



Protecting the memory of lost faith

An investigation into the presence of religion in Dutch collective memory and the consequences for religious heritage

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the role religious heritage plays in Dutch collective memory. It goes against the grand narrative of pillarisation and depillarisation that is often presented as a big break in Dutch historiography, that supposedly swept away religion from the Netherlands. Instead, it argues we have ended up in a post secular society, in which a diversity of religions still play a big role in the public sphere. However, figures show a steady decline in church membership and valuation of the church by citizens in the Netherlands. As religious heritage becomes marginalised in society, so does religion from the collective and cultural memory Two heritage institutions are framed as the protectors of religious heritage in this thesis, and by finding out how and why protect this heritage this thesis is able to give recommendations on how to protect Christian religious heritage in the current post secular, post Christendom society.

Preface

Before you lays my master thesis that I wrote as the final project for the masters programme Cultural History of Modern Europe at the University of Utrecht.

As part of the masters programme, I was an intern at Museum Catharijneconvent, a museum for Christian art and culture. This experience sparked my interest in religious heritage and brought me in contact with those people that help churches and convents with closing down and reallocation. Being there, I felt truly like a child of the post Christendom era: this world, that was so obvious and self-evident for many people, was totally unknown to me. I had no knowledge of these for me odd customs, odd rituals and this unfamiliar jargon. I felt like a bit of an outsider, not unwelcome, but like a mammal in the water, between all of these fish that have been brought up to swim.

I do not adhere to any faith and do not believe in God. I do, however, believe that religious heritage and Christian history have a story worth telling. I do not want it to be forgotten, as it is simply impossible to tell Dutch history without it. I also think our modern world might need a little of the contemplation, reflection and silence that religion offers. It seems our world keeps spinning faster and faster, and opportunities lay wide-open thanks to individualisation, globalisation and wealth. When anything is possible, it is easy to forget to think about what actually might be the Good Thing, or the Right Thing.

This thesis is, however, in no way meant to be an evangelising piece of prose, but rather an attempt to convince the reader that the heritage that religion has left behind is worth keeping around for a while longer.

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Introduction

“The church is in need of renewal, dad”, says Nico, the sixth son of Maria and Tinus Zachea, in Judith Koelemeijer’s *Het Zwijgen van Maria Zachea*.¹ The book is an oral history about her father’s hard-working, devotedly Catholic family, which at the same time functions as a beautiful sketch of an era, the rapid changing Dutch society of the 1950s and 1960s. What becomes clear is that the youngest three of the family twelve children, who grew up in the late 60s, prefer rock 'n roll music, political activism and the pill to the church.

As Koelemeijer’s book shows, until half a century ago religion played a huge part in the everyday lives of most Dutch people. This made religious heritage a “living thing”, as generation after generation took care of it and was committed to it. Geert Mak adequately describes this experience in another family history, as he writes about the century of his father in *De Eeuw van mijn Vader*. In this chronological novel, he describes in the very beginning how: “In general, they [his grandparents] experienced their religion in the equanimity of the nineteenth century, when everyday life was still permeated by the Christian rules of life, the church was regarded as a self-evident institution and almost every Dutchman believed in God, whether he was a modern, orthodox or had no specific denomination whatsoever”. Yet, at the end of the book, Mak describes: “Fixed religion had ended up in a crisis”, speaking of the middle of the 1960s. This is the decade in which it became clear how vulnerable this Christian religious heritage actually is, now that it became “something of the past”.

An urgent problem

The future of religious heritage demands attention: only 32% of the percentage of Dutch citizens feel like they belong to a church, and about 60% of the Dutch people never even visits a church on a regular basis.² A study by the Rijksdienst voor Cultureel Erfgoed (National Service for Cultural Heritage) from 2008

¹ This translation, and all those that follow from the many sources in Dutch, are done by the author herself

² Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau "God in Nederland (GIN)", https://www.scp.nl/Onderzoek/Bronnen/Beknopte_onderzoeksbeschrijvingen/God_in_Nederland_GIN, accessed on 18 January 2018.

predicted that before 2020, 1200 of the 4200 churches in the Netherlands would no longer be in use.³ What does a society do with all of these empty churches? In what ways is religious heritage still relevant to our collective memory? What do heritage institutions do to make religious heritage a sustainable topic of interest? The research question I consider in the following thesis is: *“To what extent has the role of religious heritage changed in the Dutch cultural memory since the 1960s and how should heritage institutions approach this change?”*⁴

This topical issue has been an important subject of academic debate. The *God in Nederland* publication is an important source for research, as it consists of a collection of opinion polls on faith and the church. This large-scale research project is repeated every ten years (since 1966) with the same methods and with many of the same questions, allowing the research to compare and contrast throughout the years. This research therefore gives a unique insight into shifts in the religiousness of the Dutch. The decennial numbers and statistics show a clear decline in numbers of regular churchgoers. In 2015, over 2100 people have filled out this extensive web-questionnaire, that is done in commissioned by the KRO (Catholic Radio Broadcast), a name that is left over from times of pillarisation, but is now a broadcasting company that is state-funded. The research itself is conducted by the Social and Cultural Planning Office, is an interdepartmental scientific institute that conducts socio-scientific research, and is also funded by

³ Nicole Roeterdink e.a., "Onderzoek herbestemming kerken en kerklocaties-een inventarisatie vanaf 1970", (2008) http://www.bisdomhaarlem.amsterdam.nl/docs/2008/religieus_erfgoed.pdf, accessed on 3 May 2018

⁴ When I speak of the religious heritage of the Netherlands, I speak only of the heritage its Christian history has brought forth. When this analysis mentions “our”, as in “our” history or “our” cultural memory, it is in no instance a way to assert a sort of ultimate Dutch identity. There are no political assertions underneath it, alike the way Yvonne Zonderop writes about the recently popularised tendency in Dutch politics to use “our” Judeo-Christian collective identity to exclude influences from people with a different background. I do, however, believe that there is such a thing we can call a nation, a national history and national heritage. This Dutch nation, however, is a social construct, imagined by the once who identify with this nation, after Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. The heritage of the imagined community of the Netherlands is what I speak of when I speak of “our” heritage. The ideas about what heritage of the Netherlands looks like is for example given shape in the “Dutch canon”, a list issued by the government with 50 “highlights” of Dutch history, that is implemented in study material in high schools and also exhibited in the Openluchtmuseum in Arnhem. The place that Christian heritage takes in this canon would be an interesting follow-up research. See: <https://www.entoen.nu>

the state.⁵ 2008 was chosen as the Year of Religious Heritage in the Netherlands. A number of significant reflections and academic analyses were written in honour of this event, for example a speech by preacher and theologian Peter Nissen, who speaks of secularisation, empty churches and bishops functioning as “shrink-managers”.⁶

Many of the publications concerning heritage and secularisation consider the question of what to do with empty churches. Justin Kroesen, for example, discusses the topic of the fate of churches that become too expensive or redundant to manage.⁷ Kroesen discusses the options that churches with insufficient financial means have, such as utilisation by third parties, selling or demolition. He shows how the painful process of detachment and re-use is usually accompanied by long-lasting and sometimes emotional discussions. Koen Raats affirm this claim and tries to find out what mechanisms make this process so very delicate. According to Raats it is a crucial question whether a church building should be viewed as the private property of a select religious community or the property of society as a whole, as this determines who carries responsibilities and/or ownership.⁸

In what is no more than half a century, Dutch society changed from a society in which going to church was self-evident for most of the population, to a society dealing with 1200 empty churches. In order to understand this development, we must look backward. In his book *Verzuiling, Pacaificatie en Kentering in de Nederlandse Politiek*, Arend Lijphart extensively describes the way Dutch society went from a pillarised to a depillarised society in the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1970s. Pillarisation was the post-war phenomenon in which society was divided into different groups on the basis of a “levensbeschouwing”,

⁵ "God in Nederland (GIN) - SCP".

⁶ P. J. A. Nissen, "De Nederlandse religieuzen en hun erfgoed", *Streven* 75 (2008) 292–303.

⁷ Justin Kroesen, "Tussen God en de Mammon. Het lot van te duur of overtollig geworden kerkgebouwen in Nederland", *Jaarboek voor liturgie-onderzoek* 24 (2009).

⁸ Koen Raats, "Lege kerkgebouwen: slopen of omdopen?", *Rooilijn* 45 (2012) 92–97.

a philosophy of life.⁹ As J.E. Ellemers points out not only the Catholics and the Protestants had their own pillar, there were also pillars for those abiding socialism, liberalism and humanism.¹⁰ The shift from a pillarised to a depillarised society is often characterised as a radical break in Dutch historiography. But was it really that radical? And are depillarisation and secularisation synonymous developments?

A post secular society

Numbers all point toward it: Europe is secularising. Secularisation - although this term is far from being used unequivocally - refers to those processes in which religion is increasingly pushed towards the margins of society and where the economy and politics become more important. In the process of secularization, organized religion loses its hold on society.¹¹ Yet, in observing this, Jürgen Habermas argues that we now live not in a secular society, but in a post secular one. By this he means the resurgence of religion in societies previously thought of as secularised. Post secular societies, as Habermas states, are ones where “religion maintains a public influence and relevance, while the secularistic certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization is losing ground”¹² South Korea is an example of a country that experienced rapid economic and technological growth; while at the same time there was a religious revitalization and (even) Christianization. With this theory of post secular society, Habermas attacks the “secularist thesis”. The secularist thesis entails that as a society becomes more modern, the meaning of religion in that society will decrease and eventually disappear. As the German sociologist Hans Joas points out, while it is true that “in some parts of Europe a process of secularisation has started in response to scientific and technological progress, elsewhere in Europe and beyond, modernization processes have occurred in

⁹ Arend Lijphart, *Verzuiling, pacificatie en kentering in de Nederlandse politiek* (Amsterdam 2008).

¹⁰ Jo Egbert Ellemers, "Nederland in de jaren zestig en zeventig", *Sociologische Gids* 26 (1979) 429–451.

¹¹ Durk Hak, "Over secularisering, ontkerkelijking en individualisering. Enige uitkomsten van recent godsdienstsociologisch onderzoek in Nederland", *Sociologische Gids* 42 (1995) 124–139; KRO, "Ontkerkelijking", <https://www.kro.nl/katholiek/abc/ontkerkelijking>, accessed on 15 June 2018.

¹² Jürgen Habermas, "A “post-secular” society—what does that mean", *Reset Dialogues on Civilizations* (2008) 4.

recent decades that did not lead to a decline in religion”¹³

Post secular revisionism recognizes religion as a cultural resource, as it is seen as relevant to contemporary western society and acknowledges the cultural value of still very present religious norms. Habermas suggests that instead of separation, a new peaceful dialogue and tolerant coexistence between the two realms of faith and reason must be sought in order to learn from one another.¹⁴ According to Habermas, these processes of “complementary epistemic adaptation” require religious citizens to develop an attitude of acceptance towards religious pluralism, to acknowledge the institutionalization of secular knowledge in the form of scientific expertise, and to accept the primacy of secular reasons in the political arena.¹⁵ On the other hand, it requires secular citizens to change their attitude to religion: secular citizens are expected to overcome a closed, exclusivist secular mind set by recognizing that something may be learnt from the discussion of religious ideas, for they may contain important moral intuitions that can be translated into a commonly shared language.¹⁶

The concept of post secularism is valuable for this research because it acknowledges the presence of Christians in Dutch society, as well as the multicultural society in which the immigration of “guest-workers” and refugees has brought in a lot of religious influences, mostly from Islam. This movement has made religion visible and more a topic of discussion again in Dutch society, which in turn influences the already familiar churches and congregations. Symptoms of a post secular society in the Netherlands can be found in the fact that CDA, the Christian political party became the 3rd biggest party in the

¹³ Karlijn Ligtenberg, "De seculariseringstheorie is dood", *Radboud Reflects*, <https://www.ru.nl/radboudreflects/terugblik/terugblik-2017-0/terugblik-2017/17-03-22-the-power-the-sacred-lecture-by-hans-joas/>, accessed on 15 May 2018.; José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (2011).

¹⁴ Habermas, "A “post-secular” society—what does that mean", *Reset Dialogues on Civilizations* 4 (2008).

¹⁵ Ulrike Spohn, "A Difference in Kind? Jürgen Habermas and Charles Taylor on Post-secularism", *The European Legacy* 20 (2015) 122.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

parliament in 2017.¹⁷ DENK, a new political party, generally fighting for the Muslim votes, has also gained seats in the parliament, giving the confessional parties about 20% of the seats in parliament.¹⁸ This shows religion indeed still plays a relatively big role in the political field.

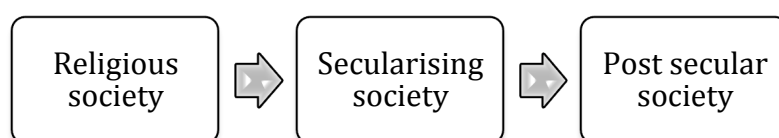


Figure 1: Visualisation of the evolution of society according to Habermas (figure made by the author)

Heritage

Heritage has become a fashionable phenomenon. Our current society is full of heritage initiatives: historical associations and monument days are flourishing, television and other media spend a growing amount of their time on historical broadcasts, the internet is bursting with historical information that is posted by non-historian. Places of remembrance have enjoyed an equally miraculous multiplication.¹⁹ Heritage industries are often seen as, in its best form, the populariser of heritage and history, and in its worst form “bad” history, more focussed on entertainment than accuracy.²⁰ Our current landscapes are full of these “formally staged experiences of encountering the physical traces of the past in the present”.²¹ Rodney Harrison also identifies this abundance of heritage, which seems to be a global trend. He claims we have an obsession with conserving the materials for the production of a memory that we are afraid to

¹⁷ Kiesraad, "Verkiezingsuitslagen - Tweede Kamer - 15 maart 2017", <https://www.verkiezingsuitslagen.nl/verkiezingen/detail/TK20170315>, accessed on 8 Aug 2018.

