

Willem Frijhoff. *Fulfilling God's Mission: The Two Worlds of Dominie Everardus Bogardus, 1607-1647.* Translated by Myra Heerspink Scholz. The Atlantic World Series. Leiden: Brill, 2007. xxvii + 628 pp. \$144.00, cloth, ISBN 978-90-04-16211-2.



Reviewed by James D. Tracy

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Commissioned by W. Douglas Catterall (Cameron University of Oklahoma)

In 1622, one of the inmates of the town orphanage in the small Holland town of Woerden was a youth of about fifteen named Evert Willem-zoon; as was customary for such boys, instead of being sent to the town's Latin school he was apprenticed, to a tailor. During the summer of that year, Evert was stricken with an illness that left him deaf and mute for over two months. He then fasted for nine days, and again lost his speech and hearing, whereupon (as he said) an angel appeared to him; he spent days writing down the heavenly messages. In interviews with Reformed clergy and civic magistrates, Evert showed himself to be a young man deeply versed in scripture and convinced that God had chosen him to "spread the word" of the need for repentance. His experiences—including a subsequent episode in which what Evert said in his sleep was taken down by his half-brother—are fully described in two pamphlets by the Latin schoolmaster, Lucas Zas, published for the edification of the faithful.

Willem Frijhof, a distinguished historian of Dutch life and culture, formed a plan for studying

the life of this extraordinary boy. Then he learned from conversation with Woerden's archivist that Evert Willemsz. had a later history as Dominie Evert Willemsz. Bogardus, a well-known and controversial preacher in New Amsterdam whose antecedents were unknown to most scholars. Hence Frijhoff began the two-part biography whose appearance in English (based on a Dutch original from 1995) will be welcomed by all who are interested in religious belief and its embeddedness in social life

Frijhoff is unusual among students of religion in that he combines an approach that one might describe as relentlessly social with a principled refusal of easy explanations: "If we wish to gain some idea of the significance of an event, it is important to avoid reductionism of every kind" (pp. 25-26). This dictum he carefully observes as he teases out the multiple social contexts into which Evert's experience fitted: his extended family, members of which seemed to function "as a separate unit" in the orphanage; the devout tailor to whom he was apprenticed, who made a practice

of discussing scripture while at work (“we catch a glimpse of the way Evert had been subconsciously schooled for his religious experience” [p. 16]); the inmates of the orphanage (including the matron, clearly “overawed” by Evert [p. 146]), among whom a kind of group dynamics seems to have been at work, as in other cases where similar psychosomatic symptoms were reported, like the vomiting of hard objects (p. 156); town politics, at a time when orthodox Calvinists sought to discredit the Remonstrant magistrates, and seem to have used to that end the publicity surrounding Evert’s experiences; the history of spirituality, which made available to a Dutch boy of fifteen in 1622 psychosomatic traditions (like fasting) that he could “use and manipulate ... in order to achieve his goal” (p. 205); and the contemporary “Further Reformation” (Nadere Reformatie), making it possible for two men who attested to Evert’s credibility, the one an orthodox Calvinist preacher (Henricus Alutarius), the other a Remonstrant schoolmaster (Zas), to find common ground in a “Puritan pietism” (p. 116). Evert was certainly a Calvinist, but not of what Frijhoff calls the theocratic faction whose doctrines prevailed at the Synod of Dordrecht: “The issue for him was not one of factional strife but of conversion within the group” (p. 243). Pietism was also the single “thread” that tied together the two halves of Evert’s life story (p. 564).

What made it possible for Evert to become Dominie Bogardus was that Woerden’s city fathers marked out a new path for this exceptional young man, transferring him from the tailor’s shop to the Latin school, and then supporting his study of theology at Leiden. He began his career as a man of the church with an assignment as a consoler of the sick (Ziekentrooster) at a fort in West Africa from which the West India Company exported slaves to the New World. His superior there, who strongly supported Bogardus’s ambition to become a preacher, complained of the company’s lack of interest in efforts to make converts among the Africans. This was an experience

Bogardus seems to have carried with him when he sailed for New Amsterdam in 1633. He probably owed his appointment to a faction within the company that favored trade over colonization, but before long Bogardus was involved in bitter quarrels with others put in office by the same faction, including the governor, Wouter van Twiller, whom he accused of drunkenness, smuggling, and corruption. He also made himself the spokesman for opponents of Twiller’s successor, Willem Kieft; Bogardus did not believe New Amsterdam’s native population was ready for the Christian message, but a massacre of Indians by Dutch troops in 1643 convinced him that Kieft was unworthy to govern. Kieft in turn lodged complaints against Bogardus for poor governance of the church. The two adversaries sailed for the Netherlands in 1647 on the same ship, each to face accusations against him; both went down as the ship sank off the coast of England. As for what he did as leader of the church, Frijhoff credits Bogardus’s tenure with a significant increase in baptisms and marriages registered among New Amsterdam’s black population; from the 1650s, church membership would be restricted to whites.

This study is austere in its avoidance of general conclusions, but exceptionally rich in detail. Because the English version is abridged, by (my estimate) 20 percent or 25 percent, those who can read Dutch, and want the full benefit of Frijhoff’s judicious reflection on these matters, should consult Wegen van Evert Willemsz.’s *Een Hollands weeskind op zoek naar zichzelf* (1995).

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