



The Sacred Lives of Things

Valuing church objects as heritage
and commodities



Jerrold Cuperus

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4061675

Supervisor: Birgit Meyer

Second reader: Jo Spaans

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Cover photo: Empty sacristy of the St. Gertrudiskerk. Utrecht, June 6, 2018. *Photo by author.*

RMA Thesis *Religious Studies*, Utrecht University



Utrecht University

Abstract

One in five Dutch churches has lost its original function in the last decades, due to declining religious affiliation and secularization. When a church building is decommissioned and has to be repurposed, the objects inside it are often required to be removed. In these moments of forced mobility, reflection on the value of church objects is required. In Roman Catholic churches in the Netherlands, rules and regulations are implemented to restrict these movements and to prevent objects from ending up in what are considered the ‘wrong’ hands. This study examines the ways in which the restrictions on church objects attributes value to items, and highlights how personal relations that people and objects develop sometimes subvert these restrictions and attribute value to objects in a different way. Focusing on churches and a religious heritage museum in Utrecht and on an antique shop specializing in religious art in Limburg, which are places where church objects often end up, this study offers a comparative perspective through which changing values can be examined.

I propose to understand the movement of church objects from a church to a different context as a move from one economy to another. In these different economies, objects are interpreted and used differently and therefore can be understood as powerful mediators, which mediate different things. In Roman Catholic churches objects can be consecrated, which imbues them with a ‘sticky’ value which cannot so easily be removed when it moves to another economy. Studying the sacred through the lens of economy provides a new perspective on the materiality of secularization and the changing religious practices which come with it.

Tags: material religion // value // waste // heritage // sacred

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Introduction

The church is nearly invisible from the main street. After consulting Google Maps, I find the church in a back alley tucked between a Catholic primary school and a community center, facing a long concrete wall with graffiti art. From here I can see that the basilica-shaped neo-gothic St. Gertrudiskerk (devoted to saint Gertrude of Nivelles) is actually quite large. Although the clock on the forty-two-meter bell tower displays the wrong time – I later learn that money for its maintenance ran out – the building is quite impressive and has functioned as a landmark in the neighborhood, which is why it is listed as a municipal monument. The parish using the church celebrated its last service during Easter, nearly two months before, after which the church building had to be vacated and could go on sale. “In anticipation of this”, writes church administrator Ton Fonville in the parish newsletter, “we are working hard, regarding the inventory of the church building, to find a new purpose for as many objects as possible. That is different for the inventory of the rectory, but we want to give the items which are present there a good purpose too. Therefore, we want to make it possible for you to see if there are things (big and small) that you would like to have. This, of course, against very reasonable prices.”¹

The hallway of the rectory, which is connected to the church via a small corridor, is filled with stacked chairs bearing a *te koop* (for sale) sign. Two people are sitting on an old church pew which is placed against the wall, and express their regret for arriving too late to buy it themselves. The four rooms of the rectory which are open today contain various categories of items: there is one room with vinyl records, paintings, and posters; another room has tables filled with kitchenware; a smaller room contains all kinds of Christmas decorations, including a nativity scene which is to be auctioned off; and there is a room full of religious paraphernalia: crucifixes, statuettes, bibles and missals, candles, and rosaries (Figure 1). The ‘Open Day’ that the parish volunteers organized on this warm Saturday in May 2018 is specifically meant for parishioners and

¹ “Vooruitlopend hierop zijn we met betrekking tot de inventaris van het kerkgebouw volop bezig om voor zoveel mogelijk objecten een herbestemming te vinden (herbestemming = gebruik in de locatie van een andere RK-kerk). Voor de inventaris van de pastorie ligt dat anders, maar wij willen de daar aanwezige zaken (groot en klein) een zo goed mogelijke bestemming geven. Het is daarvoor dat wij u in de gelegenheid willen stellen om te kijken of er zaken zijn die u graag wilt hebben. Dit uiteraard tegen zeer schappelijke prijsjes.” (Email news letter “*Nieuwsbrief Samenwerkende Parochies Katholiek Utrecht*”, 13-20 mei 2018).

family members in order to collect some memorabilia. The room with religious paraphernalia was especially designed for this purpose. “The price did not matter, in principle. It was more an attempt, as it were, in order for the people to have a souvenir. You can hardly use cups and saucers as memorabilia, but they also were on sale for next to nothing. But for the things in this room, they were predominantly meant as souvenirs”, says Ton Fonville, the church administrator in charge of the repurposing process.² Before leaving, I pick out a small wooden crucifix and haggle a bit over its price with the volunteer. The lady asks me if I want to keep the small boxwood branch or that they should burn it for Ash Wednesday. Since I would not do anything meaningful with the blessed twig, I give it back to the volunteer, pay the ten euros we agreed upon, and cycle home with Jesus firmly attached to my bicycle rack.



Figure 1 Rectory of the St. Gertrudiskerk during 'open day'-sale. Photo by author.

Objects in churches remain relatively fixed in place most of the time, but in the context of churches having to close down due to secularization and declining religious affiliation, they are required to move. This allows objects that formerly belonged to a specific church to end up in the hands of another community, or possibly even in the hands of a private individual who has little

² “De prijs was in principe niet belangrijk, het ging er meer om dat de mensen dus een aandenken als het ware. Nu kun je aan kopjes en schotels weinig aandenken hoor, maar die waren ook voor een prikkie te koop. Maar gewoon voor de dingen die hier in deze kamer lagen, was dat vooral in teken eigenlijk van een aandenken” TF-060618

investment in the Roman Catholic material tradition like me. Objects from churches change hands between churches, find their way into museums, or circulate in antique shops and (online) auctions. In the past decade, about one church per week has closed down in the Netherlands (Eggenkamp et al, 2018). A recent research by newspaper *Trouw* reported that nearly 1400 of the 6900 Dutch churches have gained a new purpose, and estimates that the rapid decommissioning and repurposing of more churches will continue (van der Breggen & de Fijter 2019). This rapid ‘de-churching’ has been going on in the Netherlands since at least the 1970’s (Bisdom Haarlem, Bisdom Rotterdam, Projectbureau Belvedere 2008) and forces people to not only deal with the building, but also with the objects inside it.

Dutch Roman-Catholic churches and dioceses are very aware of the declining membership, church attendance and affiliation. Therefore, rules and regulations regarding the repurpose of church buildings and objects from churches have been widely discussed in recent years and guidelines have been established to help churches deal with this issue. In November 2018, a Vatican episcopal conference was held on the topic of church decommissioning, and already in 2013, the diocese in Utrecht published extensive guidelines on what to do when a church has to close down. In these discussions the focus predominantly lies on the buildings themselves, although recently more attention has been directed towards the ‘moveable goods’ inside the churches as well. Objects from churches come in many shapes and sizes, and different purposes and values attributed to them require different engagements once they become obsolete for their original owners. For divergent reasons – which will be spelled out in this study — another church or a museum, a parishioner’s home, an antique shop, or even the dumping ground can become a ‘proper’ place for an object from a closed-down church to end up.

In the summer of 2017, I attended a lecture at the national museum for religious heritage ‘Catharijneconvent’ in Utrecht as part of my master program introduction. In the lecture, a staff member told us about the valuation assessment they developed in collaboration with Protestant and Catholic church institutions and heritage agencies, in order to value this ‘religious heritage’ for its various qualities. To me, it came across as rather abstract and arbitrary to simply ‘assign’ value to items which can have different meanings to different people. This provoked the question how we can understand both the grounding of these values *and* the extent to which these values reflect the relations that people have with the items involved. Could such a framework of values undermine the values which are already attributed to the object through previous interactions between church objects and people? This prompted me to further research this issue. As I soon found out, since 2013, Museum Catharijneconvent (MCC) has been explicitly tasked by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW) with cataloging all Christian religious heritage in the Netherlands. This makes this question inherently political: the Dutch state is invested specifically in the preservation of Christian religious heritage, which in turn influences the construction of national identity around Christian culture and history.

Constraints placed on the circulation of objects from churches through the cataloging and valuation frameworks set up by museums and churches influence the market of objects from churches significantly. Supply of ‘religious antiques’ is shrinking, with statues of popular saints such as St. Nicholas or St. Christoph hardly being available any longer. Still, selling the antiques has been profitable enough to allow the owner of a small statue museum, set in a former convent chapel in the predominantly Catholic province of Limburg, to open his ‘Relimarkt’ in December of 2018. Specializing in these ‘religious antiques’ and predominantly in life-size statues of saints, the business was so successful that the owner bought a second unused church which will be converted into a devotional art museum. Making money by commercializing objects from churches is sometimes considered blasphemous or unworthy by the original owners of the object, but it can also be a way of preservation, with many objects circulating back to churches through the market.

Moving objects from a church to a museum, or from a market to a church, constitutes an ‘exchange’ which invites reflection on the value of objects. The decommissioning of church buildings forces people and objects to enter into new relationships. In this study, I will provide a framework to understand these exchanges as moments wherein the relationship between humans and objects transform. Through exchange, the church object moves between distinct, yet interacting, economies: ecclesiastical, heritage, and commercial economies. The specific rules and regulations which control the flows of items constitute the boundaries of each of these economies. Across the ecclesiastical, heritage, and commercial economies, the same or similar church objects are valued differently for different reasons. At the same time, they are rarely able to shake off the valuations attributed to them by their previous owners and users. On the contrary, these values ‘stick’ to the objects and have to be taken into account in the new relationships and contexts in which they are placed. In this study, I will show in detail how objects from Roman Catholic churches are classified and organized through different frameworks of documentation and valuation and what the objects themselves do in these processes.