¹⁸ Rik Kuiper, "De felle strijd om de moslimstem: waarom Denk gaat winnen in Rotterdam", *de Volkskrant* (zp 2018) [, <https://www.volkskrant.nl/gs-be604e14>]; Kiesraad "Verkiezingsuitslagen - Tweede Kamer - 15 maart 2017". Accessed on 16 Aug. 2018

¹⁹ W. Th M. Frijhoff, "Religie en de mist van de geschiedenis. Hoe behoefte aan herinnering onze cultuur transformeert" (2010); Sharon Macdonald, *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today* (Oxford 2013); Rodney Harrison, *Heritage : Critical Approaches* (London 2012).

²⁰ Rodney Harrison, *Heritage : Critical Approaches* (Oxford 2012). 4

²¹ Ibidem.

lose, so much that it has led to a “memory crisis”. Memory and heritage are therefore tightly intertwined, as heritage can be seen as memory sites: they actively form our collective memory.²² As Macdonald states: “(....) One of the most important accomplishments of heritage is to turn the past from something that is simply there, or has merely happened, into an arena from which selections can be made and values derived.”²³ Harrison agrees by stating how heritage is primarily not about the past, but instead about our relationship with the present and the future.²⁴ “Heritage is not a passive process of simply preserving things from the past that remain, but an active process of assembling a series of objects, places and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future.”²⁵ This makes heritage a productive focus of research, as the way a society manages its heritage says a lot about that society.

This ties in well with the work of Laurajane Smith, who states that heritage is not a “thing”, but an inherently political and discordant practice.²⁶ Thus, power relations are at the heart of heritage, as powerful groups have been actively successful, over time, in defining what does and does not qualify as the nation’s heritage, creating an Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD).²⁷ Such hegemonic definitions promote the idea that heritage is a singular story of national identity, in which the visitor must be led by the expert, passively witnessing tangible remnants. This has resulted in the widely-held idea that heritage is about the preservation of “selected and credentialised buildings” and tends to exclude understandings of heritage that are not focused on material assets but on people’s attachments, identities or sense of belonging.²⁸ The case studies that form the center of this analysis reveal some of these aspects AHD.

²² Pierre Nora, Professor Pierre Nora en David P. Jordan, *Lieux de Mémoire* (Chicago 2001).

²³ Macdonald, *Memorylands*, 18.

²⁴ David Lowenthal, *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History* (Cambridge 1998).

²⁵ Harrison, *Heritage*, 4.

²⁶ Laurajane Smith, *Uses of heritage* (Oxford 2006).

²⁷ Bella Dicks, "Laurajane Smith, The Uses of Heritage", *museum and society* 5 (2007) 58.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

Cultural Memory

Jan and Aleida Assmann's work on cultural memory or "Kulturelle Gedächtnis" is a useful tool for exploring religious heritage in contemporary Dutch society. The concept of cultural memory, Assmann explains, refers to what Derrida called "Archive" and Bernstein's "Tradition".²⁹ For the Assmanns, it means the study of how societies deal with their past through cultural expression, for example the news media, literature, the visual arts, music, buildings and monuments, and remembrance days.³⁰ Some memories are passed on culturally to new generations; others are mostly ignored and thus "forgotten". Rituals and institutes related to cultural memory, and especially so for religious ones, are created to keep a memory alive that has no support in everyday life. This process functions as a "restoration of a lost unity"³¹ In doing so, cultural memory opens up "memory spaces" of a thousand years ago.³² This thesis does an analysis of the position religious heritage has taken in our collective memory in the past. It assesses how religion has become a candidate for "heritage" since the process of secularisation started. This assessment provides the grounds for the suggestions about approaches for heritage institutions to take on this heritage, which are offered in the last chapter. This thesis, then, reflects on how heritage institutions contribute to our cultural memory? It turns to this pressing issue by asking how they make sure Dutch religious past will remain present in our collective memory.

Case studies of heritage institutions

To be able to answer the research question, I have chosen two heritage institutions as a case study. I will closely analyse the Museum Catharijneconvent in Utrecht, and the Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven in Sint Agatha. By means of interviews and analysing policy documents, I can establish of what approach the two heritage institutions take on the influence of secularisation on

²⁹ Jan Assmann en Rodney Livingstone, *Religion and cultural memory: ten studies* (Redwood City 2006). 25.

³⁰ Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, "Aleida Assmann — KNAW", <https://www.knaw.nl/en/awards/laureates/heinekenprize-history/aleida-assmann>, accessed 18 January 2018.

³¹ Assmann en Livingstone, *Religion and cultural memory*. 19.

³² *Ibidem*. 28.

religious heritage. Museum Catharijneconvent is one of the leading organisations managing religious heritage in all forms, for example in the form of religious art and artefacts. But the museum also takes care of the actual convent they are located in, as well as a lot of projects within oral history. Oral history is employed in order to contain stories and memories of the past.³³ The museum describes itself as an institution that highlights “the aesthetic, cultural and historical values of the Christian heritage, with the aim of gaining more insight into our current world”.³⁴ To find out more about the Catharijneconvent, I have conducted a discourse analysis of the institution’s website and policy documents. Additionally, I conducted an interview with dr. Anique de Kruijf, who is the head of the department for Cultural Heritage in Churches and Convents. I spoke to her about her department, secularisation and how they distinguish between valuable and invaluable heritage.

Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven (Heritage Center for Dutch Monastic Life) has been established since 2006 inside the Kruisherren Monastery of Sint Agatha. The heritage center focuses on the history and significance of monks and nuns in the Netherlands. Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven represents the Catholic heritage and is a museum as well as a centre for more than 100 monastic communities (who were not able to maintain their own collections) to collect their archives, books and objects. Next to looking into the mission statement and the policy document called their “collectionplan”, I conducted an interview with Otto Lankhorst, the librarian and curator of objects at the Erfgoedcentrum. This interview represents the viewpoints of the Erfgoedcentrum, as we spoke about the future of monastic life, the importance of archives and the origins of the heritage center of Dutch monastic life.

These two institutes are chosen because together they represent a broad variety of Dutch Christian heritage. Museum Catharijneconvent represents both the

³³ "Herinneringen aan feesten, rituelen en gebruiken", *Catharijne verhalen*, <http://www.catharijneverhalen.nl/>, accessed 20 January 2018.

³⁴ Museum Catharijneconvent, "Missie en doelstellingen", <https://www.catharijneconvent.nl/de-organisatie/missie-en-doelstellingen/>, accessed 20 January 2018.

Protestant and the Catholic heritage and focuses mostly on churches, whereas the Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven represents the Catholic convent tradition. They also seem to be the leading institutions defining the Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD). They both try to convey a certain story of our national history and identities, a common national inheritance, complete with a set of values, expressed through tangible objects.

However, as I argue in this thesis, our religious past might be disappearing from our collective memory, which would make this heritage no longer part of our national story. In this case, the religious, trying to show their heritage to the public, might actually come to be a subaltern group, with little place within the AHD. Limiting this thesis to two case studies enables me to focus in depth on the two institutions within the scope of this research projects, and really get to the underlying motivations of the institutions. Combining my knowledge of the approach of the heritage institutions with the knowledge I have gained on the state of our collective memory concerning religion and religious heritage, I am able to evaluate the way these two heritage institutions have set out to present their collection and come up with some suggestions for improvement according to the current state of our collective memory.

Structure and themes

The different chapters of this thesis tackle several questions related to the major question driving the project.

Chapter 1 offers an overview of the historical context of pillarisation and secularisation in the Netherlands. It will answer the *question "How and why did the Dutch society go from a pillarised to a depillarised society?"*

Chapter 2 examines the concept of religious heritage, in a more abstract, international context but also specifically in the Dutch context. In this chapter, policy documents and interviews of my two case studies are analysed to get an answer to the question: *"What is religious heritage and how do heritage institutions manage this heritage in times of secularisation?"*.

Chapter 3 examines the concepts collective and cultural memory, and tries to find out in what stage Dutch society finds itself, in terms of Christianity. It seeks to find an answer to the question: *“What is a collective memory and what role does religion play in Dutch collective memory?”*. Additionally, some recommendations about preserving and caring for religious heritage in our post-secular society will be outlined in this chapter. This will hopefully provide a helpful tool for heritage institutions that are tackling issues surrounding the way to deal with religious heritage.

Chapter 1: Pillarisation, Secularisation and the Grand Narrative

The terms “verzuiling”, or pillarisation and “ontzuiling”, or depillarisation are often used to describe a total reversal in Dutch society: in terms of religion, politics, public and private life. As noted in the introduction, pillarisation is also often characterised as a quintessentially Dutch phenomenon. The following discussion illustrates how they have been used to describe Dutch religious history and illustrates how the narrative of depillarisation has been overused. It interrogates the conventional narrative and suggests a more nuanced, gradual and uneven process of secularisation.

Pillarisation

The start of pillarisation in the Netherlands is often traced back to the “schoolstrijd” or the education struggle. This education struggle consisted of a clash between advocates of public education on the one hand, and advocates of “bijzonder onderwijs”, or “particular education” on the other hand. Particular education refers to education that is shaped by the idea of a certain religious denomination.

From the first half of the 19th century onwards, education was regulated by the state, yet every municipality shaped its own schools and education institutions after the dominant religious views in that area. In 1848, such a right to observe freedom in education was set by law.³⁵ Around 1900 this “education struggle” came to its most heated point of discussion, as the government had to decide whether or not to fund particular education. The “pacificatie” of 1917 stated the government would indeed fund particular education (as it still does today), which ended the education struggle.³⁶

At this point, pillarisation was a widespread phenomenon in Dutch society, as the education struggle enhanced this process. As mentioned in the introduction,

³⁵ Martinus Antonius Maria Franken en Rob M. Kemperink, *Verzuiling en ontzuiling 1880-2000* (Apeldoorn 2004).

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

this meant Dutch society was divided into different groups on the basis of a “levensbeschouwing”, a philosophy of life. The metaphor of the pillar refers to the vertical separation of groups, but within which different classes were represented. Van Engen and Robijn focus on the Catholic and Protestant pillars, and describe how they were characterised by a strong and steady organisation, wide social control and the importance of an active religious life. In the “interbellum”, the years between the first and second world war, these two pillars were blossoming. Protestants and Catholics were dominating the government and the Christian morale was omnipresent in society. As historian Peter van Rooden explains: “Dutch Christianity was collective, not reflexive. It was just something you did”.³⁷ There was a strict separation between these vertical pillars, and they often had their own schools, associations, parties, trade unions, broadcasters, newspapers and even hospitals. On a political level, however, the leaders of these different pillars would peacefully and productively work together.

Pillarisation has often been characterised as a negative episode of a disunited nation, in which different groups of people would live along side each other, yet were totally distanced from one another. Contact with “dissidents” of other groups was hardly necessary, and also frowned upon, as the Dutch saying “Twee geloven op één kussen, daar slaapt de duivel tussen” (When two religions are sleeping on one pillow, the devil is always sleeping in between) shows. In the present day however, there is more attention for the positive sides of pillarisation, for example the important contribution it made to the modernisation and democratisation of our country, as well as the emancipation of people within their groups.³⁸ Additionally, pillarisation gave people a strong sense of belonging and social engagement.

Depillarisation

In the grand narrative of pillarisation, the start of depillarisation is always situated in the 1960s. As always in such a “shift of paradigms”, there is not one

³⁷ Peter van Rooden in A.P.J Bernts e.a., *God in Nederland 1966-2015* (Utrecht 2016), 37.

³⁸ Franken en Kemperink, *Verzuiling en ontzuiling 1880-2000*. 27; James Carleton Kennedy, “Building New Babylon: Cultural change in the Netherlands during the 1960s” (1995).

moment or reason that we can point to. Thus, different scholars give different accounts of depillarisation. For most scholars, depillarisation started in the second half of the sixties.

The year 1967 can be seen as a turning point, as the confessional parties did not reach an absolute majority in parliament for the first time in half a century. One reason that is often given for enhancing the process of depillarisation is the increasing wealth of the Dutch citizens, because of which development of the individual, rather than meeting the expectations of the pillar, became more important.³⁹ This increase in wealth was also the starting point of the Dutch welfare state. Social services, for example the work schools, hospitals, and through poverty care and missionary work were managed by the state from now on, decreasing the need for societal organisations from churches. This pushed religion into the private sphere.⁴⁰ The increased mobility through the widespread use of cars and the introduction of mass media and the television brought people from different environments in contact with each other.⁴¹

Modernisation thus rapidly swept through the country. James Kennedy points out how a discourse of modernity was created in the 1960's, which may explain the generational break that occurred between the youth and their parents.⁴² He shows that the elites of Dutch society ("regenten" or regents), in combination with the generation gap that occurred in the 1960's created a sense of a fast, unstoppable changing society. In order to "keep up with the times" and control a rapidly changing society, these elites either initiated significant changes or (more often) proved to be rather receptive in reacting to the "modern" forces with which they were confronted.⁴³ The main words used in this discourse of modernity are secularisation, democratisation and urbanisation, which, he argues, are all common features of "the modern man". "The youth" was seen as a

³⁹ Joris Van Eijnatten en Frederik A. van Lieburg, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis* (Hilversum 2006) 328.

