam, with a stop in South Africa (1687, pp. 206-211); and finally the history of Santo Domingo (1733, pp. 266-269).

A few publications concern *history*: a report on the siege of Breda (1626, pp. 58-63); a history of the wars in Belgium (1648, pp. 121-124); the history of the diocese of Maastricht with the signature of author Govert Henskens (1653, pp. 137-139); and an illustrated general Church history of the Netherlands (1669, pp. 182-186).

The Jesuits in the Low Countries, especially in the Dutch Republic, have more than once been the object of *slander and persecution* in pamphlets and in booklets written and published by the State (secular authorities) and theological opponents. The States of Frisia had hoped to undercut the influence of the Jesuits by publishing confiscated letters (1616, pp. 30-32); a Protestant minister attacked their ambition (1648, pp. 125-128); and Blaise Pascal found a printer in the Low Countries for his internationally famous anti-Jesuit *Lettres Provinciales* (1659, pp. 153-156).

The remaining publications cover a wide area of topics: an emblem book by Jan van Sambeeck (1663, pp. 170-172); a publication on the subterranean world by *homo universalis*, Athanasius Kircher (1664, pp. 173-176); Latin poems by Sidronius Hosschius (1667, pp. 177-181); an explanation of the sundial in the Royal Gardens in London (1673, pp. 187-190); a comic play by French writer, Guillaume Hyacinthe Bougeant (1732, pp. 261-265); and finally, an illustrated description of the ceiling paintings by Peter Paul Rubens in the Jesuit church in Antwerp (1751, pp. 277-279), which were destroyed by fire in 1718.

The wide range of topics, treated in the seventy chosen publications on the Jesuits in the Low Countries over the period of the ‘Old Society’, 1540-1773, shows that the attitude of the Jesuits in their ministry was an expression of, what Karl Rahner once called, “the Ignatian mysticism of joy in the world.”²⁰

Paul Begheyn S.J.

²⁰ Karl Rahner, “The Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World,” in his *Theological Investigations, III* (Baltimore/London: Helicon Press/Darton, Longman & Todd, 1967), 277-293.