Studying value through things

To study religion means to study movements. Attempting to construct a general theory of religion, historian Thomas A. Tweed defines religions as “confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries” (Tweed 2006, 54). The flows through space and time that Tweed describes have meaningful effects in the lives of humans and are formed by and (re)shape their physical and cultural worlds. We can imagine creeks and rivers flowing down a mountain, occasionally touching and coming together before diverging again. The aim of this study is to

study the contents of these streams, the sediments that these lively currents carry. Religion, in Tweed's perspective, happens in instances where social, cultural, political, economic, and other 'organic-cultural flows' temporarily come together before they flow further. Tweed equates *religions*, these moments of convergence, with 'sacrosapes'. "[T]his term, sacrosapes, invites scholars to attend to the multiple ways that religious flows have left traces, transforming peoples and places, the social arena and the natural terrain" (ibid., 62). The traces that these flows leave behind are the 'sacred' sediments carried by the currents.

In recent years, the study of material religion has advocated to study the intricate relationships between humans and objects, where some of these 'sacred' traces might be visible:

"A materialized study of religion begins with the assumption that things, their use, their valuation, and their appeal are not something added to a religion, but rather inextricable from it (...). Religion is not a pure realm of ideas or beliefs that are translated into material signs. The material study of religion avoids reifications that identify ideas or dogmas or individual people as the irreducible core of religion. Instead, a religion is inseparable from a matrix or network of components that consist of people, divine beings or forces, institutions, things, places (Meyer, Morgan, Paine, Plate 2010: 209).

The study of 'relational materiality' is partially grounded in Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT), which examines the relationships between different actors in 'matrixes of components', networks, or assemblages (Hazard 2013; Hodder 2014, 23). In a romantic relationship, partners share, interact, and gradually transform one another. The same goes for the intricate relationship between humans and objects. An object does not merely subject to the volition of the all-powerful human which is able to imbue it with all sorts of meanings and values, but it garners a new identity and becomes something different in the relationship with humans. The physical matter of the object and human might remain the same, but the metaphysical identities of objects and humans change. Bill Brown (2001, 4) argues that in these changing relationships with humans, objects become things. These relationships are what make objects into valuable things (ibid., 5). Value is not something attributed to the object top-down. Rather, value is made in the becoming of the person with an object in an assemblage,³ involving culture, economics, politics, and religion. Studying the relationships between humans and things – like those between objects from churches which have to close down and the humans who engage with these items – and the ways in which objects enter into new relationships through movements is what Appadurai (1986, 5) calls studying 'things-in-motion'. The analysis of things and their relations with people, requires

3 The notion of 'becoming' or 'becoming-with' emerges from multispecies theory. The concept describes how species interact and, in those interactions, break the boundaries of their species' being. They construct and become different self through interaction with another animal. A human who domesticates a horse, for example, gives a new identity to both the horse, who becomes a horse-with-human, and the human, who becomes a human-with-horse (Despret 2004, 122; see also: Haraway 2008; Helmreich & Kirksey, 2010).

a certain amount of *methodological fetishism* – imbuing the items with agency (ibid.), but can shed light on the social contexts or economies in which these things circulate.

Before a Catholic church in Utrecht closes down, an expert from Museum Catharijneconvent's *Erfgoed in Kerken en Kloosters* (Heritage in Churches and Convents; EKK) department comes to update the inventory with a church administrator. They follow the 'Guidelines on Ways of Dealing with Religious Objects', a document which was published in 2011 as part of a collaboration between (religious) heritage agencies and both Protestant and Catholic church institutions. The document contains a four-page heritage assessment form, which has to be filled in for every important item present in the inventory of the church. For every item, a number of values have to be filled in: the 'actual value' (relating to the contemporaneous emotional and religious use of the object), a number of historical values (art-historical, church-historical, and general historical), and some comparative criteria (values relating to its rarity, physical state, and whether it is part of an ensemble of items). Each value has to be categorized 'high', 'moderate', or 'low', and a description of this valuation has to be given, both for a national and a local level. As such, the valuation process of objects from churches is highly formalized and influences how and where an object will be repurposed. Consecrated items, for example, can only be reused in another church or, if that is not possible, have to be destroyed.

Objects from churches can be consecrated (chapter 2), meaning that a ritual can be held in order to move an object from the sphere of the profane to the sphere of the sacred. The sacred, in the Durkheimian sense, is a realm which is set apart from the 'profane', the everyday, the normal. In Durkheim's ([1912] 2001) understanding, the sacred is *superimposed* on the profane through ritual, and not a physical space existing in the world (see also Vásquez 2010, 263). Everything can be made sacred through the process of 'sacralization', in which objects, images, and people can become 'sacred' through "intensive interpretation and regular ritualization" (Chidester 2018, 34). Following the 'traces of the sacred', the objective of this study is to track what happens to the object and its sacredness when that object is forced to leave a church due to its closure.

Sacralization is a specific way of valuation which generates "a surplus of signification and a surplus of power that can be claimed but also contested in struggles over the ownership of the sacred" (Chidester 2014, 240). This becomes apparent in the rules and regulations regarding church objects as well: they are specifically designed to prevent certain objects from falling in the wrong hands for fear of profanation or 'unworthy use'. These items, now obsolete for the original owners in the closed-down church, can be categorized as 'sacred waste'. Anthropologist Irene Stengs launched this concept to describe how the remainders of public memorials, like flowers or cuddly toys, are difficult to get rid of since they are reminders of tragedies, imbued with meaning. They are "material residues and surpluses that cannot be disposed of as just garbage (or rubble), but neither can be kept or left alone" (Stengs 2014, 235). This form of waste demand 'special

treatment' in some way: it has to be properly dealt with, either through a ritual desacralization or it has to be reused in a 'worthy' setting. This explains that some consecrated items can end up in heritage museums, since this is seen as a worthy destination, or have to undergo the ritual of destruction. Still, a 'surplus of signification' which has to be dealt with is not the only problem. There is also a surplus of goods available due to the large number of churches closing down at the moment. Some items are not consecrated, not of interest to museums, and less valuable for their original owners. At the same time, selling them or throwing them away is also not an option. Unused church objects become 'matter-out-of-place', dirt, as Mary Douglas (1966, 36-37) defines it. They fall outside the normal systems commonly used by people to classify matter. They cannot remain church-objects, cannot become heritage-objects, but neither can be 'just' thrown in the garbage because of the surplus of signification that is imbued in them. Annette Weiner (1992, 33) calls these objects 'inalienable possessions': "[T]heir unique, subjective identity gives them absolute value placing them above the exchangeability of one thing for another." When these objects are on the move, the sacredness remains stuck to them. If value is generated in affective relationships between humans and things, this 'stickiness' (Ahmed 2004) of value can show where objects have travelled, and which relationships humans and objects have engaged in. We can study an object's history of valuation "through what it has gathered onto its surface" (Ahmed 2004, 92). Reuse of church objects in different contexts, such as in museums (chapter 3) or in private homes and as café decorations (chapter 4) revalues these items in specific ways (Isenhour & Reno 2019, 2). Reusing 'waste', argue anthropologists Cindy Isenhour and Joshua Reno, has a lasting impact on the humans who engage in this form of care for things. "[R]emaking used materials also means remaking the self" (ibid., 3) Reuse transforms the objects and their users through establishing new contacts and relationships, making them both part of new *regimes of value*.

The meaning and function of a church object changes significantly when it moves, for example, into a museum. The moment of movement from one context constitutes a transformation in the context of an 'exchange'. Building on sociologist Georg Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*, Arjun Appadurai argues that exchanges are not just moments wherein reflection on value is required but are the moments wherein value is actually created (Appadurai 1986, 56). Although this understanding of value neglects the 'stickiness' of value that results from a history of exchanges, it points to the importance of the moment of exchange in the life of an object. Different kinds of exchanges can take place, and therefore different sorts of valuation exist and can be traced, of which sacralization is a sticky form which is especially important for church objects. In this study, I focus predominantly on what anthropologist Igor Kopytoff calls 'singularized items'. These items are the opposites of commodities, "things that are publicly *precluded* from being commoditized" (Kopytoff 1986, 73, emphasis added). Resisting commodification, they circulate outside of monetized economies. Art objects are fruitful examples of this: although they are subject to commodification and are bought and sold as status symbols

on high-class auctions, they remain outside the realm of the strictly commercial: “[A]rt’ has been situated in the West as a category of redemptive value, distinct from money and discrete from other sociocultural values” (Myers 2002, 7). Church objects are treated similarly. Although they are not regularly treated as commodities, and despite the fact that rules and regulations are in place to prevent them from being commoditized, eventually they do end up on commercial markets where their value has to be expressed in financial terms (chapter 4).



Figure 2 The market hall of the 'Relimarkt'. Photo by author.