⁴⁰ Peter Van Dam, James Kennedy en Friso Wielenga, *Achter de zuilen: op zoek naar religie in naoorlogs Nederland* (Amsterdam 2014) 18.

⁴¹ Ibidem. 17.

⁴² Kennedy, "Building New Babylon".

⁴³ Ibidem. 362.

separate movement, a libertine, progressive and rebellious generation, thriving on post-war prosperity, ready to overthrow the conservative morality of their parents.⁴⁴ Kennedy also brings up the significant difference in the collective experiences between the pre-war generation (born between 1910-1930) and the post-war generation (born between 1940-1955), and asks himself if these differences can explain this so-called gap of generations.

The decline in membership of the Dutch Reformed church (hervormde kerk) had already started in between the two world wars. The Catholic parishes started to lose members later, but a lot faster. For the Roman-Catholic pillar specifically, the Second Vatican Council (taking place between 1962-1965) was of big impact on their secularisation. Dutch Catholics had high hopes, as a big modernisation of the church was expected to follow. The Council was set up to modernise the church and create more transparency, but in the end the pope remained powerful, and no democratic breakthrough had taken place.⁴⁵ As the pace of modernisation was not fast enough for most Dutch Catholics, many started to leave their church in large numbers.⁴⁶

At the same time, the non-religious groups in society started to claim more space, as the communists had fierce critique on the church and the humanists started to get more organised. The self-evident identity of social institutions, relating to religion or philosophies of life disappeared fast.

The myth of pillarisation

Marit Monteiro goes against this “master narrative of modernisation”, and claims it is too one-sided. Instead, she claims that the 1960’s were not only the decade of secularisation, but also the decade of great reform and renewal within many churches.⁴⁷ Van Eijnatten and van Liesburg claim that the 1960’s are so engraved in collective memory as times of radical change, that one easily loses sight of the

⁴⁴ Ibidem. 365.

⁴⁵ Eijnatten, van en Lieburg, van, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis*. 333.

⁴⁶ Dam, van, Kennedy en Wielenga, *Achter de zuilen*. 35.

⁴⁷ M. E., Monteiro, "Vergeten om te herinneren. Religieus Erfgoed en de contemporaine collectieve herinnering in Nederland" in: *Contrapunten* (Nijmegen 2010).

continuity with the times before.⁴⁸ Popular Dutch historian Maarten van Rossem argues, as he calls pillarisation a worn-out paradigm.⁴⁹ Historians often use it to unjustly form continuity between pre-war and post-war Netherlands. Rather, he insists that a large minority of the population had already been depillarised in the 1950s, which he says is overlooked in the historiography traditionally controlled by the pillarisation-paradigm. He concludes this from pointing to the fact that there was no liberal pillar, many Dutch reformed did not consider themselves to be pillarised, and the metaphor of the pillar applies to a much lesser extent to the socialists than the confessionals. Moreover, pillarisation played less of a role among the business, scientific and cultural elite.⁵⁰ If anything, van Rossem states, the rapidly changing socio-economic circumstances are the most essential element of post-war times, rather than pillarisation. Van Dam and Kennedy claim secularisation and depillarisation are tunnel vision terms. In their book *Achter De Zuilen*, they try to show the multiplicity of religious actors and the difference in the way they handled the transformation of religion at the time.⁵¹

The “myth of pillarisation”, as Van Dam calls it, has created a distorted image of Dutch history in three ways, he claims.⁵² First of all, this narrative of pillarisation suggests that this phenomenon was a process unique to the Netherlands, whereas the same similar processes occurred in other countries. Secondly, the metaphor of the pillar is often taken to literally. Van Dam calls the terms caricatures or ideals, instead of a descriptive term. It was created to substantiate certain societal and political agendas. Lastly, the myth exaggerates the rupture in history between 1917 and the 1960s. Van Dam calls the shift in society gradual, rather than radical.⁵³ Another thing Van Dam places critical notes at is the notion that depillarisation automatically meant religion lost its importance in society.

⁴⁸ Eijnatten, van en Lieburg, van, *Nederlandse religiegeschiedenis*. 328.

⁴⁹ Maarten van Rossem, *Nederland volgens Maarten van Rossem* (Amsterdam 2012).

⁵⁰ Ibidem.

⁵¹ Van Dam, Kennedy en Wielenga, *Achter de zuilen*, 21.

⁵² Ibidem. 45.

⁵³ Ibidem. 46.

The meaning of religion was much bigger than just a dividing line between groups in society.⁵⁴

Depillarisation and secularisation are therefore not synonymous: whereas it is true that pillarisation made believing a more self-evident thing, depillarisation did not mean that everyone abandoned their faith. Additionally, it is likely that many people that belonged to a certain church during the pillarisation were not religious per se, as the term “cultural-Catholic” (cultuurkatholiek) implies.⁵⁵ This outlook matches well with Habermas’ ideas on the post-secular society, as outlined in the introduction. By claiming that depillarisation did not cause all people to leave their church, these scholars go against the secularist thesis and agree with Habermas on the point that the role and influence of religion remains relevant in society, which is where we find ourselves now.

⁵⁴ Ibidem. 32.

⁵⁵ Bernts e.a., *God in Nederland 1966-2015*. 36.

Chapter 2: Religious Heritage and its Protectors

This chapter investigates the phenomenon religious heritage and its role in Dutch society. Figures of declining church membership and predictions on how many churches will close in the coming years show the size of the trouble surrounding religious heritage. The difficult processes that come into play when reallocating a church or convent are also identified. In order to find out what kind of action is taken, the second part analyses a policy document and two heritage institutions. This includes an analysis of the discourse these initiatives engage in to justify their motivation for preserving religious heritage, as well as of the choices they make in the process. Next to the fact that the work these institutions do tells a lot about the state of the heritage in the present day, I also do this analysis to get a clear picture of what is done to protect religious heritage, in order to be able to give some recommendations at the end of this thesis.

Material and immaterial heritage

Willem Frijhoff, a historian specialising in the relation between memory and religion, calls the bible the foundation of Dutch collective heritage. He sums up what he thinks Christianity has accomplished in our society:

“The Christian culture has taken shape in almost two thousand years as a spiritual culture that has not only established monuments, but has also created standards and values, ideas and ideals, symbols and rituals, reflexes, gestures and attitudes: a broad “action repertoire” that allows a person coming from a traditionally Christian formed society to differentiate oneself flawlessly from other big religious traditions.”⁵⁶

Frijhoff clearly wants to emphasise not only the material heritage brought by Christianity, but maybe even more so, the immaterial aspects of heritage. When discussing heritage, it is fruitful to be aware of the distinction that can be made between material (or tangible) and immaterial (intangible) heritage.⁵⁷ As

⁵⁶ W. T. M. Frijhoff en F. Grijzenhout, "Hemels erfgoed: een reflectie", *Erfgoed: de geschiedenis van een begrip* (2007) 45–56.

⁵⁷ UNESCO, "Definition of the cultural heritage | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization", <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/illicit-trafficking-of->

Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett explains, since the Second World War, UNESCO has supported a big number of heritage initiatives from all over the world, starting with the tangible, both “immovable and movable, and expanding to natural heritage, and most recently to intangible heritage”.⁵⁸ Tangible heritage can be defined as monumental, a site that has aesthetic, archaeological, scientific, ethnological or anthropological value. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett outlines how intangible heritage has previously and sometimes still is called folklore, but there “has been an important shift in the concept of intangible heritage to include not only the masterpieces, but also the masters”.⁵⁹ Whereas the folklore model supported heritage preservers to protect and document disappearing traditions, the most recent models set out to “sustain a living”, if endangered, by supporting the conditions necessary for cultural reproduction.⁶⁰ The distinction between material and immaterial heritage is, however, not always clear. As Richard Kurin of the Smithsonian Institution Centre for Folklife and Cultural Heritage explains, separating the tangible and the intangible seems quite artificial and makes little sense in some cases. For example: “Tools are tangible, but plans, if thought are not, but if drawn are. This makes safeguarding most interesting because sometimes the preservation of the tangible and intangible are intimately conjoined.”⁶¹ Often, the material heritage is a result of the immaterial, making it hard to look at them separately. Therefore, this research takes under consideration both the religious material and immaterial religious heritage, and acknowledges their interplay. Henceforth, a church, religious art, relics, but also traditions such as carnival and personal stories captured in oral history are classified as being religious heritage.

Frijhoff continues about the role of heritage, or inheritance in the bible. As described in Genesis, the right of the chosen people to their land is the

cultural-property/unesco-database-of-national-cultural-heritage-laws/frequently-asked-questions/definition-of-the-cultural-heritage/, accessed 20 June 2018.

⁵⁸ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Intangible heritage as metacultural production", *Museum international* 56 (2004) 52–65.

⁵⁹ Ibidem. 53.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ Richard Kurin, "Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the 2003 UNESCO Convention: a critical appraisal", *Museum international* 56 (2004) 66–77.

foundation of their group identity. Frijhoff, in his chapter about the religious dimension of the term “heritage”, construes the role of the apostle Paul in developing the concept of heritage, and also the anti-material turn Christianity took during the reformation. Yet, he states: “The design of a common identity requires spatial elements: a meeting place, a ritual, visual contact, intimate relations between people who need to ensure the continuity of the group”.⁶² Hence, he describes the inevitability of the creation of material heritage, necessary to support the immaterial. In this same way, religious heritage is that materiality which supports the practice of religion. In my interview with Anique de Kruijf, head of the department of Cultural Heritage in Churches and Convents at Museum Catharijneconvent, she expressed this same sentiment, stating that material heritage is the tool that is needed to visualise the immaterial heritage for current and new generations.⁶³

Religious heritage

Religious beliefs and practices have shaped local land- and cityscapes through built forms but also through associated rituals and performances.⁶⁴ In many cases, this religious heritage is a stage for political conflicts, asserting certain national identities and power structures while refuting others. The work of Exell on heritage projects in the Arabian Peninsula, for example, investigates the way Western heritage practices and standards have been employed in the region for the rapidly forming heritage and museum initiatives. She calls these museums and heritage sites “symbols of shifting national identities, and a way of placing the Arabian Peninsula states on the international map”.⁶⁵ The textbook *Contested Cultural Heritage* discusses these same topics of heritage, power and identity politics. As an illustration, the contribution of D. Fairchild Ruggles deals with the issue of the Great Mosque of Cordoba, as it is the vehicle for a larger debate between the Catholic majority and the Muslim minority that once was the

⁶² Frijhoff en Grijzenhout, "Hemels erfgoed". 49.

⁶³ Interview with dr. Anique de Kruijf, head of the department of Cultural Heritage in Churches and Convents at Museum Catharijneconvent (11 June 2018).

⁶⁴ Peter Howard en Brian Graham, *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity* (Oxford 2008).

⁶⁵ Karen Exell en Trinidad Rico, *Cultural Heritage in the Arabian Peninsula: Debates, Discourses and Practices* (Oxford 2016).

controlling force in Spain, over the legitimacy of the Muslim population in Spain nowadays.⁶⁶ The discussion is a contestation over space of performance of identity, and an exercise not only to use heritage in order to collectively remember, but also in collectively forgetting a part of Cordoba's past.

In the context of this thesis, looking into secularisation in the Netherlands, an excess of empty church and convent buildings turn into cases of contested space, as they are conflict zones in which religious views, cultural awareness, emotions and rationality compete for priority.⁶⁷ Next to the religious, cultural and emotional values, a church always has an economic value, expressed in euros per square meter. The weighing of these different kinds of values often creates a situation that can easily lead to conflicts and distorted relationships. Since the prognosis for secularisation points towards a further decline in churchgoers, cases such as these will increase rather than decrease in the near future.⁶⁸

Empty Churches

The predictions state that before 2020, 1200 of the 4200 churches in the Netherlands will not be used as a religious house anymore.⁶⁹ This is one of the most discussed topics surrounding religious heritage: the problem of empty churches. Almost every city or village is dealing with the problems that stem from shrinking religious communities that are no longer able to care for the sacral building, and have trouble financing their churches due to declining membership.

⁶⁶ D. Fairchild Ruggles, "The Stratigraphy of Forgetting: The Great Mosque of Cordoba and Its Contested Legacy", in: *Contested Cultural Heritage* (New York 2011) 51–67.

⁶⁷ Kroesen, "Tussen God en de Mammon. Het lot van te duur of overtollig geworden kerkgebouwen in Nederland".

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ Roeterdink e.a., "Onderzoek herbestemming kerken en kerklocaties-een inventarisatie vanaf 1970".

Table 1: Church membership. (Numbers provided by Bernts e.a., *God in Nederland 1966-2015*, layout by the author)

	1966	1979	1996	2006	2015
Roman-Catholic Church	35	29	21	16	11,7
Protestant Church in the Netherlands	25	22	19	14	8,6
Small Protestant churches	7	6	7	4	4,2
Other churches and religions				5	7,7
Unrelated to a church	33	43	53	61	67,8

The *God in Nederland* research of 2015 focuses on the role of the individual in current religious structures. The first chapter holds the title “Christianity losing ground”, and is on church participation. The three big conclusions that are drawn are 1) the magnitude of the bigger churches such the RKK (Rooms Katholieke Kerk, Roman Catholic Church) and PKN (Protestantse Kerk Nederland, Protestant Church of the Netherlands) is decreasing 2) Catholic churches are increasingly less vital and 3) churches in general are increasingly marginalised in society. From table 1 it becomes clear that the amount of churchgoers from the big Christian churches has indeed steadily decreased in the last half decade. One thing that stands out, however, is the fact that the small Protestant churches did not lose in membership, but actually gained a little in percentage. This can be partly explained by the fact that these small churches gain some members coming from the PKN. The measurement of “other churches and religions” has only started in 2006, but has also increased in the last 9 years. This can be explained by the increase of people from different backgrounds coming into the Netherlands, for example expats, students, immigrants and refugees.