To enable circulation in commercial markets means to commoditize the church objects. The values that these objects have been imbued with over the course of their 'lives' have to be converted into a monetary prize. According to Appadurai, this is what all economies do: they tend to “expand the jurisdiction of commoditization” of objects (1986, 17). Appadurai’s claim can be placed in a very Marxist perspective. Marx sees the transformations that the objects themselves undergo in this ‘translation’ as alchemic: it turns common elements into gold. “Not even the bones of saints [are] able to withstand this alchemy” (Marx [1889] 2013, 108). This is apparent in the lives of objects from decommissioned churches as well: statues, icons, and crucifixes for which another purpose in a different church cannot be found can be sold to parishioners or on the market. To counter this, rules and regulations, grounded in the traditions and laws of the church, were articulated and mobilized in order to restrict circulation in commercial markets (chapter 2). Nonetheless, for many objects from closed-down churches, the commercial market is

the only suitable place where they can be reused – precisely because money is generated there. Although churches and museums would rather store objects from churches indefinitely, this is only possible for a small number of privileged singularized items. The rest is required to be transformed into commodities or has to be destroyed. Items originally meant for other purposes but nonetheless undergo this transformation into commodities can be called *commodities of metamorphosis* or *commodities of diversion*, if they are specifically protected from being commoditized but become commoditized anyway (Appadurai 1986, 16). Although both categories resonate with the state many church objects find themselves in today, neither of these categories directly apply to the commodification of objects from closed down churches. In the 1960's, many objects which are today retrospectively considered 'sacred', were actually thrown out of churches quite carelessly (see chapter 1). While at the time they did not deserve any special protection from commoditization, today the commercial trade in (art-historically acclaimed or sacred) statues and chalices is frowned upon, both by heritage agencies and by the Roman Catholic church. Although they make for nice decorations in a home or café, this is not what they are intended for and their commodification is therefore deemed unworthy.

This study traces the journeys of objects from churches – sediments in the streams — down the mountain of space and time. They are carried along by different currents, come across dams, and meet other sediments when these currents converge. In this study, I refer to these different currents as economies. In commercial economies, exchanges of goods and services are mediated through money. When people require a thing or service, money – which is imbued with value – mediates in this relationship. In the ecclesiastical and heritage economy, church items are the currency through which exchange is mediated. The value of church objects themselves is not set, but the items do structure “an ongoing relationship between human and divine” (Morgan 2015, 74). People want something from the deities they worship, and the deities want something back. The system of exchange in which these objects mediate, Morgan calls a 'sacred economy'. When a church object has to be removed from the church and its ecclesiastical economy, a different kind of exchange takes place. It has to be transferred across the boundary of the ecclesiastical economy, and move into a different economy. It becomes part of the heritage economy when it moves to a museum, or of the commercial economy when it begins to circulate on the market. Objects and people enter into new relationships in these economies, and the objects begin to carry new values and meanings. The goal of this study is to trace how objects are valued and revalued across these different economies through the relationships that people and church objects engage in. How are the latter protected from profanation by the application of rules and regulations? Which mechanisms are in place to prevent items from circulating freely on commercial markets? How is conversion from an ecclesiastical to a heritage economy regulated and which values are highlighted in the objects before and after their transfer across these two economies? Can objects from churches get rid of the sacredness which 'sticks' to them, and if so,

how? How are objects (re)sacralized across various economies? In the coming chapters, I will track the movements of objects to explain the complex dynamics of exchanges of church objects within and across economies.

A material lens on secularization

The material framework taken up in this study also offers a lens into processes of secularization. The rapid decommissioning and repurposing of churches and the items inside them, cannot be seen separately from the rise in church construction in the Netherlands during the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Beekers 2017, 175). In fact, in the 1960's the Dutch were considered one of the most Christian peoples in Europe (van Rooden 2004), whereas today the country is highly secularized in terms of religious affiliation.⁴ 'Religious heritage' becomes increasingly important and its collection and indexation is sponsored by the state. Museum Catharijneconvent, for example, received money from the government to index religious heritage, and almost 70% of the available budget for the repurposing of buildings and monuments goes to churches and monasteries.⁵ I will return to the ways in which objects from churches are valued and employed in the heritage museum explicitly in chapter 3, but here I want to highlight the importance of the heritage dimension to the lives of church objects here.

Historically, churches and states have been part of codependent relationships: "[C]hurches rely on states for definition, protection, infrastructure, recognition, and financial or legal rights, while states take from the church the aesthetics of monumentality and permanence, the solemnity of legal-ritual formalities to grant legitimacy to governance and transmission of powers, and the time-weathered aura of tradition" (Johnsson, Klassen & Sullivan 2018, 4). With the declining authority of the church in many North-West European countries and other countries across the world, Christian religion is increasingly relegated to the realm of culture. This is clear in Spain as well, where "the place of religion as a marker of national unity is in question", which has launched a discourse emphasizing the importance of 'religious heritage' (Astor, Burchardt & Grieria 2017). The same goes for Québec in Canada, where not only is Catholicism relegated to the realm of culture and identity (Burchardt 2017), but claims made by Indigenous inhabitants of the area to a part of that identity are erased and reframed (Klassen 2015). Christianity as culture does not merely inform national identity, it also reinforces colonization in

⁴ A recent study by the national statistical bureau shows that just over half of the Dutch population (>15 years of age) does not ascribe to a religious movement (<https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2018/43/meer-dan-de-helft-nederlanders-niet-religieus>) Accessed August 22, 2019.

⁵ National Heritage Agency program manager Frank Strolenberg mentioned this during the *Bouwhistorisch Platform* meeting held February 20, 2019. An additional €325.000.000 will be assigned to heritage in the national budget as well: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2018/06/22/nieuw-leven-voor-erfgoed> Accessed August 22, 2019.

certain areas. In the Netherlands, sociologists argue that identity and belonging are increasingly framed in cultural terms involving the same kind of reframing and forgetting: “Women’s and gay rights are traced to the country’s ‘Judeo-Christian roots’ rather than the outcome of struggle *against* social doctrines informed by conservative Christian morality” (Tonkens & Duyvendak 2016, 10, emphasis added). Reference to ‘Judeo-Christian’ roots or traditions are often part of a right-wing political discourse, used to exclude certain groups of people—and most predominantly people adhering to Islam—from access to the imagined national identity (van den Hemel 2013).

Heritage plays an instrumental role in the materialization of belonging and identity and can partially substitute the function of the church in this regard. In religious heritage museums such as Museum Catharijneconvent, art and religion are increasingly conflated. “Signs of Christianity appear to move so fluidly between the categories of ‘religious’, ‘secular’, and ‘cultural’”, writes Elayne Oliphant (2015, 355-356). She argues that art-and-heritage-viewing practices in museums constitute ‘secular rituals’, meaning that items in museums can be sacralized through ‘intensive interpretation and regular ritualization’ as well. Birgit Meyer and Marleen de Witte (2013, 277) refer to this process as the ‘sacralization of heritage’. They see this as a concurrent process to what they call ‘heritagization of the sacred’, the previously described process wherein churches and objects from churches become important to national identity and belonging through a process of heritagization. To analyze these processes, they propose to focus on the ‘politics of authentication’ and the ‘aesthetics of persuasion’ (ibid., 276). The way in which heritage is authenticated involves the (discursive) inclusion and exclusion of certain ‘heritage communities’, through collection and exhibition practices. Exhibition practices especially are part of and materialize “political-aesthetic regimes that appeal to the senses, emotions and intellect and hence are central to the making of culture and heritage” (van de Port & Meyer 2018, 24). The aesthetic, visual, or sensational (Meyer 2015, 19) regimes that are maintained in heritage museums, are part of a separate economy wherein objects and images flow into new relationships. The heritage industry, Sally Butler argues, trades in desire and mediates a carefully constructed imagined past. Museums create illusions that decrease “awareness of the discrepancy between past and present fueled by visitors’ desire to apprehend or consume the past beyond the passage of time” (Butler 2018, 56). Notwithstanding recent temporary exhibitions that focus on comparison between religions, in the permanent exhibition of Museum Catharijneconvent (and some other museums that display Dutch ‘religious heritage’ items) the constructed past centralizes Christianity as the common denominator of Dutchness (see also Cuperus 2019). The ‘sacralization of heritage’ and the functioning of these objects as mediators in a ‘heritage’ economy, means that church objects can become part of another ‘sacred economy’ wherein the divine is substituted for an imagined past and a common identity of Dutchness. In this study, I will carefully examine the exhibition and valuing practices of Museum Catharijneconvent to understand how the transition

of church objects into the heritage economy can help to materialize these constructed histories and identities.



Figure 3 Permanent exhibition hall at Museum Catharijneconvent. Photo by author

Methods

This study combines several qualitative research methods with the goal to reconstruct the processes of repurposing objects from Roman Catholic churches in the Netherlands to other churches, museums, and markets. Between May 2018 and June 2019, I conducted fieldwork consisting of participant observation and interviews, and analyses of various policies and documents dealing with the repurposing of ‘religious heritage’. All these methods together aimed to construct a ‘cultural biography’, following the life of items throughout their social trajectories (Kopytoff 1986), which proved to be a challenging enterprise. The lives of objects are long, and an item can be commissioned, interpreted, forgotten, found, made meaningful, and lose its value all in a matter of years. The abundance of objects on the ‘religious heritage-market’ is enormous, which means that selecting certain objects to follow proved impossible. Therefore, I shifted my attention to different ways in which value is created and maintained in the interactions between people and objects.

Museum Catharijneconvent, as a national museum, has various policies for collection and exhibition in place which discursively privilege and exclude certain objects and groups of people

from participating in the sacred economy of (religious) heritage. The previously mentioned ‘Guidelines on Ways of Dealing with Religious Objects’ document has been especially useful to understand both the position of the museum and the church in the process of repurposing objects from churches and the negotiations between these parties. Because of my focus on Roman Catholic churches in the city of Utrecht, I also used guidelines from the Utrecht diocese. I read these guidelines against their underlying motivations from Roman Catholic Canon Law. Even though my experience in reading and interpreting these laws and basic understanding of Catholic theology is limited, this proved a useful source to understand why these objects are deemed valuable from the perspective of ‘the Church’. In December of 2018, the Vatican issued a document containing guidelines on “Decommissioning and Ecclesiastical Reuse of Churches”, the result of the episcopal conference on Roman Catholic heritage held in the preceding month. Although these texts and the discursive analysis of them has proven very useful to understand the overall repurposing process and some of the reasons why certain rules and regulations exist, they show little about the ‘messiness’ in practice that rules and guidelines often quite effectively hide. In-depth interviews were therefore a big part of supplementing the understandings of these texts.

Ten semi-structured interviews with nine different people were conducted, most of them were recorded, transcribed, and coded using qualitative data analysis and research software *Atlas.ti*. Church administrators and wardens, a parish priest, and various (former) museum staff participated in the initial interviews, which varied in length between fifty-four and ninety-seven minutes. Although a broader and more extensive range of interlocutors including officials from the municipality (who play a role in the repurposing process through licensing the removal of heritage objects from churches) and parishioners from various congregations (who often engage in intimate and lasting relationships with church objects) would have improved the quality of the collected data, the limited timespan of this research did not allow for this. Especially initiating a lasting relationship with parishioners, who were often mourning the loss of their church and their community, was difficult. Therefore, during the interviews in churches, I focused predominantly on object-related stories. All of the interviews with church-affiliated interlocutors were held in church buildings and rectories. This allowed the participants, although limited in number, to – often unprompted – point to objects and interior elements of buildings and tell a great deal about them. Two interviews, an interview with the former parish priest of Utrecht and an interview with an art-historian and former museum curator, are used in this study as oral history narrations. Some of their statements are supported by literature or newspaper articles, but others come from their own expertise and experiences. In some cases, the line between interview and participant observation became opaque. My two days of fieldwork in the Relimarkt consisted of informal chats with customers, the owner, and volunteers. I wrote extensive fieldnotes after each visit to the Relimarkt, and used news articles and online sources to complement my observations and the stories which were shared there. Newspapers proved very useful in understanding the broader

context of unchurched and heritage collection, with *toekomstreligieuserfgoed.nl* (future of religious heritage), a recent initiative by the *Rijksdienst Cultureel Erfgoed* (National Cultural Heritage Agency, RCE), providing many of the resources. I visited several events (co-)organized by the RCE, among which the *Bouwhistorisch Platform* (Platform for the Archeology of Buildings) where various church buildings and the historical research which informs their valuation were discussed. This meeting took place on February 20, 2019. I also attended and participated in several workshops at the *Kerkenbeurs* (Church Fair), which is an annual event that brings together heritage agencies and commercial parties involved with churches such as furnishers, insurance agencies, and light- and sound design, held in Utrecht on March 22 and 23, 2019. I also visited the Gertrudiskerk ‘Open Day’ on May 26, 2018, and was able to meet and speak with some members of the remaining community that day and a few weeks later following my interview with the administrator of that church.

The combination of these methods of collaborative research, supplemented by the visual method of taking photographs during these events, proved a helpful addition to the more text-based research methods detailed above. In some instances, it was possible to reconstruct parts of a cultural biography of objects, always through the relationships of people with these objects. In the interaction with people, objects are able to nest themselves into human memories, which makes them accessible to research by proxy. Another set of methods which proved useful to engage in as a protestant-raised, non-practicing agnostic scholar of religion such as me, where buying and touching. This helped to gain an approximate understanding of the sacredness and high value that some items hold for pious Catholics. The moment that I bought the crucifix as described in the introduction to this section, was the first time that I consciously held and touched such a devotional object, something which felt uneasy, since I only observed these items in the contexts of churches, museums, or roadside shrines on holiday in the Alps before. My first visit to the Relimarkt was interesting in this aspect as well, because I did not dare to touch anything. After getting accustomed to the interactions that staff and customers to the Relimarkt had with the objects, on my second day I dared to touch, grab, or even lift the tabernacles, chalices, and statues. Although I will never be able to entirely ‘grasp’ the meaning that these objects have to a pious Catholic who receives the blood of Christ from a chalice or to a museum curator who deeply appreciates the artistry in relation to its maker, these methods together have certainly deepened my understanding of what these items mean for people, how they are valued in interactions with people, and to which regimes they are held by people.

Structure

In order to answer the questions how objects from churches engage in relationships with humans, how they are valued in these relationships, and how they circulate in and across different

economies, this thesis is structured along the lines of the different economies which I have studied. While the first chapter aims to contextualize current events, the subsequent chapters will show how objects are valued and how they ‘flow’ through the respective contexts of the church, museum, and commercial market. The first chapter focuses on the historical context of repurposing objects from churches. The history of Roman Catholicism in the Netherlands is very rich, and the current situation in which many church buildings have to close down and, as a result, have to repurpose their possessions cannot be understood without regard for the diverse Roman Catholic devotional practices and the objects accompanying this devotion throughout Dutch history. This chapter will show the interconnectedness of church buildings with both the materials inside the churches, and personal devotional culture. In the interbellum Netherlands, a lifestyle known as *het Rijke Roomsche Leven* (the Rich Roman-Catholic Life) emerged and informed a unique and very public expression of religious belonging with its own accompanying material culture.⁶ As mentioned above, more recently a focus on Christianity as part of Dutch national identity has increased. This has not only led to more attention for ‘religious’ heritage in general, but also figures into a predominantly right-wing political discourse which employs Christianity in opposition to (Islamic) Others.

The second chapter will introduce ‘the Church’ as a main stakeholder in the process of repurposing and valuing objects from churches. The Vatican and the diocese in Utrecht have rules regarding the proper ways to deal with ‘movable goods’ once a church closes down. Different classes of objects require different ways of handling, but it is sometimes unclear to which class objects belong. Although various interlocutors who administer the process of repurposing church objects strictly adhere to the official guidelines of the church, at the same time their personal relationships with objects show that these guidelines cannot capture the complexity of values that are connected to these items. The notion of sacralization is central in these discussions: consecrated objects have a special set of official rules which apply to them, but objects which are not consecrated can acquire similar values and meanings through their relationship with people, or even by virtue of their mere presence in a church building. Because not every object is valued the same, a large number of items cannot be kept, but neither thrown away. These objects become unusable because of their abundance, but are neither eligible to be thrown away because of their relative sacredness. I analyze church and diocesan policies and juxtapose them with the personal relationships that people and objects exhibit throughout the repurposing process. Rules and guidelines discursively construct the ‘nature’ of church objects and inform the ways in which they are recorded in the ecclesiastical economy. I focus especially

⁶ See <https://wierookwijwaterenworstenbrood.nl> for an extensive library of stories, practices, and items relating to this important period which was especially visible in the southern Dutch provinces of Brabant and Limburg. Accessed August 22, 2019.

on the ways in which objects are sacralized, and how rules and regulation attempt to prevent ‘profanation’ of the objects.

Chapter three focuses on the heritage museum and on the ways in which heritage is sacralized in the heritage economy. Museum Catharijneconvent assists churches with the indexation and valuation of their movable goods, and hosts databases for object and value registration. On its website, the museum also hosts a “supply-and-demand” page where churches and other affiliated instances can post items available for repurpose. Museum staff curates these databases and mediates in the exchange of church objects between organizations. The museum does not have an explicit stake in the process: the goal is not to acquire objects for its own collection. The way in which the museum values and displays objects in its exhibitions, can however tell us a lot about the importance of heritage in a national perspective. Here, I will show how some objects with the ability to represent narratives about Dutch history can acquire the status of heritage, and how they are sacralized in this process of becoming heritage through cataloging and exhibiting.

The final chapter deals with the question how the value of objects from churches can be expressed in financial terms. Focusing on the recently opened Relimarkt in Limburg, a predominantly Catholic region in the Netherlands, I will examine the ways in which the shop staff relates to objects from churches and how they see commodification of these objects as a way of preservation. Starting as a collector of statues, the owner opened his first museum in the town of Vaals near the Belgian-German border in 2008. Set in an old convent chapel, with an accompanying thematically decorated restaurant, he always offered some of his statues on sale in the reception space and online. After temporarily using another church as his depot, he acquired a second-hand store in 2018 where he started his Relimarkt. He sells the objects which he has no use for, in order to finance his hobby of statue and art collection, so he can buy more beautiful and more important pieces for his museums. Arguing that the objects he sells would have been thrown away if he did not have them, the market is a place where ‘sacred waste’ can be revalued and gain a second life as decorative and nostalgic objects. This chapter will show how affect and nostalgia figure into this marginalized category of objects ‘which nobody seems to want’.