To answer the question whether the trend of the marginalisation of churches will persist, the report has looked into the percentage of different generations that attends church.

Table 2 shows how of the last two generations according to the Generations Divider of Becker, the “pragmatic generation” and the “borderless generation”, only 20% still attends church, compared to 50% of the two eldest generations.⁷⁰ Thus, we can expect that in the next decennium, the number of church-goers will drop under 20%, as churches will struggle with a great deal of ageing members.

Table 2: Church members and non-members (2015), per generation. (Numbers provided by Bernts e.a., *God in Nederland 1966-2015*, layout by the author)

	Pre-war and silent generations (1910-1940)	Protest-generation (1941-1955)	Lost generation (1956-1970)	Pragmatic generation (1971-1985)	Limitless generation (1986-2001)
Roman Catholic Church	28	18	11	7	7
Protestant Church in the Netherlands	19	12	9	6	6
Other churches	4	4	4	8	7
Unrelated to a church	49	66	76	79	80

Naturally, this has consequences. The 2008 Year of Religious Heritage committee has called attention to the emptying churches by stating that every week from now on, two churches will close their doors. This appears to be a slight exaggeration. From 2008 till 2010 for example, 23 Catholic churches closed their doors, and in 2010 38 of the PKN churches did. However, as the Stichting Kerkelijk Waardebeheer states, the act of dismissing church buildings by congregations is often put off and postponed, creating a “pile” of churches that will have to close in the near future.⁷¹ This might lead to a flow of churches all

⁷⁰ See for example Henk A. Becker, "Aspecten van generaties en cohorten: een overzicht van het onderzoeksprogramma", *Sociologische gids* 38 (1991) 212–226.

⁷¹ Stichting Kerkelijk Waardebeheer, "De realiteit van de getallen", <http://www.kerkelijkwaardebeheer.nl/wp-content/uploads/De-realiteit-van-de-getallen.pdf>, accessed 20 May 2018.

closing at the same time. The Catholic Church expects one third of its churches closed before 2020, and two third of its churches to be closed before 2025. That means that from the current 1,593 Catholic church buildings 531 will be withdrawn from services and ceremonies in 2020, and another 1062 five years later. In that year, 531 churches are expected to remain.⁷² In 2012, professor Stefan Paans mentioned that “roughly 70%” of the church buildings of the PKN that will have to be sold in the period 2012-2022.⁷³ The 2013 report of Stichting Kerkelijk Waardebeheer concludes that of the 4,000 church buildings that are still in use as such in the Netherlands, half will lose their original purpose in the next twenty years.⁷⁴

So what happens to all these churches that have lost their purpose? Justin Kroesen claims churches that can no longer be maintained by its communal owner are a “contested space”, as the processes of repurposing are almost always painful and emotional.⁷⁵ Marieke Kuipers agrees with this, pointing out how contemplation and commerce are often a bad match.⁷⁶ Kroesen emphasises that the religious community, in the case of repurposing a church, almost always prefers a continuation of the religious function of the building. There are therefore many cases in which empty churches are being taken over by a different, more “successful” religious community. But of course religious communities also have to take the economical value of the building into account, and will often be tempted by the highest bidder. Yet most of the time, cultural or philosophical activities are chosen over material or physical activities, as a bookstore is seen as a more fitting new purpose than a nightclub. Kuipers suggests that there is a growing need for certain guidelines on the handling of buildings with monumental and sacral value. Yet, as she also claims, repurposing of buildings is nothing new: for centuries we have been building and rebuilding

⁷² “Eijk: In 2025 meer dan duizend kerken dicht”, *Katholiek Nieuwsblad* (2013), <https://www.katholieknieuwsblad.nl/nieuws/eijk-in-2025-meer-dan-duizend-kerken-dicht>, accessed 5 July 2018.

⁷³ Stichting Kerkelijk Waardebeheer, “De realiteit van de getallen”.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁵ Kroesen, “Tussen God en de Mammon. Het lot van te duur of overtollig geworden kerkgebouwen in Nederland”.

⁷⁶ Marieke C. Kuipers, “Saxa loquuntur? Spankracht en draagkracht van eeuwenoude stadskerken”, *Bulletin KNOB* (2012) 174–182.

our cities and towns.⁷⁷ After the Reformation, Catholic churches were repurposed as Protestant ones, and in the French time, many abbeys functioned as storehouses for ammunition. She thus explains that repurposing of sacral buildings is not a new thing, and states that it does not necessarily has to be a problem, as long as there is a conscious and ethical process. From the perspective of an architect she speaks of “design with history”, in which reversibility and compatibility should be central principles.

The people that know all about these difficult processes of reallocation and closing religious buildings are the heritage institutions that work in the field. The next part of this chapter will therefore analyse three heritage initiatives focussed on religious heritage. The first is the organisation of 2008 as the Year of Religious Heritage and the report that came with it, set up by a multitude of interested parties, trying to map the exact size of the problematic surrounding religious heritage and give recommendations. After this I will analyse two heritage institutions that are part of the most important players in the field of protecting religious heritage. I do this in order to find out what kind of action heritage initiatives are taking, as well as to see with what kind of discourse they engage. This knowledge will help me when I give recommendations to the heritage institutions, at the end of this thesis.

Geloof in de toekomst!

In 2008 the Foundation for the Year of Religious Heritage produced the report *Geloof in de Toekomst!*, a strategic plan for the future of religious heritage in the Netherlands.⁷⁸ The report details the goals of the organisers of the 2008 Year of Religious Heritage. These included putting the trouble concerning the reduced support for religious heritage on the social, institutional and political agenda. It also seeks to create an online inventory of all religious buildings, objects and ensembles, and has organised multiple symposia on the subject of religious

⁷⁷ Ibidem. 181.

⁷⁸ Nicolaas Johannes Maria Nelissen, *Geloof in de toekomst!: strategisch plan voor religieus erfgoed* (2008).

heritage⁷⁹ But above all, in the report *Geloof in de Toekomst!*, the foundation has determined the exact size and nature of the matter. An analysis of this document will follow now.

They aptly list, first of all, what it is that we call heritage. They state that “a “neutral” definition of heritage could be: material and immaterial matters that a society considers worth

preserving and passing on to future generations.”⁸⁰ With this statement, the report asserts that religion is becoming heritage and it shows how they go along in the hype of the word heritage. Heritage should be about objects from the past that are assigned meaning for the present and the future, that claim. Here, the report very clearly is part of the Authorised Heritage Discourse, as they take on a very material definition of heritage, and also talk about “assigning meaning”, which implies they see the heritage as a thing with defined meanings and value.

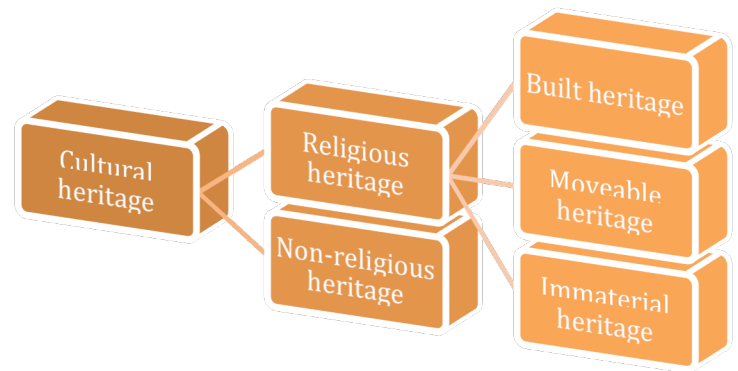


Figure 2: The different categories of cultural heritage (according to *Geloof in de Toekomst!*, figure made by the author)

There is not a clear-cut line between when something is defined as religious heritage and when something is not, but we can see the term in a narrow or a more broad sense. In a narrow sense, religious heritage relates to buildings directly linked to religion, and in a broad sense when everything that is considered to be brought about under the influence of religion, such as religious institutions established by religious groups (guesthouses, hospitals, orphanages, retirement homes, schools, orphanages and the like).⁸¹

⁷⁹ See: www.reliwiki.nl

⁸⁰ Nelissen, *Geloof in de toekomst!* 34.

⁸¹ *Ibidem.* 32.

The *Geloof in de Toekomst!* report takes immaterial heritage into account, but focuses on the material part. The report distinguishes between different kinds of material heritage, as visualised in figure 3. It analyses religious heritage under “changed social circumstances”, it presents different visions on religious heritage and also policy instruments. The report is lengthy, but very complete, and ends with a long list of conclusions and recommendations. They summarise the final conclusion of the report in the following three points:

- 1.** The future of the religious heritage concerns us all and is a matter of general interest. However, the survival of the religious heritage is seriously threatened. It is therefore an absolute necessity to develop a coherent policy.
- 2.** The implementation of that policy is a joint responsibility of all parties involved. A substantial extra effort is asked from them, also financially.
- 3.** In view of the very complex subject matter and the many actors, strict management is necessary, for which the final responsibility must be vested in the Minister of Education, Culture and Science.

The first point is meant to create a sense of importance and maybe also desperation. Using terms as “seriously threatened” and “absolute necessity” are not neutral or subtle, but are meant to provoke and spark a sense of concern. The second point tries to get all the different parties to step up and take their responsibility. One of the essential elements in most undertakings is money, which is also admitted and addressed in this point. The last point stipulates an intense collaboration between all parties, to all work together on a joint strategy. It also lays the final responsibility with the state, which ultimately means making it a responsibility of every taxpayer.

All of these points make sense and seem like good ideas to rescue our religious heritage. One point in the report, however, seems somewhat contradictory and fails to match the argument of the report. In its very conclusion, the report alleges that religious heritage is the biggest “attraction” of the country, and is therefore worth saving. It states we “attend a mass or a service, listen to a sermon, go praying, take part in a funeral service, light a candle, walk around to

view the building from the inside, listen to singing or enjoy silence there and rest.” The report alleges we do this in our own place of residence, but certainly also when we visit another city or village in the country. Yet, this is exactly the problem religious heritage is facing: the fact that people do not go to sermon, do not pray and do not get in touch with this religious heritage. To pretend like most of the Dutch people do this in their everyday life is to diminish the whole problematic the report is about.

The Museum Catharijneconvent has launched a campaign called “Het Grootste Museum van Nederland”, the Biggest Museum of the Netherlands, which addresses this exact problematic, as they wonder why it is very normal to visit an impressive cathedral abroad, yet many people in the Netherlands pass “their own” churches unnoticed. They set up audio tours in 11 churches and 2 synagogues to make this heritage more accessible, and with success.⁸² The initiative ensured that around 100,000 extra visitors came to see this religious heritage in the first half of 2018.⁸³ The project has added a kind of museological layer to the churches, De Kruijf explains. The approach of the project is that it attracts the kind of people that come to a city to go shopping for a day. The information provided through the audio tours is therefore on a very basic level, as it is not meant for churchgoers, but for those unfamiliar with the heritage.⁸⁴

Next to the Biggest Museum of the Netherlands project, and being a museum themselves, Museum Catharijneconvent also has a department that assists religious communities in mapping their religious collections and helps determine their value. The next part of this chapter investigates this department further.

⁸² Nederlands Dagblad "Grootste Museum van Nederland breidt uit met drie kerken", <https://www.nd.nl/nieuws/geloof/grootste-museum-van-nederland-breidt-uit-met-drie.3069924 lynkx>, accessed 3 Aug. 2018.

⁸³ Museumcontact, "Marketinganalyse: het Grootste Museum van Nederland", <https://museumcontact.nl/evenementen/marketinganalyse-het-grootste-museum-van-nederland>, accessed on 11 Aug. 2018.

⁸⁴ Interview with dr. Anique de Kruijf, head of the department of Cultural Heritage in Churches and Convents at Museum Catharijneconvent (11 June 2018)

Museum Catharijneconvent

When it became apparent that church organisations had difficulty financing the preservation and control of their museum collections, the government decided to regulate the management. Museum Catharijneconvent opened in 1979, where the collections of the Bisschoppelijk Museum Utrecht, the Bisschoppelijk Museum Haarlem, the Oud-Katholiek Museum and the Stichting Protestants Kerkelijk Kunst are professionally managed. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science permanently finances the museum, located in Utrecht. Since the opening, the museum has included many thousands of objects of art and culture in her collection. In 2008, the collection had approximately 68,000 objects in total.⁸⁵As they are the institution with the largest number of religious art historical objects in the Netherlands, the Catharijneconvent can surely be evaluated as an organisation that works within the Authorised Heritage Discourse.

One department of the Catharijneconvent, Erfgoed in Kerken en Klooster (EKK, Cultural Heritage in Churches and Convents), is responsible for the managing of religious heritage as such. The slogan of this department, on their website, is “We use our knowledge to protect the endangered heritage in churches and monasteries”.⁸⁶ Endangered, “bedreigd” in the original Dutch, is a strong word, implemented to evoke a sense of necessity and pressure in the reader. The heritage specialists of Museum Catharijneconvent map religious collections in Dutch churches and monasteries, establish their cultural value and assist in the re-use of objects. The department gets asked by dioceses, parishes and Protestant congregations to review their religious collections together. The EKK department also writes guides for religious institutions on how to make inventories of their property and how to estimate its value. In their motivation to do this, they bring up the fact that it is expected that two churches will close on average every week in the coming years. This has consequences for all Dutch people, EKK continues. Since: what happens to our religious heritage: church

⁸⁵ Nelissen, *Geloof in de toekomst!* 18.