1 ‘Jesus made for good chalk’

“Cardinal Eijk’s ‘home church’ in Utrecht has to close its doors”, reads the headline of news agency RTV Utrecht in May of 2018.

The move is a sad moment for people who sometimes went to this church their entire life, comments [parish board member] Blom-Van Oostrum. “Especially for believers this is a painful process. For many regular attendants, the church has a lot of emotional value in the family context. Some families have baptized their children and married here for generations.” Closing a Catholic church is not easy. The parish will propose the closure to the bishop [Cardinal Eijk], who in turn has to present the request to the Vatican in Rome. There it will be decided if the church can close. (*RTV Utrecht*, May 28, 2018, *translation mine*)

At the time that this article was published, the church board had already commenced negotiations with Museum Catharijneconvent. The museum is housed in the former convent of which the cathedral (devoted to Saint Catherine of Alexandria) was historically part. Museum management was enthusiastic about the prospects of assuming the church back into the convent complex. The news of the cathedral’s prospective closure did however lead to a lot of commotion within Utrecht’s catholic community. “The church is still in use” says Ton Fonville, a parish member and church administrator of a different church in Utrecht, “before that all changes, the bishop has to approve it. [...] It is all in a rather early stage, but it already came out. Way too early, actually.”⁷ On the forums and opinion pages of Utrecht’s online newspaper DUIC, the news led to a lot of response from parishioners and other persons loosely involved. A petition to keep the church in its current use was signed by over 2000 people, according to the petitioners⁸. The church, which is only a few minutes by foot from the main tourist attraction in the city, Utrecht’s Domkerk (Saint Martin’s Cathedral, currently a Protestant church), came in the public limelight. The church housed a small parish and some irregular visitors from Saint Augustine’s church, which at the time of writing is undergoing renovations. Judging by the petition and engagement with the news of its

⁷ “Ja, de Catharijnekkerk wordt ook nog gebruikt [...]. Eer dat dat allemaal anders wordt, want die bisschop die moet goedkeuring geven. [...] Nou ja, dat is allemaal nog in een primair stadium, maar het is naar buiten gekomen. Eigenlijk veel te vroeg, maar ja” TF-060618

⁸ <https://petities.nl/petitions/behoud-catharinakathedraal-voor-bisdom-utrecht?locale=nl> Accessed August 22, 2019

closure, the attention for the church increased significantly: its character as a public heritage site important to Utrecht's inhabitants was emphasized while the interests of the community using the building for religious purposes were downplayed. In March of 2019, probably under pressure from Rome⁹, the bishop retracted the plans to sell the building and vowed to keep it in use, at least for the time being.

In the wake of the news of closing, the church became a public good. Contestations over ownership developed in the public debate. A question arose: to who does the church belong? Parish members, who started the petition? The parish board, who decided to propose the closure to the bishop? Utrecht's inhabitants, who signed the petition and expressed both disdain for the plans and approval in Facebook and forum comments? The Dutch government, who declared the church to be a national monument? The question of ownership is central when a church closes down. In December of 2008, a report was released by a committee made up of two Dutch dioceses and the research committee (Belvedere) of the Dutch ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW) which claimed that in the last forty years, over nine hundred church buildings had closed down, and made the careful prediction that before 2019 another 1200 would follow (Bisdom Haarlem, Bisdom Rotterdam, Projectbureau Belvedere 2008, 7). This would mean that two or three churches would close down every week (see also Beekers 2017, 163). While actual numbers seem to be a bit lower, at around one church per week (Eggenkamp et al., 2018), this still means that in the last decade around five hundred churches have been either repurposed or demolished. Almost 1400 of the 6900 churches in the Netherlands, Christian newspaper *Trouw* reported recently, 'are not a church anymore' (van der Breggen & de Fijter 2019). The closure of a church forces parishioners to not only repurpose the building, but also the objects inside. Ownership discussions frame itself along similar terms in this context, with the notable exception that objects inside the buildings are far less publicly visible than the buildings themselves. The church building might be a focal point for the neighborhood (Beekers 2017), the skyline of the city and its 'religioscape' (Hayden and Walker 2013), or function as materializations of religion as part of a national identity (Astor, Burchardt & Grier 2017), but the objects inside have remained rather hidden throughout the ages. Notwithstanding attempts by heritage agencies such as Museum Catharijneconvent to focus the attention of legislators on church interiors and not just the buildings themselves, movable objects from churches continue to be neglected in policies and debates.

In the last decades, Catholic communities in Utrecht have undergone many institutional changes. Although the Utrecht parishes together have over twenty-nine thousand members, only eleven hundred regularly attend services, forcing some communities to merge¹⁰. Every

⁹ From interview CS-070619

¹⁰ <https://katholiekutrecht.nl/over-ons/wie-zijn-wij/> Accessed August 22, 2019.

neighborhood used to have its own church and parish, but between 2008 and 2010 most of these churches merged into three parishes: Saint Martin unites churches in the south and east neighborhoods of Utrecht, Saint Ludger in north and west, and Saint Salvator in Utrecht's inner city. Although many of the church buildings remained in use and the communities could remain where they are, managerial oversight was merged. In 2017, these three city parishes established a *Personele Unie* (personal union), which established one parish board covering all the parishes and their churches in the city. The union was established in anticipation of a new merger between the three city parishes. Of the eleven remaining Roman Catholic churches under their jurisdiction at the time of writing, several churches are either up for sale or are not used for Eucharist services anymore. This means that, in time, most of the objects inside these churches will have to be repurposed too. In this context, the value of items from these churches become contested.

In order to situate the phenomenon in question, where many objects from churches suddenly become mobile, this chapter provides a history of Roman Catholicism and its material culture in the Netherlands. It aims to contextualize how the material remnants of Christianity in the Netherlands have become eligible as 'religious heritage', by placing these items in a history of ever-changing importance and value. First, I will discuss the broader historical context of the place of religion in Dutch society on a national level. Historical antagonism between Catholicism and Protestantism since the Reformation changed and shaped Dutch religiosity. I will show how secularization and 'de-churching' happening in the contemporary moment are part of a long history of changes in the religious-political landscape which has included iconoclasm, repression of non-Calvinist Christian denominations, and socio-cultural segregation of people on basis of their religion or worldview. Second, I will focus the materiality and valuation of objects of personal piety in Dutch Roman Catholicism. Objects, ranging from as large as churches to as small as rosaries, have been used and reused, made and destroyed across history. Devotional objects have played a large role in shaping Catholicism in the Netherlands and have changed in relation to the broader socio-political context. Recent changes in liturgical practices, effectuated by the Second Vatican Council held in the 1960's, and dematerialized personal devotional practices have contributed to an abundance of religious objects available on the 'religious heritage' market today.

Iconoclasm and exclusion

August 1566. The preacher known as 'Squinting Gerrit' holds a sermon in the fields outside Utrecht's southern *Tolsteeg* gate, the designated place for Protestants to gather as they are not allowed to congregate in the city itself. The message apparently hits close to home. Shortly after the service some of Gerrit's followers, likely provoked upon seeing guild members carry precious

items from de Geertekerk (Saint Gertrude's church) to safety, enter the parish church and commence the destruction of altars and images (Staal 2007, 315). At the same time in the city hall, several Protestants request to speak 'in friendship' to mayor Johannes Bol and ask him to hand over two churches for the Protestants to preach in (Kleijntjes and Campen 1932, 67). Mayor Bol keeps postponing judgment on the issue, and small factions of Protestants keep on rioting. Over the course of a weekend the interiors of four parish churches and two monasteries were demolished, after which Bol was quick to grant the Protestants a church for their worship.

October 2017. The Sint Jacobuskerk (dedicated to Saint James) in Utrecht celebrates its final Eucharistic service. The church had to be sold due to its financial situation. In the months leading up to the transfer, a representative of the church has been busy, repurposing all the objects inside the church. People from other Roman Catholic churches have come into the church and taken with them statues, crucifixes, chalices, and banners. Not all objects could be saved. A tabernacle was too heavy to lift and therefore had to be demolished by a demolition company. The high altar suffered the same fate and got demolished in order to safely remove the relics kept inside it. Today the choir houses not an altar but the stage of the self-proclaimed 'contemporary' *Best Life Church*, a Protestant evangelical church community who bought the building and vastly remodeled it (Beekers 2018).

These two periods in history have similar characteristics: removal and destruction of interior elements, transfer of ownership, and remodeling of the church by the new owner. The historical and social contexts in which these 'iconoclasm' took place are however vastly different. Iconoclasm has played a large role in Dutch history, and the destruction of images is very important to understand the value of religious images because destruction can contribute to disenchantment. David Morgan (2018, 75) argues that iconoclasm is a political process with the explicit intention to disenchant. Destruction removes the sacredness from an object: when a statue or image is physically destroyed, it is rendered worthless as currency in a sacred economy because it cannot longer mediate in the exchange between human and divine. Exactly because objects can be powerful mediators, however, the urge to destroy them also acknowledges their value: "[T]hose destroying an image in an iconoclastic act actually produce it as idol" (Meyer 2019, 85). There is an interesting tension between the Reformation Iconoclastic Fury (*Beeldenstorm*) where Protestants claimed their right to churches by destroying the interiors of Catholic churches, and the current situation where people feel tempted to destroy their own objects to protect them from profanation.¹¹ The post-Reformation iconoclasm demonstrate that in the violent clashes

¹¹ <http://www.urban-sacred.org/amsterdam-chasse/> Accessed August 22, 2019

between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism in the Netherlands, objects are imbued with value through destruction and preservation.