⁸⁶ Museum Catharijneconvent, "Erfgoed in kerken en kloosters", <https://www.catharijneconvent.nl/kennis-advies/erfgoed-kerken-en-kloosters/>, accessed 15 June 2018.

buildings and monasteries, but also religious objects? As we have seen earlier in this chapter, these figures turned out to be an exaggeration, but are employed in multiple instances to again create this sense of urgency.

But how does this assisting of congregations work in practice? One of these guides the department has produced is the Guide to Movable Religious Heritage. The intention of the guide is to help churches and monasteries to determine what part of their moveable heritage is valuable, emotionally, religiously and/or cultural-historically speaking. Just like Kroesen spoke of the process of reallocating a church as an emotional one, the word is found in this guide as well. As it outlines: "The current value of the objects is determined. This concerns the current emotional/religious value. This is the perspective of, for example, the churchgoer, the church council, the pastor, the pastor or the sexton."⁸⁷, and continues: "The value of a religious object is therefore - ideally - determined by the church-goer or religious community itself, in concert with a heritage specialist".⁸⁸ This passage shows exactly the difficulty with estimating the value of (religious) heritage: this is not something one can express merely in capital, or historical or aesthetic quality, it is also relative to the ones who are connected to it: it is heritage that is used, or was used until recently, a living context. These religious objects, directly or indirectly connected with worship service, often determine to a large extent the character and identity of the faith community that used or uses it. Therefore the meaning of the objects is subject to the emotional and religious experience of its users, which gives the object a special meaningful implication.⁸⁹

As Anique de Kruijf, head of the EKK department comments, some rather plain-looking objects can have a central meaning for a particular church, even though it has very little cultural historical value, but a very high "current value". Almost

⁸⁷ Museum Catharijneconvent and Stichting Kerkelijk Kunstbezit Nederland, "Handreiking Religieus Erfgoed"
https://www.catharijneconvent.nl/media/medialibrary/2015/01/Handreiking_Roerend_Religieus_Erfgoed.pdf12, accessed 1 June 2018, 12.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem.* 9.

⁸⁹ *Ibidem.*

every church she has been to had one or more of such objects. The experts, she continues, are helpful on the side, as they know more about the cultural historical and art historical value, and the uniqueness of the object. Some objects get placed in other, more vital churches, other things get taken into the collection of a museum. However, the museum is of the opinion that a part of the heritage can be “rejected”. This is a more subtle term for the act of throwing something away. According to De Kruijf, the term “rejecting” is more and more accepted within church walls, as many church leaders also understand not everything can be saved.⁹⁰

It seems the Museum Catharijneconvent has a very realistic vision of secularisation and the protection of heritage. They try to make an as good as possible distinction between what is deemed valuable and what is not. De Kruijf explains they focus on that part of heritage that is needed in the future to tell the story of Dutch history and Dutch identity, to make sure we can still visualise the world of our ancestors.⁹¹ Another heritage institution that wants to tell a story they deem important for Dutch history is the Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven, that wants to preserve the history of Dutch monastic life, through archives and objects.

Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven St. Agatha

In 2006 the Heritage Center for Dutch Monastic Life has been established, in the Kruisherren Monastery of Sint Agatha.⁹² Due to the population aging, many monastic communities cannot continue to manage their heritage themselves. They decided to jointly establish a heritage center in the eldest monastery of the Netherlands. Some of the monastic buildings have been renovated and an archival depot was built. More than 100 monastic communities gather their archives, books and objects here. The center focuses on the history and

⁹⁰ Interview with dr. Anique de Kruijf, head of the department of Cultural Heritage in Churches and Convents at Museum Catharijneconvent (11 June 2018).

⁹¹ Interview with dr. Anique de Kruijf, head of the department of Cultural Heritage in Churches and Convents at Museum Catharijneconvent (11 June 2018)

⁹² "Het Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven", <https://www.erfgoedkloosterleven.nl/erfgoedcentrum/erfgoedcentrum.html>, accessed 18 June 2018.

significance of monks and nuns in the Netherlands and their heritage can be consulted in a reading room and through the exhibitions they organise.

Throughout the centuries, the center explains on their website, these monks have been working in poverty care, education, health care, parishes and associations, and have been at the cradle of our social services.⁹³ As the Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven states further, in their “collection plan”:

The aim of the project is first and foremost the preservation and careful management of the monastery archives. It is a center where unique sources on religious life, on spirituality, life and work of monks, can be collected and remain traceable. (...) As people of faith, we show who we were and what we meant and still mean in our society and elsewhere. One can only hope that something of the inspiration that has borne us will be understood and picked up again by generations after us. In the future, more and more use can be made of exhibitions, lectures, study days, educational programs, and so on. We must continue to search for new forms to pass on our monastic heritage, our monastic tradition and culture and to transfer them to those who come after us.”⁹⁴

We can detect a hint of hope that their efforts to preserve their heritage will not merely to the benefit of historical research, but also perhaps to evangelise future generations, as they “hope some of the inspiration (...) will be picked up again”. However, in my interview with librarian and curator of the Erfgoedcentrum, Otto Lankhorst, he explained they don’t seek to convert their visitors, but inspire them to carry on the values of monastic communities in modern forms.⁹⁵ He spoke of some looser forms of monastic life, such as new sorts of congregations that no longer take the three vows of poverty, celibacy and obedience. Such a loose form can also be people who come to a monastery in a family setting, for example.

⁹³ Ibidem.

⁹⁴ Collectieplan “Zorg voor het kloosterlijk erfgoed” (2002)
https://www.erfgoedkloosterleven.nl/media/pag/p-erf/collectieplan_Erfgoedcentrum.pdf,
accessed June 3, 2018. 2.

⁹⁵ Interview with mr. Otto Lankhorst, librarian and curator of objects at Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven (3 August 2018).

The passage above also shows that the Erfgoedcentrum's main focus lies in the preservations of archival sources from monasteries, yet they also collect physical objects. Lankhorst explained how their center is not a museum of religious art, and that therefore all the objects they preserve have to tell a story about the order or congregation the piece came from.⁹⁶ Examples of such objects are portraits of friars and nuns, or liturgical tableware. He expressed this position multiple times: the Erfgoedcentrum does not focus on the artistic side of the things closed convents bring in. Also when reviewing if objects are valuable for the center to collect, the focus is always on what it is, how it was used and what its role was within a congregation, and never on aesthetics. The objects are in some ways the archival sources made into an object.⁹⁷ This is clearly a very different valuation system from the Catharijneconvent, who focus on art-historical value first and foremost.

Whereas the government founded the Catharijneconvent, Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven was initiated by multiple religious orders, and is still managed and fully financed by the religious. The Erfgoedcentrum is very aware of the changed times we are in today. They describe how looking for appealing and engaging ways of presenting is essential if one wants to continue to appeal to the generations after us. Plans to, for example, make archival repositories into historic centres for a wider audience, where, in addition to archives, books, historical objects and educational tools bring the past back to life are part of this attempt to remain contemporary.⁹⁸ First and foremost, the Erfgoedcentrum wants to present the actual and factual history and development of religious life in the Netherlands and of the individual institutes. However, they also want to

⁹⁶ The correct way to address the Dutch monastic communities would be to say "orders and congregation", as an order is a community of monks who have made vows and were founded before about 1550 and a congregation is such a community of monks who have made vows and were founded after about 1550. However, for the sake of avoiding lengthyness and repetition I will often merely say congregation, but mean to address both of them.

⁹⁷ Interview with mr. Otto Lankhorst, librarian and curator of objects at Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven (3 August 2018).

⁹⁸ Collectieplan "Zorg voor het kloosterlijk erfgoed".

https://www.erfgoedkloosterleven.nl/media/pag/perf/collectieplan_Erfgoedcentrum.pdf, accessed June 3, 2018, 4-5

answer questions concerning the experience and motivation of the religious. What inspired all those women and men? Wherefrom did they draw the strength to do what they did under often particularly uncomfortable circumstances? What was the spirituality that supported their work and life? How was this given shape in liturgy and prayer?

The Erfgoedcentrum holds the archives of 118 orders and congregations from the Netherlands, meaning there are only a few left that did not join the initiative (yet). When asked about the emotions that come into play when a monastery has to close its doors and let the Erfgoedcentrum take their archive and moveable objects, Lankhorst replies pragmatic. Of course the monks will miss their things, but they are also often happy and content that their heritage is well accommodated and preserved for the future. Additionally, a lot of congregations have multiple convents, in which case a lot of their heritage can go to the “mother house” of that congregation, which can be in the Netherlands but is also often abroad. Besides, Lankhorst explains, closing a convent is a long-term process; it does not just happen over night. The congregations have known for a long time their monastery is not doing well, and the process of selling the cloister can take years. The tour guide of the Erfgoedcentrum emphasises, as is also often the case with churches, a new function of a repurposed convent preferably has something to do with spirituality or religion.

The Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven is practical in the way they transparently and accessibly store archival material and objects that tell us something about the role of monks in the Netherlands. In doing this, the center focuses on the societal function these friars and sisters fulfilled. The Erfgoedcentrum is part of the Authorised Heritage Discourse, as their focus on objects and archives holds a very Western, traditional view of heritage. As the religious fulfilled such an important role in Dutch society, Lankhorst claims preserving and guarding these archives is important for Dutch history, and

important for the Dutch people.⁹⁹ The Erfgoedcentrum thus does not want this memory to be forgotten.

The two institutions have different approaches towards religious heritage: whereas Catharijneconvent focuses on the artistic values of religious heritage, the Erfgoedcentrum finds meaningful only those objects that tell a story, as a way to supplement the archival sources. The Catharijneconvent is funded by the state, while the Erfgoedcentrum is fully financed by the religious themselves. Their motivation, however, seems to be identical. They are both part of the Authorised Heritage Discourse, as they focus on traditional forms of heritage such as buildings, objects and archives, and presenting them for an audience. Both are convinced religious heritage tells a story that is important to Dutch history. The way this relates to the forming of cultural and collective memory is laid out in the next chapter.

⁹⁹ Interview with mr. Otto Lankhorst, librarian and curator of objects at Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven (3 August 2018).

Chapter 3: Religion in Dutch Collective Memory

This chapter examines the role religion plays in this day and age in Dutch society. It first dives into some passages of popular culture, which reveal a tip of the iceberg of some reaction against the disappearing of religion in society. The figures from the *God in Nederland* research as well as the conducted interviews help establish how important religion is deemed in current society, which in turn help determine what stage Dutch society is in. In the end, this chapter gives some recommendations for heritage institutions in the future, based on this acquired knowledge.

Religion in popular culture

“If we do not guard our heritage, we deny ourselves a common asset that can provide inspiration at a time when we wonder where we actually stand”¹⁰⁰

“If we do not know this [Christian] heritage, we do not know ourselves. And it is at this point that we become susceptible for radicalism, xenophobia and nationalism”¹⁰¹

In February of 2018, independent journalist Yvonne Zonderop published her book *Ongelofelijk*, about “the surprising comeback of religion”. Of course, putting “religion” and “comeback” together in one sentence is meant to provoke. The book is a call to re-evaluate “our” (society’s) choice to put aside Christianity as something bad. Zonderop thinks the solutions to many contemporary social problems lie within our forgotten Christian heritage. “Perhaps a religious spirit is a sensitive reaction to a world in which rationality is indispensable, but inadequate to fully understand life.”¹⁰² She continues, considering four out of every five people in the world is religious, religion must meet a real need.¹⁰³ She for example mentions our need for community, for rules to live our life by and for forgiveness.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Yvonne Zonderop, *Ongelofelijk: over de verassende comeback van religie* (Amsterdam 2018) 164.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem. 165

¹⁰² Ibidem. 27

¹⁰³ Ibidem. 24

¹⁰⁴ Ibidem.

Similarly, popular philosopher Alain de Botton published his *A Religion for Atheists* in 2011.¹⁰⁵ He writes how thinking about whether God exists is an unproductive question, yet a lot of other aspects of religion are productive. He discusses rituals and habits from Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism, in which he, without any mention of a reason, leaves out Islam. This leaves the audience to conclude that maybe saying positive things about Islam was too risky for De Botton. In an interview he responds to this choice by saying that Islam was such a political “hot potato” that he left it out, declaring: “There has been a lot of intolerance from Islam and then a lot of intolerance from people attacking it. I thought the best response was to ignore it.”¹⁰⁶ However, as the writer of the article for *New Humanists* articulates on point: “to try and reach a grand synthesis of religious form and secular content by ignoring where they clash, surely, is no way to heal the world”.¹⁰⁷ What De Botton does speak of are the things that we can learn from the remaining religions, such as how to build a sense of community, make our relationships last, overcome feelings of envy and inadequacy and how to get more out of art, architecture and music.

These popular ways to revive, re-evaluate and revalue (parts of) religion are attempts to undo the dismissal of religion that started in the 1960s. Maybe as a reaction against publications such as Dawkin’s *The God Delusion* (2006) and Hitchens’ *God is not Great* (2007), it seems this decennium brings forward a new sound.¹⁰⁸ Publications such as those of Zonderop and De Botton, but also for example *The Good Book: A Secular Bible* (2011) try to convince the reader to give religion a second chance: although “religion” is often framed in a new, more individual way, in which one selects out the aspects of different religions that they find relevant.¹⁰⁹ Popular culture adopts religion in response to an apparent emptiness or a perceived lack of something. This comes in waves. It seems the

¹⁰⁵ Alain de Botton, *Religie voor atheïsten: een heidense gebruikersgids* (Amsterdam 2011).