The first example, about the destruction of images in the Geertekerk, is often understood to be part of one of the first waves of the so-called *beeldenstorm* (Iconoclastic Fury) in the Netherlands. The term *beeldenstorm* literally translates to ‘storming of statues’ or – from the German equivalent *Bildersturm* — ‘storm on images’ (Morgan 2015, 45). While the term ‘iconoclasm’ in this context is warranted, the term ‘fury’ is up for debate. The history of events during the *beeldenstorm* in Utrecht shows that four parish churches and two convents were, quite systematically and efficiently, demolished over the course of a weekend (Staal 2007, 315). Witness reports at the time record how the ‘stormers’ promised to deposit valuable items at the city hall, and that the sacristan of the Geertekerk noted down the names of those participating in the ‘Fury’ in order to compensate them later on (Kleijntjes and Campen 1932). Although it is unclear whether the *beeldenstorm* in Utrecht was orchestrated and controlled, there is ample evidence of communication about the events themselves. Churches and images were not destroyed in a collective frenzy, but with intent.

The 1566 wave of iconoclasm can be characterized as a reactionary act regarding the perceived injustice of the non-acceptance of the Protestant religion within Utrecht’s city walls. The intended purpose of these iconoclasms was to show Catholics how ‘dumb’ their idols were and how their relics did not have any inherent power (Staal 2007, 316). This first wave of iconoclasm did not yet impact the Domkerk, which at the time was the seat of the bishop, and other collegiate churches in the city. Although the 1566 reports show that collegiate churches were not necessarily off-bounds, they were left alone at the time (Kleijntjes and Campen 1932, 73). In part this was due to protection by the rulers of the city, who were predominantly Catholic. In order to defend “a sense of civic unity” (Spaans 1999, 149), Catholics did not mobilize to protect themselves against the Protestants, because a comparison to the Roman Catholic French and Spanish enemies would be unfavorable. Mayor Bol gave in to the destructive acts and the demands of the Protestants quickly, granting them a church to convene in. The iconoclasm seems to have ceased or quickly tune down after the Protestants gained this *de facto* right to preach. When in 1580 the city officially converted to Protestantism, the collegiate churches, including the Domkerk, were also converted. Another iconoclasm ensued, this time with the character of a cleansing: the purpose was to remodel the churches to make them suitable for Protestant worship, to claim a space and make it into a place suited to the needs of the community using it. Denying the validity of Catholic beliefs and practices seems to have had little to do with this form of destruction. A characteristic which is shared by the 1566 and 1580 movement is found in the systematic character of the destructions. Both movements worked fast and efficient. What is important to note about these developments, is that in both the 1566 and 1580 waves of iconoclasm, the number of participants was quite small, but the acts of destruction were largely

public. During the French occupation of the Netherlands, in 1662, Catholics regained control over the Domkerk after which they publicly burnt the pulpit and pews on the square outside the church (Vanhaelen 2005, 362). The public character of these iconoclasm reveals that the act of destruction inadvertently acknowledges the value of that which is attacked or criticized.

Notwithstanding the acts of iconoclasm during French occupation, the Calvinist Dutch Reformed church has largely remained the privileged church since the 1580's. Catholics, often referred to as 'papists' because of their alleged loyalty to the pope which was deemed incompatible with loyalty to the Dutch Republic (see Locke [1685] 1983), were not allowed to publicly express their religious affiliation from 1581 on (Bergsma 1995, 203). In lieu of using public churches for their worship, Catholics and other non-Calvinists such as Lutherans, Socinians, and Mennonites, were dependent on what have later been called *schuilkerken* (literally 'shelter churches', more commonly known as 'hidden' or 'clandestine' churches). These churches were not unbeknownst to the ruling elites and legislators, but worship there was 'tolerated', especially in places where Catholics were numerous or maintained close friendly relationships with the Calvinists authorities (Spaans 2013, 19-20). The toleration of the use and existence of clandestine churches, historian Benjamin Kaplan (2007, 176) argues, predominantly safeguarded a common identity among the members of the recently established republic. Diversion from the norm of Dutch Calvinism was relegated to the private realm, allowing people to have a certain degree of freedom in exercising their religion. In public, visual expressions of Catholicism were not allowed. Only allowing public expressions of Calvinism, the church maintained a monopoly around which a common Dutch identity could be formed and preserved.

Eleven Catholic *schuilkerken* were established in Utrecht (ibid., 174), of which two have survived to this day: the Gertrudiskapel (Saint Gertrudes chapel), which is currently connected to the Old-Catholic Gertrudiskathedraal, and Maria Minor around two hundred meters due north of this chapel, which is currently home to a popular café. The Gertrudiskapel was not only a refuge for Catholics who continued to practice their faith, but also to a number of important objects and relics from Catholic churches across Utrecht. In the period preceding a second wave of Reformation-related iconoclasm in Utrecht in 1580, many precious objects from the treasury of the Domkerk were melted down. Apparently, the treasury served as an insurance for the community as well: it was war time after all. Only some objects, most predominantly relics without much shimmering gold and silver, survive. Many of these objects were found in the Gertrudiskapel. Displayed in an exhibition of Museum Catharijneconvent in early 2019, we can see that these objects say a lot about the priorities of sixteenth-century Catholics. The relics which survive are mostly pieces of bone and charcoal, not the silver and gold encasings which likely once surrounded these objects.¹²

¹² One object, the *Saint Martin's Hammer*, is a notable exception to this. See chapter 3.

Following almost two hundred years of suppression and private worship, a change in the constitution in 1848 allowed the ‘episcopal hierarchy’ to effectively reestablish. This happened by decree of Pope Pius IX in 1853, with the seat of the Archbishop to be placed in Utrecht.¹³ In the same period, new churches designated for Catholic worship were built as well. Utrecht’s Augustinuskerk (dedicated to Saint Augustine of Hippo) is one such church. By royal decree of 1824, every church modification or newly built design had to be approved by inspectors from the Dutch state. These churches were, in turn, partly funded by *Rijkswaterstaat*, the ministry of Public works and Water Management (von der Dunk 2002). After the repeal of this law in 1868, Catholics were free to build their own churches by their own design again. In Utrecht, the *Bernulphusgilde* (Guild of Saint Bernulphus) was established. The guild brought together artists and architects who together designed churches throughout the Netherlands, mostly built in a typical neo-gothic style. Architect Pierre Cuypers, known for designing the *Rijksmuseum* and Central Station in Amsterdam was an honorary member, Alfred Tepe, responsible for the design of the St. Willibrorduskerk, Sint-Maartenskerk, and St. Hieronymushuis (home for the elderly and orphans) in Utrecht, Gerard Bartel Brom, the father of a family of famous gold- and silversmiths from Utrecht, interior designer and sculptor Friedrich Wilhelm Mengelberg, who built the St. Willibrorduskerk together with Tepe and designed the choir for the Kölner Dom, and Michael Maarschalkerweerd, an organ builder who amongst others built the organ for Saint Catherines church discussed in the introduction of this chapter, were prominent non-clerical members of the guild (see also Wesselink 2018, 40-41). At this time, business was thriving for craftsmen in the business of religious objects. Casper Staal, art-historian and former curator of Museum Catharijneconvent told me:

In the first period, everything is imported. From Germany, the Rhineland, and Belgium. Simply because we, because of the suppression, because Catholics were ‘second-order’ [citizens], there was nothing left. At the end of the nineteenth century, beginning of the twentieth, there arises a new production, with big workshops. [...] Our own people, they are great artists, don’t get me wrong, but they are not the leading artists in Western Europe.¹⁴

¹³ A curious and very much political choice: the ‘weight’ of Catholicism in those days was predominantly found, as it is today, ‘below the rivers’ in the Southern provinces. The choice for Utrecht was thanks to years of lobbying at the papal address and primarily motivated against a ‘protestantization’ of the Netherlands (see: de Valk 2002)

¹⁴ “In de eerste periode is alles import. Uit Duitsland, het Rijnland, en België. Gewoon omdat wij, door die onderdrukking he, door het tweederangs zijn van katholieken, is er wat betreft niets meer. En dan, aan het eind van de negentiende eeuw, begin twintigste, ontstaat er een eigen productie, met grote ateliers. [...] Maar onze eigen mensen, het zijn mooie kunstenaars hoor, daar niet van, maar het zijn niet kunstenaars, zeg maar, die het voortouw nemen in West-Europa.” CS-070619

The craft had to be relearned and was reinvigorated, in large part thanks to the Bernulphus guild. The aforementioned family of gold- and silversmiths Brom had a license to sell items from the German Rheinland under their own name. “At a certain point,” Staal continues, “they know [the style] quite well, and then they will grow to become one of the most important precious metal workshops of our country.”¹⁵ The former workshop on Drift 15 in Utrecht is still recognizable through the large chimney which used to be above the bronze forge behind the building. In the façade, a sculpted brick is placed with a poem reminding passers-by of the former workshop which closed in 1962.