¹⁰⁶ Caspar Melville, "No fire, no brimstone: An interview with Alain de Botton" (2012), <https://newhumanist.org.uk/2757/no-fire-no-brimstone-an-interview-with-alain-de-botton>, accessed 15 June 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York City 2009); Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great* (London 2011).

¹⁰⁹ A. C. Grayling, *The Good Book: A Secular Bible* (London 2011).

atheist secularist wave is over, and writing about religion positively, but within this secularist framework, is the new way to speak of religion. I think this sentiment best described by Matt Healy, the lead singer of the popular indie band The 1975, as he sings “I’ve got a God-shaped hole – that’s infected”. Is there an intrinsic human need for spirituality and faith, which non-believers are missing in contemporary Western society? Has religion been degraded to a mere memory? Or is it even slipping from our memory? As Zonderop claimed above, if we don’t remember where we come from, how can we know what we are?

Collective and cultural memory

As mentioned briefly in the introduction, it is inevitable to speak of heritage without touching upon the concept of memory. The notion that heritage “offers materiality to memory (or “fixity” in Jan Assman’s terms)” is commonly cited, and aligns with the view that heritage preserves memory.¹¹⁰ However, as Bethan Coupland emphasises, rather than heritage merely preserving, protecting or enshrining memory, heritage narratives may incorporate, influence or conflict with living memories.¹¹¹ This notion, in some ways, builds on Nora’s concept of “lieux de memoire” which acknowledges the importance of attaching memory to a certain place, focussing on the significance of places in which memory was produced, and providing materiality to memory.

The introduction of the term “collective memory” is traced to French sociologist and philosopher Maurice Halbwachs. He first mentioned the existence of a “collective memory”, and also claimed that all individual memories were actually communicative, always framed in relation to others. Writers such as Jan and Aleida Assmann and Jeffrey K. Olick have built on Halbwachs’ thinking on collective memory, developing the terms “communicative” and “cultural” remembrance.¹¹² While “communicative memory refers to living memory circulated via social structures and person-to-person communication, cultural memory incorporates the mediation of memory in external records and

¹¹⁰ Bethan Elinor Coupland, "Heritage and memory: Oral history and mining heritage in Wales and Cornwall" (2012). 46.

¹¹¹ Ibidem.

¹¹² Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago 1992).

documentation.”¹¹³ Cultural memory is also characterised by its distance from the everyday, as it is the institutional memory humans create through museums, archives, monuments and the like. It comprises that body of “reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image”.¹¹⁴

Working with the term “collective memory”, as if it were a truly collective entity is tricky. The concept has been used so frequently, and to describe so many different things, that it is the question what value it still adds. As Olick writes: collective memory has been used to “refer to aggregated individual recollections, to official commemorations, to collective representations, and to disembodied constitutive features of shared identities; it is said to be located in dreamy reminiscence, personal testimony, oral history, tradition, myth, style, language, art, popular culture, and the built world.”¹¹⁵ He compares the term to Pierre Nora’s term *lieux de mémoire* that has been applied to so many different things that “what is not a *lieux de mémoire*?” has become the more worthwhile question.

The most problematic part of the term lies in its tension with the individual and the collective. Halbwachs suggested that memory can be collective, and “although individuals can be included in numerous collective memories (such as communities or nations), all memory is embedded in culture and society”.¹¹⁶ But isn’t remembering a purely mental and therefore personal thing? And what about individual agency? Because of such frequent use of the term collective memory, the concept of personal, autobiographical memory “has vanished, collapsed into and all-encompassing concept of collective memory”, Anna Green claims.¹¹⁷ Green also emphasised that Halbwachs’ theory was only applied to small groups in close contact with each other, particularly families and working

¹¹³ Coupland, "Heritage and memory".

¹¹⁴ Jan Assmann en John Czaplicka, "Collective memory and cultural identity", *New german critique* (1995) 126.

¹¹⁵ Jeffrey K. Olick, "Collective memory: The two cultures", *Sociological theory* 17 (1999) 336.

¹¹⁶ Coupland, "Heritage and memory", 37.

¹¹⁷ Anna Green, "Can memory be collective?", in: Donald A. Richie ed., *The Oxford handbook of oral history* (Oxford 2011).

groups. This last point, she very accurately makes, is often neglected by those who, without this consideration, extrapolate the notion of collective memory into much larger scales of analysis.¹¹⁸

So, how can we use the terms collective and cultural memory in a productive way? We need to keep in mind that memory has both “individual” and “collective” elements, which we should not see as purely separate entities, but as overlapping layer which interact and influence each other.¹¹⁹ However many scholars have worked on the topic, the term collective memory will always remain somewhat vague, but in this research will stand for the active past that forms our identity.

As heritage is the embodiment of cultural memory and forms our memory, it follows that when material and immaterial religious heritage is increasingly diminished in society’s spaces, so is religious heritage from our cultural memory. Marit Monteiro also notices how vulnerable religious heritage has become, as religion has been marginalised in the public domain, it has also been marginalised in the collective memory. She sees it all around her, for example in the disappearance of basic knowledge of the history of Christianity (think of the annual articles in the media about what is actually celebrated at Easter and Pentecost).¹²⁰ She also emphasises the loss of the realisation how our Christian history has determined our image of humanity and our worldviews, and even our sense of time and space, alike Zonderop addressed in her book. De Kruijf also expressed that the reason why visiting a church is not popular in the Netherlands is because people have no idea how to behave in a church, but also because they no longer understand what they are looking at. Objects are only of value if you know something about them, she explained.¹²¹ This aligns with something theologian Peter Nissen declared, which points directly at the

¹¹⁸ Ibidem.

¹¹⁹ Coupland, "Heritage and memory", 44.

¹²⁰ Monteiro, "Vergeten om te herinneren. Religieus Erfgoed en de contemporaine collectieve herinnering in Nederland", 39.

¹²¹ Interview with dr. Anique de Kruijf, head of the department of Cultural Heritage in Churches and Convents at Museum Catharijneconvent (11 June 2018).

problems religious heritage is facing. The diminishing of institutional religion in the Netherlands has caused, according to Nissen, a growing religious illiteracy. Increasingly less people understand the material heritage because they no longer know the immaterial heritage of which it is an expression.¹²²

Finds religion very or somewhat important:	2006	2015	Difference
At rites of passage such as birth and death	73	59	14
For maintaining standards and values	74	55	19
At memorials	70	53	17
When raising a child	67	51	16
At catastrophes	70	49	21
To show us how to live well together	63	45	18
To point out social misconduct	64	39	25
At national festivities	56	36	20
To show the importance of sobriety	54	35	19
For our identity as Dutch	48	35	13
For our identity as European	47	31	16
To be a thorn in the flesh for those in power	48	27	21

Table 3: Social importance of religion, per measured year. (Numbers provided by Bernts e.a., *God in Nederland 1966-2015*, layout by the author)

So, what can numbers say about religion in our collective memory? When the *God in Nederland* researchers asked people how important they deemed religion in different aspects of society, people in 2015 deemed the role of religion on every aspect less important than in 2006 (see table 3). What is interesting is the fact that the perceived importance “for our identity as Dutch” and “for our identity as European” has both dropped. In the current climate, Judaeo-Christian identity is often endorsed in order to create a dichotomy between the Dutch or Europeans and “the Other”, which then stands for Islam, the East or “the terrorists”. Even though right wing populist politics have successfully brought

¹²² Nissen, "De Nederlandse religieuzen en hun erfgoed", 2.

this division into mass media and the minds of many of their voters, it does not seem to have reached a majority of Dutch society.

The fact that two of the fastest dropping categories are “to be a thorn in the flesh for those in power” and “to point out social misconduct” could be a product of the sexual offences that took place within the Roman Catholic Church that came to light. This might have damaged the trust people have in the church being a moral guidance. Furthermore, the fact that religion is considered less important at rites of passage, for example in the form of a baptism, or when raising a child, could predict that coming generations will follow the example of their parents and also consider religion of little importance in these instances. Rather ironically, in national festivities religion loses about 20% of people that find it important, in less than 10 years. The term “festivities” is rather vague, but I can imagine people have interpreted it as national holidays. In that case, the irony lies in the fact that most of these holidays have Christian origins.

All in all, the value and importance of religion is seen as very limited. However, when asked whether it would be a good thing if churches would disappear, there seem to be very little people that agree with that statement, and although this percentage is climbing (6% in 2006 and 11% in 2015), it is not climbing very fast. What is remarkable, however, is how the percentage of people that answered: No, I totally disagree (churches should not disappear) has gone down severely (85% in 1996, 54% in 2015). Instead, many more people have started doubting: I don't agree, I don't disagree has risen from 16% in 2006 to 35% in 2015 (see table 4). It seems as though the Dutch people have become indifferent towards religion and its heritage.

	1996	2006	2015	Church members	Unbound believers	Unbound spirituals	Seculars
(Totally) agree	4	6	11	2	3	12	19
Don't agree, don't disagree	11	16	35	16	30	39	48
(Totally) disagree	85	78	54	82	67	49	33

Table 4: It would be a good thing if churches would disappear, per measured year and per group (Numbers provided by Bernts e.a., *God in Nederland 1966-2015*, layout by the author)

Post Christendom?

With the pace of the devaluation of religion we see in table 3, religion's place in society will be further marginalised. Stuart Murray describes our current climate in Western Europe as post-Christendom. With this term he describes "a culture in which central features of the Christian story are unknown and churches are alien institutions whose rhythms do not normally impinge on most members of society".¹²³ Murray does not mean that this is the end of Christianity or a total absence of Christians in Western Europe, but that the *culture* that has emerged as the Christian faith "loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence".¹²⁴ Christianity has therefore gone from the centre to margins and Christians from a majority to a minority. The Western European society in which Christianity and Christian churches occupied a self-evident and dominant place is decaying. In other words: a society and a culture in which Christianity is almost as self-evident as the air we breathe, Nissen calls it, is collapsing.¹²⁵

¹²³ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and mission in a strange new world* (Eugene 2018).

¹²⁴ Stuart Murray, "Post-Christendom, Post-Constantinian, Post-Christian ... Does the Label Matter?", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 9 (2009), 197.

¹²⁵ Nissen, "De Nederlandse religieuzen en hun erfgoed". 2.

Murray does not expect Christianity to collapse overnight, as it took centuries to develop, but merely thinks we are in a transition phase, as we cannot presume that Christianity will endure forever. He bases his proposition on the British society, in which he notices declines in members of every denomination of Christianity. Yet, unlike in the 1960's, when people left church out of protest, in the day and age of post-Christendom, the church and Christianity provoke surprise not hostility, curiosity not indifference. Murray gives the example of a schoolchild who knows no other meaning of the name "Jesus" than a swear word.¹²⁶ In my interview with Otto Lankhorst he told me an anecdote of a conversation he had with an Augustine sister, who walks around in a habit. She told him how different the reactions of young people to her habit are, now compared to 30 years ago. "Thirty years ago the reactions were rather hostile, she said, while she is now approached more with curiosity and interest. And that's just a detail, but that does say something".¹²⁷ And I agree with mr. Lankhorst, it says something. It shows a hint of the possibility that young people have an increasing interest in religion.

Invisible religion and new spirituality: the future of religion?

As has been noted, there is a clear downfall not only of church memberships and attendance, but also of the valuation of religion's role in society. Christendom, as a self-evident way of ordering society, is collapsing. Yet, the fact that Christianity is being marginalised in society and the institution of the church has lost a big part of its followers, does not automatically mean people have become less religious. So, are people in current society not just interacting differently with religion than a century ago?

Jan Assmann distinguishes between invisible and visible religion, as coined by Thomas Luckmann. Visible religion relates to these specific institutions that handle the "administration of the sacred" e.g. the churches. With invisible

¹²⁶ Murray, *Post-Christendom*.

¹²⁷ Interview with mr. Otto Lankhorst, librarian and curator of objects at Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven (3 August 2018).

religion, however, he means the way the individual links to society or “the world”, the way in which the individual fills out religiosity outside of institutions, a sort of privatisation of religion. Luckmann emphasised the fundamentally religious nature of human existence and personal identity. Assmann then establishes that only in the case of visible religion we can speak of a culture of secularisation, loss of validity and marginalisation, not in the case of invisible religion. Frijhoff agrees and states that while the firmness of the old religious identity was based on the certainty of the religious structures in the old sense of the definition, the new forms of identification, with their flowing, highly individualized and often almost intangible development, are based on the memory process.¹²⁸ Frijhoff mentions the revival of pilgrimages as an example of this renewed perspective, since it is much less about the traditional celebration of religious group identity and more about the individual experience and recollection of – e.g. the memory of - religious values.¹²⁹ Yet, how much do these modern initiatives of remembrance really still have to do with Christianity?

In 2007, Charles Taylor in his *A Secular Age*, describes the relation between religion and society. Traditionally, society and religion have been closely intertwined, especially in those times when church and state had no legal separation.¹³⁰ Taylor, however, concludes that this relation of church and society can change in time. He claims that Western society has ended up in the “age of authenticity” as of the 1960’s, where religion and spirituality have become part of our individual “repertoire”, no longer obviously linked to community and society.¹³¹

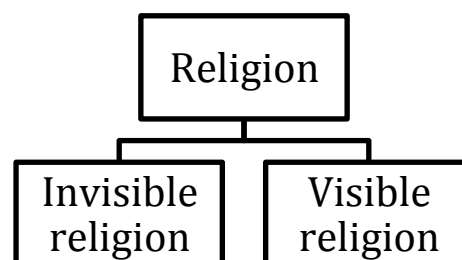


Figure 3: Luckmann’s dissection of religion, figure made by the author

The decennial report *God in Nederland* of 2006 concluded likewise, with the idea that empty churches do not have to mean that interest in religion and spirituality

¹²⁸ Frijhoff, "Religie en de mist van de geschiedenis. Hoe behoefte aan herinnering onze cultuur transformeert". 21.