In the 1960’s, vast changes take place in the Dutch socio-political context during a period known as ‘de-pillarization’. Already since before the nineteenth century, Dutch towns and cities had long traditions of gathering in ‘associations’ (Kennedy & Zwemer 2010, 250). Starting with the theologian-politician Abraham Kuiper, who mobilized orthodox Calvinists by gathering them in an association through founding a Calvinist newspaper, political party, church, and also the *Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam*, effectively established the first ‘pillar’ of Dutch society (ibid., 253). In essence, there were four pillars: Roman Catholics, Orthodox Protestants, Reformed Protestants, and humanists. De-pillarization ensued when the welfare state was established (van Rooden 2004, 549-550) and the social safety nets that the pillars provided in, for example, health care and education, were taken over by the state. The influence of different religious organizations in the form of political parties, denominationally colored media, and state funding of religiously affiliated schools, has persisted long after this period, albeit not uncontested. The declining influence of the pillars starting in the 1960’s largely concurred with the first significant decline in church attendance measured in the Netherlands (Kennedy & Zwemer 2010, 263). Since the re-establishment of the episcopal hierarchy, Roman Catholic churches were built in a high pace, many of which with extravagant neo-gothic designs. Along with the increase in churches, church attendance also rose in that period. Kennedy and Zwemer (ibid., 264) argue that, rather than speaking of a strong ‘unchurching’ or ‘secularization’, the levels of church attendance in the 1960’s returned to the situation before 1850.

Between the 1970’s and 2008, research initiated by two dioceses and the research center of the Dutch national heritage agency shows, at least 927 churches were either repurposed or demolished. Of these 927 churches, almost four hundred were Roman Catholic churches and just over five hundred Protestant. Just under one third of churches were destroyed, the majority of which Catholic. Protestant churches often found a new purpose, mostly again as religious buildings or converted into housing (Bisdom Haarlem, Bisdom Rotterdam, Projectbureau Belvedere 2008, 24-25). Church attendance has also continued to decline since the 1970’s,

¹⁵ “Op gegeven moment dan kennen ze het zelf, en dan wordt het een van de belangrijkste edelsmidateliers van ons land” CS-070619

although recently the curve has somewhat flattened out.¹⁶ Together, these historical developments have not only shaped the skylines of cities – in Utrecht almost a dozen Roman Catholic churches have been demolished since the 1970’s — but have thoroughly impacted both religious practices and the overall sentiment of people about religion.

The accumulation of goods

“Dutch Christianity died when the ritualistic, collective, and self-evident religious acts which had shaped it within the lives of the believers, became less relevant as a consequence of the popularization of the ideal and practices of the expressive and reflexive self” (van Rooden 2004, 548, *translation mine*). With this Taylorian argument (Taylor 2007), van Rooden identifies a break in the experience of Dutch religiosity wherein a more internalized expressions of religion effectively replaced the more exuberant and collective religiosity which characterized the first half of the twentieth century in the Netherlands. Many of the pains expressed today with regard to changes in Roman Catholic liturgical practices in the 1960’s, reflect with regret upon this break. The performed and embodied Catholic rituals were replaced by a far more internalized and reflexive, almost Calvinist, experience of faith. “*Met Jezus kon je goed krijgen*” (Jesus made for good chalk), said Gert de Weert, the owner of the ‘Relimarkt’ in Limburg, an antique shop exclusively buying and selling Roman Catholic devotional art and commodities (see chapter 4). His shop, as many others specializing in the same field, exists by the ‘grace’ of the Second Vatican council (Vatican II), which assembled between 1962 and 1965 in order to ‘update’ the ways of the Roman Catholic church to the times (*aggiornamento*). The former parish priest of Utrecht has his own story about this time:

I was assigned in Baarn, I understand there used to be a pond. And that pond was filled up with the debris of statues and other elements from the church. And it was normal at the time. Now we consider it a shame, but at the time it was not so weird. And it was encouraged from all sides. With enthusiasm, history was turned into rubble. A sort of second *beeldenstorm*, you could say.¹⁷

The priest sees this as one of the reasons why church attendance and membership in the Roman Catholic church eventually declined: “Many people naturally experienced this as very painful. It

¹⁶ <https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2018/43/meer-dan-de-helft-nederlanders-niet-religieus> Accessed August 22, 2019.

¹⁷ “Ik heb in Baarn gestaan, waarvan ik heb begrepen dat de voortuin, daar was een vijver, en die vijver is gedempt met de brokstukken van beelden en andere elementen uit de kerk. En dat was toen gewoon. Nu vinden we het een schande, maar toen was dat niet zo gek. En werd dat ook van alle kanten gestimuleerd. Met enthousiasme werd het verleden eigenlijk aan gruzelementen gedaan. Een soort van tweede beeldenstorm, zou je kunnen zeggen.” TH-120219

also affected the faith of people.”¹⁸ Vatican II, however, can be placed in a history of changing liturgical focus points and practices. The experience of the people versus the policy of the church has always constituted a tension in this regard.

In response to the Reformation, which in theological criticisms and iconoclastic acts criticized the excessive use of items and images in the Catholic church, pope Paul III convened the Council of Trent. Held between 1545 and 1563, the council reaffirmed some of the beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic church, and explicitly addressed the issue of the use of images: “[I]mages of Christ, of the Virgin Mother of God, and of the other saints are to be placed and retained especially in churches [not because] any divinity or virtue is believed to be in them [...] but because the honor which is shown them is referred to the prototypes which they represent” (Holt 1958, 64). As mediators of the divine, images could form ‘the bible of the illiterate’, helping people in their faith (ibid., 62). The late medieval age constituted a turbulent period in Roman Catholicism, with spiritual movements initiated by, amongst others, Teresa of Avila in the Spanish world, Ignatius of Loyola in Rome, and Thomas a Kempis in the Low Countries. These spiritual movements coincided with a ‘distinctive lay piety’, which was materially and immaterially propagated by Dominican and Franciscan orders (Spaans 2003, 31). Inspired by monastic attire, followers of this *Devotio Moderna* (modern devotion) started to wear rosaries already in the 13th century (ibid., 32). Devotional scapulars, consisting of two square patches of fabric held together by rope and worn on chest and back, started to gain in popularity at this time. Reaffirming the validity of indulgences, the council of Trent was also directly influential in the connection of these type of devotional items in shortening the period in purgatory for pious lay Catholics (Morgan 2015, 84). So-called ‘plenary indulgences’ could be acquired through the use of these objects in combination with specific prayers or other prescribed utterances, a practice which continues to take place until this day. The relatively unrestricted use of these items, however, led to an ‘inflation’ in indulgences. This led pope Paul VI to eventually declare, in the context of Vatican II, that only partial indulgences could be acquired in this way. Plenary indulgences removing all temporal punishment could from then on only be acquired through items blessed by bishops or the pope, and only on specific occasions (ibid., 88).

¹⁸ “Heel veel mensen hebben dat natuurlijk als zeer pijnlijk ervaren. Het heeft ook het geloof aangetast van mensen.” TH-120219



Figure 4 Rosaries and other devotional items on sale in the Relimarkt. Photo by author

Decreasing time in purgatory logically provided a welcome stimulant to use devotional objects. During the counter-Reformation, the practice of wearing these items, also visibly regardless of the ban on public display of Catholic religiosity in the Netherlands, was propagated in various ways (Spaans 2003, 37). Wearing and using these items during a period of clandestine worship, the performances of Catholicism in this way was an act of public dissent (see Yasuhira 2019). During the pillarization period, wearing and using these items constituted public performances of belonging. In the interbellum period, Roman Catholic devotional culture gained its peak with the so-called '*Rijke Rooms(ch)e Leven*' (Rich Roman-Catholic Life). Aided by mass-production in the industrial age and the previously described 'pillarization', the proliferation of this kind of 'confessional group culture' among Dutch Catholics increased (Spaans 2003). In 1995, Museum Catharijneconvent organized an exhibition on the material culture of the Rich Roman-Catholic Life. "A magnificent success" says Casper Staal. "Especially the older generation was able to see again what they had known, but which they had, for a number of decades, not seen and heard. From their bags, they retrieved the items that were in the display case."¹⁹ This period

¹⁹ "Een daverend succes. Met name dus de wat oudere generatie zag ineens terug wat ze gekend hadden, maar eigenlijk een paar decennia niet meer gezien hadden, en niet meer gehoord hadden. Uit hun tas haalden ze dus de spullen tevoorschijn die in de vitrine stonden." CS-070619

marked an era in which the public presence of Catholicism was reestablished after a period of suppression. Alongside the construction of very visible new neo-gothic churches, material devotional objects were very present in the public sphere. The Rich Roman-Catholic Life propagated an immersive experience in which Roman Catholicism encompassed a large part of people's identity. The newspaper review of the exhibition reads: "Dutch Catholics in these decades were the most well-behaved in the world, and in part that was thanks to a clergy which wanted to convert every Catholic residence into a small-version-church building." (*Trouw*, March 23, 1996, *translation mine*). Home altars were very popular in the early twentieth century. Smaller home altars specifically meant to educate young boys and to provoke their calling into priesthood were to be found in many houses. The proper use of these home-altars was controlled by clergy: "These altars were supposed to be in liturgical accordance with reality and were usually bought from stores specializing in ecclesiastical goods. [...] [I]here was the yearly pastoral visit in which the cleric could give directions about [the proper use]. If the owner or the priest wished to proceed to bless or enthrone the devotional assemblage or the altar, the normative influence was even stronger" (Margry 2003, 56-57, *translation mine*).