¹²⁹ Ibidem. 21.

¹³⁰ Charles Taylor, *A secular age* (Cambridge 2007).

¹³¹ Bernts e.a., *God in Nederland 1966-2015*, 37.

is disappearing.¹³² This interest will, however, take on different, secular forms, alike the invisible religion in Asmann's book. Christianity has gone into the postmodern phase, which creates an attitude of relativism and individuality.¹³³ Despite this individualisation, there was a remaining need for collective rituals, such as national commemorations and rites of passage such as birth and death, the report concluded.¹³⁴

Table 5: Agreeing or partially agreeing to items of new spirituality, per measured year (Numbers provided by Bernts e.a., *God in Nederland 1966-2015*, layout by the author)

	2006	2015
Self-spirituality:		
If feel you have to experience truth within yourself	90	74
Religion for me is mainly something personal, not necessarily a group activity	81	70
I think religion does not have so much to do with the church	79	73
You should trust your inner voice	-	86
In every human being, you can find a real, authentic, "holy" essence, that is unspoilt by culture, history and society	-	58
Search-religiosity:		
In real religiosity, there is no room for doubt	48	38
For me, religion is something that keeps changing throughout your life	64	59
Religion has more to do with searching than with firm convictions, according to me	-	67
In my experience questions are more important than answers	-	63
Every gained insight is provisional	-	70
Syncretism:		
I think religion can rise from many sources	74	67
In think religion is about you collecting wisdom from different traditions and ideas	67	62
You can combine different wisdoms and practices until you have what fits you best	-	77
Connection and transcendence:		
I think there is something that connects man, world and nature in the core	79	72

¹³² Ibidem. 145.

¹³³ Ibidem.

¹³⁴ Ibidem.

I think my life is led by a spiritual power that is stronger than any human being	50	37
I believe in a life after death in combination with reincarnation	8	5

In 2015 however, *God in Nederland* concludes that the “spiritual revolution” that was predicted in 2006, did not take place.¹³⁵ This spiritual revolution, according to the ideas of Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, would lead to a further increase in interest in the “spiritual and holistic” industry, replacing traditional forms of (Christian) religion.¹³⁶ Yet, this observed “new spirituality”, the individuated sense one personally constructs ones own religion, taking from different religious and spiritual traditions, has lost ground. In table 5 we can see how all forms of religious or spiritual thinking or interest has suffered further loss in comparison to 2006. Naturally, some categories are impossible to compare, as the questions were not asked in 2006. Moreover, even though the percentages have dropped somewhat, for some categories, such as “You should trust your inner voice” and “You can combine different wisdoms and practices” the amount of people agreeing still lies very high. However, the fact that the presence of these sorts of convictions is diminishing does not change. We can therefore conclude that in the Netherlands, visible as well as invisible religion is losing importance.

Recommendations

After looking into the relation between memory and heritage, between heritage and religion and seeing multiple figures on the opinions of the Dutch people, we can establish the Netherlands is now a post secular, post-Christendom society in which the interest in religion and spirituality inside as well as outside of the church is diminishing. So, what can we recommend to heritage institutions, who want to protect Christian heritage in this day and age, to refrain it from slipping from our collective memory?

¹³⁵ Ibidem. 172

¹³⁶ Paul Heelas en Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Hoboken 2005).

1. In a post Christendom society, new generations do not look at the church with repulsion or disapproval, but rather with wonder and curiosity. This is because the phenomenon of Christianity, with its convents, mass and bible is something unknown and mysterious to them, as they have not been brought up with it. Heritage institutions should play into this sense of wonder by impressing them with the many stories from the Bible, the abundance of rituals but also the amazing built heritage that they have to offer. This is the first since many generations that will listen without prejudices. This, however, also requires approaching the heritage with zero foreknowledge.
2. Living in a post secular society means religion still plays a vital role in society, and it acknowledges the tracks that religion has left behind in shaping our society. With increasing globalisation and immigration, we are facing a society in which religious plurality and diversity is a given. Heritage institution should try to link their Christian heritage to these different cultures, in order to invite people of different roots to engage with the heritage, and also to create more tolerance for each other's beliefs.
3. The God in Nederland report showed how the expected increase in spirituality and invisible religion did not take place. However, in our post modern society with its loose structure, individualisation and many stimuli coming from technology and social media, it seems as though people are looking for some values to hold onto. Heritage institutions therefore do not have to play into a sense of spirituality, but rather a revival of Christian values and customs, alike the books of Yvonne Zonderop and Alain de Botton do.

Conclusion

This thesis was able to give some recommendations to the protectors of Christian heritage on the basis of findings on the current link between religion, religious heritage and memory in the Netherlands. At times, the figures and theories presented in this thesis may have seemed pessimistic, or even tragic. It may have felt as if the current religious people and religious heritage protectors are like the orchestra of the Titanic, who keep on playing while their ship is sinking. But I think this post-Christendom, post secular era we are slipping into is not all that bad, it merely provides the protectors of religious heritage some challenges that should be seen as possibilities. We should keep in mind that there are still many vital parishes and congregations, and the small Reformed churches and also the Pentecostal Church are blooming.

However, the idea that we find ourselves in a post Christendom society might take some getting used to. Even though secularisation did not come overnight, the term itself needs some time to land. In the first chapter of this thesis we have seen how the grand narrative of pillarisation and depillarisation, as deeply engraved in the Dutch collective memory, did not mean religion faded alongside the pillars. This chapter also shed some light on the difference between church membership and actual religiosity. Is the image right that before depillarisation, believing in the Netherlands was a given? Church membership, in the end, does not say anything about the level of religiosity of the members.

In the second chapter the research dived into different parties that are involved with religious heritage. The *Geloof in de Toekomst!* report shows how the Dutch religious create urgency with a report and try to convince other parties to support their case, especially in terms of financing from the government. The research introduced the two case studies, Museum Catharijneconvent and Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven. The *Geloof in de Toekomst* report and both of these institutions used sharp language to present their case: “endangered”, “seriously threatened” and “absolute necessity” were used to create a sense of urgency with the reader. But they did not use these terms in vain: the numbers of churches and convents that is going to close is severe.

Museum Catharijneconvent and Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven are therefore trying their very hardest to make sure all the heritage that will be “out on the street” soon, will be carefully displaced, and the valuable pieces will find a new home.

The two heritage institutions do all this to ensure that the memory of Dutch religious life, work and art will not be lost, as this memory is, according to them, essential to Dutch history and our Dutch identity. The last chapter therefore examined the place of religion and religious heritage in Dutch collective memory. As heritage is the embodiment of cultural memory and at the same time forms this memory, it follows that when religious heritage has been marginalised in the public domain, it has also been marginalised in our collective memory. As I concluded from the figures from the *God in Nederland* research, the Dutch people have become indifferent towards religion and its heritage. Or rather, they do not approach religion with hostility, but maybe with neutrality. This conclusion then brought us to the understanding that we now live in a post-Christendom society. And this is where I think lie the opportunities: different that generations before, new generations are curious and interested of the church, as also the Augustine sister who walks around in her habit could profess.

It is a general idea that while institutionalised religion is losing members, people are in the future are getting more spiritual and will find their own path to the God-like, by assembling from different religions and spiritual traditions what they deem right. The fact that the new numbers of the 2015 *God in Nederland* project contradict this prediction, in my view is not a reason for more pessimism, but rather for optimism. To me, it says that we simply cannot foresee the future. Already in 1970, Elseviers Magazine headlined with the title “Will the last brother turn down the light?”, as

Figure 6: Front page of Elseviers Magazine, 7 March 1970



a reaction to the “exodus” in the convents. Now, almost half a century later, that light, even if it is not shining bright, is still on. We can speculate and guess, but in the end only time will tell. For now, I think it would be good if religious heritage institution were to play into the curiosity of the new generations and marvel them with the rich (hi)stories and material heritage of Christianity. They should also engage with the multicultural society and its diversity of spiritual and religious beliefs, as well as give people in this “burn-out” era a set of morals and quietness. Because ultimately, the churches may need our help in protecting their rich heritage, but we might need them just as much.

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Interviews:

dr. Anique de Kruijf, Museum Catharijneconvent
(Utrecht:, 11 June, 25 minutes, in Dutch)

Otto Lankhorst, Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven
(St. Agatha, 3 August 2018, 30 minutes, in Dutch)

Appendix 1: List of images

Frontpage:

“Van God Los” <https://slothouber.files.wordpress.com/2014/03/de-kerk-wordt-gesloopt.jpg> accessed 4 June 2018

Page 54:

Front page of Elseviers Magazine, 7 March 1970.

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Appendix 2: Interviews

An interview with dr. Anique de Kruijf

Report of the interview with dr. Anique de Kruijf, head of the department of Cultural Heritage in Churches and Convents at Museum Catharijneconvent (Utrecht:, 11 June, 25 minutes, in Dutch)

IB: Wat doet de afdeling Erfgoed in Kerken en Kloosters precies?

De erfgoed specialisten van Erfgoed in Kerken en Kloosters staan kerken met raad en daad terzijde, als het gaat om hun interieurs en liturgische voorwerpen. Het kunstbezit van de kerken. Wij maken inventarislijsten voor kerken zodat ze weten wat ze hebben. Dat doen we vanuit een stuk kennis, omdat wij kunnen bepalen wat wel en niet historische waardevol is. Verder helpen we op dit moment veel met herbestemming. Als een kerk de deuren moet sluiten dan gaan wij de volledige collectie bespreken met zo'n kerk, en kijken we of iets wellicht in een andere kerk terecht zou kunnen komen. Daarnaast proberen we natuurlijk het publiek enthousiast te maken met het Grootste Museum van Nederland.

IB: Hoe lang doen jullie dit al?

Sinds februari 2013 zit de Stichting Kerkelijk Kunstbezit in Nederland (SKKN) bij het museum aangesloten. Die deden dit al sinds de jaren 70.

IB: En hoe zien jullie dat in de toekomst? Omdat er nieuws is dat er steeds meer kerken leeglopen, denken jullie dat dit iets is dat eeuwig doorgaat?

Ik geloof niet dat ooit alle kerken in Nederland gesloten zullen zijn. Maar de cijfers zijn wel enigszins schrikbarend. Ik denk dat we best mogen rekenen op ongeveer 60% sluiten binnen 15 jaar, ik denk dat dat heel realistisch is. Als wij dan naar de toekomst kijken, dat zetten we ons er echt voor in om de meest waardevolle kerken in gebruik te houden. Als erfgoed specialisten zullen we dan steeds meer vliegende conservator moeten gaan spelen. Kerken zullen toch steeds meer de functie van museum moeten gaan bekleden, om draagvlak te kunnen creëren. De deelnemers van het Grootste Museum hebben een soort museale laag toegevoegd aan hun kerk.

IB: Zijn de bezoekers van het Grootste Museum nog veelal gelovige bezoekers?

Nee, juist niet. Dat is ook wel echt de insteek van het project, dat we de mensen binnen krijgen die een dagje gaan winkelen, maar dat die dan toch begrijpen wat ze zien. Dat is natuurlijk een reden waarom kerken niet populair zijn, omdat mensen echt niet weten hoe ze zich moeten gedragen in een kerk. En omdat ze niet meer begrijpen wat ze zien.

IB: Waarom moet dit erfgoed bewaard blijven?

Onze visie is dat alleen het waardevolle erfgoed bewaard moet blijven. Wij vinden dat dat bewaard moet blijven omdat het een heel groot deel van de Nederlandse identiteit en het kan echt van betekenis zijn voor huidige generaties, maar ook voor toekomstige generaties, als je die betekenis eraan

blijft geven. Het terugvinden waar je voorouders allemaal in opgegroeid zijn, dat je die lijn visueel kunt maken.

IB: Je benadrukt dat het gaat om waardevol erfgoed, dus jullie gooien ook dingen weg?

Ja. In 2011 hebben we de handreiking geschreven, dat was een eerste verkenning of we erfgoed dat niet zo waardevol is ook af kunnen stoten. Als een katholieke kerk 12 patenen heeft liggen, die worden niet meer gebruikt in de eredienst, moet je die dan allemaal gaan bewaren? Of mag je ze ook omsmelten? Het woord afstoten is inmiddels redelijk geland binnen kerken, dus we kunnen het zeggen zonder meteen weer buiten de deur gezet te worden. Dat afstoten gebeurt momenteel vooral met nagelvast interieur dat er nog op een goede manier uitgehaald kan worden tijdens een herbestemming. Ik verwacht wel dat dat ook meer zal worden. Het is natuurlijk wel een gevoeligheid binnen kerken, maar op gegeven moment breekt de nood toch de wet. Maar wanneer bereik je dat punt? Maar wat ons betreft kan een deel van het religieus erfgoed best voor vernietiging in aanmerking komen.

IB: En hoe reageren kerken daar dan op?

Dat ligt bij elke kerk anders. Soms heb je een koster die bij wijze van spreken al een container heeft laten komen, en soms heb je een pastoor die een kruisbeeldje, waarvan hij weet dat het niks waard is, wil houden omdat het een schenking is van een bepaalde mevrouw. Dat vind ik wel een hele mooie uitdaging in ons werk, je hebt echt met mensen en emoties te maken.

IB: Heeft de gemiddelde Nederlander nog iets met religieus erfgoed?

Dat is lastig in te schatten. Voorwerpen zijn pas van waarde als je er iets van weet. Dus educatief vind ik dat wij een hele grote taak hebben, om mensen juist op de hoogte te stellen van het belang van die zaken, en de schoonheid die erin zit. De Nederlander van vandaag is wel echt op zoek naar rust en verstillings en spiritualiteit, als wij dat verlangen kunnen koppelen aan dit erfgoed, wordt het belang al weer veel duidelijker. Maar voor de meeste mensen zal het wel echt met hun voorouders te maken hebben.

IB: Zijn er grote verandering geweest in beleid van de SKKN van het begin tot nu?

Je ziet dat het in golfbewegingen gaat. In de jaren 70 en 80 was het vooral inventariseren, omdat de leegloop van kerken nog niet zo drastisch was. In de jaren 70 ging alles op typemachines, in de ja 80 werden de belangrijkste zaken gefotografeerd en vanaf de jaren 90 werd er dankzij de digitale fotografie heel veel gefotografeerd, en nog maar heel weinig beschreven. We zitten nu met de digitalisering rond de 80%. EKK streeft er nu naar om eerst te waarderen en dan te registreren.

IB: Wat maakt iets nu waardevol? Jullie waarderingsformulier gaat over de actuele, historische en vergelijkbare waarde.

Ons waarderingsformulier wordt vermoedelijk niet veel gebruikt door kerken in Nederland, maar is voor ons erfgoed specialisten wel van heel grote waarde geweest. Wij zijn nu allemaal on the same page over waar het zwaartepunt moet

liggen. Actuele waarde en historische waarde zijn ongeveer gelijk. De actuele waarde wordt door de kerk zelf bepaald, en historische waarde bepaalt een erfgoedsspecialist.

IB: Hoe ziet de spanning tussen (kunst)historische waarde en religieus-emotionele waarde er uit in de praktijk?

In de praktijk ziet dat er uit zoals in het voorbeeld dat ik net gaf, als wij een gemiddeld kruisbeeldje tegenkomen dan zeggen wij de historische waarde is nihil, want elke kerk heeft precies zo'n kruisbeeldje. Maar het kan zijn dat de voorzitter van het parochiebestuur zegt: dit kerkbeeldje is voor ons wel zo bijzonder, dan is het voor hen misschien wel het meest belangrijke voorwerp in hun hele collectie. Dat kan zijn. Dat speelt op het gebied van allerlei voorwerpen af, grote heiligenbeelden maar ook klein zilverwerk. Dat heeft vaak te maken met de schenkingsachtergrond van een voorwerp.

IB: Heb je vaak zulke confrontaties?

Ja, in bijna elke kerk wel. Er zijn heel veel voorwerpen waar men emotioneel heel erg aan gehecht is, die cultuurhistorisch van heel lage waarde is. Bij een herbestemming nemen de parochianen, die gaan fuseren met een andere kerk, dat kruisbeeldje gewoon mee. Dus daar ontstaat niet echt een discussie over.

IB: Wil je nog iets toevoegen?

Erfgoedinstelling hebben eigenlijk precies niks te zeggen. Er zijn drie belanghebbenden: kerken als eigenaars, erfgoedinstellingen aan raadgevers en de overheid als financier. We zijn natuurlijk nergens juridisch eigenaar van, we zijn meer een adviserend orgaan. We hebben wel veel toegevoegde waarde, en ons advies wordt bijna altijd wel aangenomen. Maar het blijft een advies. Wees je bewust van de verhoudingen.

An interview with Otto Lankhorst

Report of the interview with Otto Lankhorst, librarian and curator of objects at Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven
(St. Agatha, 3 August 2018, 30 minutes, in Dutch)

IB: Ten eerste, kunt u mij vertellen wat u hier doet en waar we precies zijn?

Dit is het Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven, het is gehuisvest in het klooster van de Kruisheren. Dit is een bijzondere plek want dit klooster is altijd open gebleven, sinds 1371, ook tijdens de reformatie, dankzij bescherming van de prins van Oranje. Dat is bijzonder, want alle andere kloosters moesten sluiten. Eind van de twintigste eeuw hebben de Kruisheren de stichting st. Aegthen opgericht, om zich te bekommeren over het erfgoed van de Kruisheren vanuit verschillende kloosters in Nederland. De tweede stichting is stichting Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven. Dat zijn inmiddels meer dan 100 orden congregaties die zich hebben aangevoegd om hun archieven, boeken en voorwerpen te bewaren. Dat is begonnen met de archieven, rond 1986. Een aantal religieuzen met historisch besef gaan kijken: hoe moet het verder met de kloosterarchieven? Toen heeft de toenmalige hoogleraar nieuwste geschiedenis Ad Manning een rede gehouden om ordes en congregaties te overtuigen dat die archieven belangrijk waren, dat daar veel stukken inzitten belangrijk voor de geschiedenis van Nederland, van Nederlanders. Dat is opgericht, als Dienstencentrum Kloosterarchief Nederland. Dat waren twee archivariissen die door Nederland reisden om kloosters bij te staan met hun archieven. Ongeveer 10 jaar later gingen steeds meer kloosters sluiten, wat doen we nu met die archieven? Toen is ervoor gekozen dat in eigen hand te doen, in samenwerking met stichting st. Aegthen, en is hier een depot gebouwd voor de archieven. In 2006 is het erfgoedcentrum geopend. Sindsdien zijn er iets meer dan 100 ordes en congregaties aangesloten. Nu is er die bibliotheek en de tentoonstellingen. In de bibliotheek staan vooral boeken van en over de ordes en congregaties van Nederland, over hun leven en werken van de Nederlandse religieuzen. Ook is er de voorwerpen collectie. Dat zeg ik altijd: wij zijn geen museum van religieuze kunst, daarvoor is het Catharijneconvent en het museum voor Religieuze Kunst Uden. Wij verzamelen voorwerpen die nauw verband houden met de geschiedenis van de congregatie, die iets vertellen over het leven en werken van de religieuzen. Het gaat dus om voorwerpen die in de kloosters gebruikt zijn, het gaat om de kleding, er zijn portretten van oversten, pater, broeders, zusters etc. Wat liturgisch vaatwerk, en paramenten. Maar daar moet wel altijd een verhaal bij zijn. Het zijn voorwerpen die bij het archief horen.

IB: Mocht een klooster sluiten, kijken jullie dan samen naar wat eventueel hier heen kan?

Ja. Ik wel eens, het is goed dat dit erfgoedcentrum op tijd is begonnen, eind jaren 80. Toen er nog de nodige religieuzen waren die zich daar voor konden inzetten. Heel belangrijk dat het de religieuzen zijn die het hebben opgezet, want dat waren natuurlijk toch vrij gesloten kloosters. Ook qua financiën is het op tijd begonnen. Het zijn religieuzen die het financieren, niks van de overheid. "Rome" betaalt het ook niet. De orden en congregaties die meedoen aan het project, die financieren het ook. Er is afgesproken: er wordt betaald naar omvang van het archief. Natuurlijk zijn we solidair naar armere congregaties.

IB: En wat doet u dan precies?

Ik ben hier bibliothecaris en ook conservator voor de voorwerpen. De archivaris gaat naar het klooster toe om advies te geven over het archief: wat wel of niet bewaren, hoe op te zetten. Ik ben in heel wat kloosters geweest om te kijken naar de bibliotheek, wat hoor hier [in het erfgoedcentrum] thuis, advies geven wat ze met andere boeken moeten doen. En ook qua voorwerpen, ter plekke kijken: wat komt in aanmerking om hier te bewaren? Veel is ook al bekeken door specialisten van de stichting SKKN. Dat is nuttig, maar voor ons beslist het kunstzinnige niet of iets al dan niet wordt opgenomen. Het is natuurlijk mooi al er kunsthistorisch mooie voorwerpen zijn, maar dat geeft niet de doorslag. Die rapporten van zo'n stichting zijn toch vaak door kunsthistorici samengesteld, terwijl de vragen die ik er dan bij heb zijn: hoe werd het gebruikt, wanneer werd het gebruikt, tot wanneer werd het gebruikt.

IB: Wat gebeurt er met voorwerpen waarvan jullie denken dat ze niet perse bewaard moeten worden?

Dat kan heel verschillend zijn. Boeken die kostbaar zijn die gaan wel eens naar het antiquariaat. We zorgen wel echt dat zaken die bewaard moeten blijven, wel echt bewaard blijven. Zaken gaan naar het studiecetrum Kapucijnen in Leuven.

IB: Wordt er ook wel soms iets weggegooid?

Ja, er gaan soms wel dingen naar het oud papier. Als ze bijvoorbeeld al op meerdere plekken in Nederland bewaard worden en er dus geen vraag meer naar is. Voor de voorwerpen: het Museum Catharijneconvent heeft een afdeling voor herplaatsing van voorwerpen. Binnen congregaties zijn er internationaal soms wel bruisend zijn nog, bijvoorbeeld in Indonesië of Brazilië, dan zijn er ook wel voorwerpen die daar dan naar toe gaan.

IB: Zo'n proces, als een klooster moet sluiten, heeft u wel eens wat meegekregen van de emoties die daar achter zitten?

Ja, maar dat zijn natuurlijk, dat is niet van de ene dag op de andere. Eigenlijk is het al decennia aan de gang. Weekblad Elsevier had in 1970 al een verhaal over het sluiten van de kloosters "Wil de laatste pater het licht uit doen?". Binnen congregaties die worden gesloten trekt men zich over het algemeen terug naar het moederhuis, waar het ooit allemaal begonnen is. We weten hoeveel paters en zuster er zijn, en we kunnen ook wel berekenen hoe dat de komende jaren gaat zijn. Dat is natuurlijk wisselend, hoe ze daar tegenaan kijken. Als zo'n archief of de voorwerpen dan hier aankomen is dat voor een kloosterarchivaris de afsluiting van jarenlang aan gewerkt hebben. Dus dan missen ze het soms wel. Maar daar staat wel tegenover dat het hier dan goed is ondergebracht, en ook wel een soort opluchting van de zorg kunnen afstaan.

IB: U zegt zelf al, kijkend naar de leeftijd kunnen we zelf al wel een beetje voorspellen hoe het met de congregaties verder gaat. Denk het Erfgoedcentrum dat het kloosterleven op gegeven moment helemaal geen rol meer zal spelen in Nederland?

Het zal nog wel spelen, maar in een beperkt aantal, en eerder de contemplatieve congregaties. Niet meer de actieve, die in de 19^e eeuw zijn opgericht voor werk

in scholen, ziekenhuizen etc. Wij worden hier wel geconfronteerd met steeds meer congregaties die echt uitsterven. De archieven van de congregaties hier beheren wij, maar wij zijn geen eigenaar. De congregatie moet toestemming geven als iemand stukken wil inzien.

IB: Verandert dat jullie rol als centrum, dat de traditie van het kloosterleven steeds meer uitsterft?

Onze alle eerste taak was en is nog steeds dat alles goed omsloten wordt, en dat vervolgens mensen hier kunnen komen om dat erfgoed te bestuderen of te bekijken, want we hebben nu ook een museale stand. Aanvankelijk was het project opgezet om 30 jaar, tot 2035 te blijven bestaan. Nu zijn we bezig om het voor een nog langere tijd te kunnen financieren.

IB: Waarom is dit erfgoed zo waardevol, zo belangrijk, waarom moet het zo goed bewaard blijven?

Religieuzen hebben voor Nederland een belangrijke rol gespeeld. Al is het maar in het zuiden in het land het oprichten van zo veel scholen, ziekenhuizen, maatschappelijke instellingen, zorg voor bejaarden, zorg voor “krankzinnigen”, mensen in de marge van de maatschappij, missie. Belangrijk onderdeel van Nederlandse geschiedenis. Dat is de reden er toch zorgvuldig mee om te gaan.

IB: Is het dan ook belangrijk dat iedereen daarvan weet?

Dat is natuurlijk wel het streven, ook met de tentoonstellingen, om dat duidelijk te maken. Wat de betekenis geweest is van de religieuzen. Via de tentoonstelling hier, via de website, via de diensten die wij bieden als kenniscentrum.

IB: Op de website staat dat jullie hopen dat er ook wat inspiratie overvloedt, hoe zit dat?

Ja niet dat wij hier mensen willen bekeren, maar misschien wel inspireren. Er zijn natuurlijk wel een aantal nieuwe bewegingen. Een bepaalde vorm van kloosterleven is definitief voorbij, wat betreft die actieve congregaties. Dat zijn dat wat lossere vormen, dat kan zijn niet meer de drie geloften afleggen, maar ook bijvoorbeeld mensen die in familieverband in een klooster komen.

IB: Denk u dat het afnemen van het kloosterleven in Nederland ook een waarschuwing dat het Christendom ook een steeds kleinere rol zal spelen?

Ik vind persoonlijk dat er binnen de katholieke kerk altijd, naast de bisschoppen en de parochies een de tweede stroom geweest is, van de religieuzen. De diversiteit van geluiden binnen de katholieke kerk is minder geworden.

IB: Hebben jullie met het centrum een visie over of die secularisatie steeds maar door zal gaan?

Die secularisatie is natuurlijk al heel ver gegaan, en zoals het er nu uit ziet zal dat de komende jaren steeds verder gaan. Het blijft een beetje speculeren. Het is wel duidelijk dat de jongeren wel weer een zeker toenemende belangstelling in religie is. In ieder geval, ik sprak laatst met een zuster Augustines, die loopt in habijt rond, en zij zei mij: het is toch anders toch anders, de reacties die ik nu van jongeren krijg op mijn habijt, nu of 30 jaar geleden. 30 jaar geleden was het

eerder wat vijandig, terwijl nu is het meer nieuwsgierig en belangstellend. En dat is maar een detail, maar dat zegt wel wat.