The 1960's definitively closed off the period of exuberant public Catholicism, not the least due to Vatican II. Since the beginning of the century, the form of the liturgy in the church was questioned in the Netherlands. The former parish of Utrecht says:

Already there was considerable experimentation with the liturgy. Everything which was old, was renounced, radically. If you go on the internet, I am from Maarssen [a town near Utrecht; JC]. If you look up the Heilig Hart parish there on YouTube, you can see how the priest is walking around with a box of cigars and boxes of sandwiches. How the walls were painted by children. Everything, the polychrome and everything, it was all painted over. It had to be radically changed, we are going into a new age, everything had to be different. And in those circumstances, statues were destroyed.²⁰

The video clip that the priest refers to predates Vatican II and indeed shows how a new choir is built and how both children and adults help to add a thick layer of paint to the walls.²¹ More stories about these practices persist, although they are not so 'radical' as the priest here describes. Casper Staal nuances the priest's point: "That line, it is an official liturgical movement that starts in the early twentieth century with the Benedictines in France, and it has a large following in Belgium and Germany, and the Netherlands does not really play a role but is interested in it and

²⁰ "De liturgie, daar werd al vrij fors mee geëxperimenteerd. Alles wat oud was, werd redelijk radicaal afgezworen. Als je op internet kijkt... Ik kom uit Maarssen. Als je kijkt naar de heilig hart parochie op Youtube, hoe de pastoor daar met de sigarendoos en de dozen met broodjes rondliep. Hoe de muur werd beschilderd door kinderen. Alles, de polychromie en alles werd overgeschilderd. Het moest radicaal anders, we gaan naar een nieuwe tijd, alles moest anders. En in die sfeer werden beelden vernietigd" TH-120219

²¹ <https://youtu.be/y1wX5jsKqH0> Accessed August 22, 2019

eventually participates in it.”²² In 1958, then archbishop Alfrink consecrated an altar in Arnhem. That altar was a freestanding altar, so it was meant to be used with the face of the priest directed *ad populum*, towards the people. Before Vatican II, however, the priest would have performed the Eucharistic rites with his back turned on the congregation. In itself, this moved the Eucharist from a performance held before the eyes of the parishioners, to a participatory event (Margry 2003, 57). Staal: “The Council of Trent determined that the tabernacle should be on the altar. But well, you can’t see over the tabernacle if you face the people. So, you see that in Arnhem already a modern altar is placed, even though it is not yet allowed at all. But the people think by themselves: in a few years, the time will come.”²³

Although Dutch congregations were already anticipating changes, Vatican II marked a significant break in liturgical practices and devotional culture.

The Second Vatican council plays a crucial role. It is so much aimed at the Eucharist, that everything non-Eucharistic falls away. That is not the law or anything, but it is the way it happens. So, the Eucharist is all that matters, and everything around it, for example the worship, suddenly disappears. And the clergy, they go along with it, hard. [...] So, what happens to the saints? They go into the trash, they become chalk. And even Mary has to take a couple of steps back.”²⁴

Statues of saint were no longer regarded as ‘sacred’ (Margry 2003, 57), as the title of this chapter shows. As for popular devotional culture, the second Vatican council also constituted a break. Agnus Dei, often in the form of medallions depicting the Lamb of God, were no longer blessed, and the use of other devotional items was discouraged (Spaans 2003, 41). This is also the period that passionate collectors started to go around churches and monasteries in the country, collecting everything from smaller objects to entire church interiors. One prominent collector was Joannes Peters, who has founded the largest supplier of ecclesiastical goods in the world on this day, *Fluminalis*, which is situated in the Netherlands.

²² “Die lijn, dat is officieel een liturgische beweging, die in de vroege twintigste eeuw vanuit de Benedictijnen in Frankrijk begint, en in België en Duitsland ook hele grote aanhang heeft, en waar Nederland niet echt een rol in speelt, maar wel in geïnteresseerd is en in meedoet op den duur.” CS-070619

²³ [H]et concilie van Trente heeft gezegd dat op het altaar het tabernakel moet staan. Maar ja, je kunt niet over de tabernakel heen kijken als je met het gezicht naar het volk staat. Je ziet dan dat dus in Arnhem dan al zo’n modern altaar wordt neergezet, terwijl het nog eigenlijk helemaal niet kan. Maar men denkt bij zichzelf: over een paar jaar is het zover” CS-070619

²⁴ “Het tweede Vaticaans concilie speelt een cruciale rol. Dat is zo Eucharistisch gericht, dat alles wat niet Eucharistisch is eigenlijk er af valt. Dat is geen wet of zo, maar zo gebeurt het. Dus de Eucharistieviering is ‘je van het’, en alles wat daar omheen zit, het lof bijvoorbeeld, verdwijnt ineens. En de geestelijkheid gaat daar hard in mee. [...] Dus wat gebeurt er met de heiligen? Die gaan allemaal de prullenbak in, die worden krijt. En zelfs Maria, die moet ook een aantal stappen terug doen” CS-070619

Joannes Peters began collecting statues in the seventies. The decade before, a second *beeldenstorm* roared through the Catholic churches, during which walls were painted white and all the splendor disappeared. Confessional, pulpit, and altar rail were abolished. Peters says that it only encouraged the de-churching. “The mysticism disappeared. The church has grown by virtue of beautiful things. The Gregorian mass was exciting because you didn’t understand it.’ As an admirer of beautiful statues, he was often the first one present when a church was emptied out. ‘Nobody saw the value of it. I was laughed at when I drove home with three life-size statues on my car.’ (*Vrij Nederland*, January 27, 2012, *translation mine*).

In these years, a serious market for religious items was formed. Not only in the Netherlands, but also abroad the second *beeldenstorm* raged, and monasteries and churches were more than happy to sell or give away their now obsolete objects.

In the wake of this movement, Museum Catharijneconvent was also established. The museum brought together the Roman Catholic *Aartsbischoffelijk museum* (Archdiocesan museum) and the *Bischoffelijk Museum Haarlem* (diocesan museum of Haarlem), the *Oud Katholieke Museum* (old-Catholic museum), and the newly founded *Stichting Protestantse Kerkelijke Kunst* (foundation for Protestant Ecclesiastical Art) in 1976. Efforts to bring together these organizations had already been attempted since 1966, when Catholic politicians had brought together the Roman Catholic museums in an agreement, but without the inclusion of a Protestant branch as well, the museum would not be eligible for state funding due to the strict separation of church and state which was enforced at the time (van den Hout 2007, 437). “Everything was geared towards the Third World in those days” says Casper Staal. When the first attempts were made to establish a museum, socialists and liberal politicians were leading the way. They were afraid that the Catholic leadership, not caring about the cultural value of the treasures and riches in churches, would melt art objects down or sell them in order to subsidize the mission and fight hunger and disease in the Global South. “They said: there is risk that those Catholic guys, for the benefit of the Third World, will sell all their art. We have to prevent that, because those goods belong to the fatherland.”²⁵ Catholic politicians were of course happy to collaborate with the plan to establish a museum. Alongside Museum Catharijneconvent, the *Stichting Kerkelijke Kunstbezit Nederland* (Foundation for the Possession of Ecclesiastical Art; SKKN) was founded. Their goal was to make up an inventory of religious art in Dutch churches, a task which since 2013 has been continued by Museum Catharijneconvent’s *Erfgoed in Kerken en Kloosters* (EKK) department. “Museum and SKKN were two [separate] organizations for a long time with a reason. The appearance that assessors were going around churches to acquire things for the museum collection had to be avoided” a former SKKN staff member who currently works at Museum

²⁵ “[A]lles was toen gericht op de Derde Wereld.” “Die zei: het risico bestaat dat die Roomse jongens, ter behoefte van de Derde Wereld, hun hele kunstbezit gaan verkopen. Dat moeten we verhinderen, want dat is gewoon vaderlands goed.” CS-070619

Catharijneconvent told me.²⁶ Eventually, the SKKN got disbanded due to lack of funding and Museum Catharijneconvent took over its tasks. In this process they were able to digitalize one of the core tasks of the SKKN, which was to help churches repurpose their surplus goods. Online environments now help to both keep track of the religious heritage, and as a sort of marketplace, only accessible to church-affiliated persons (see chapter 3). Instigated by a political movement which feared the loss of Christian heritage, the establishment of Museum Catharijneconvent is a direct response to the ‘second *beeldenstorm*’.



Figure 5 "Debris from the *beeldenstorm*, dredged from a river".

Photo by author.

Conclusion

Churches and the objects inside them have been valued differently throughout the history of Christianity in the Netherlands. To contextualize the current ‘crisis’, wherein many churches have to close down and parishes have to find ways to repurpose their now obsolete objects, it is

²⁶ “Museum en SKKN waren niet voor niks twee organisaties lange tijd. Omdat de schijn vermeden moest worden dat de inventarisatoren aan het kijken waren om te verwerven voor de museumcollectie” PM-170518

important to historicize the relationship between people and objects throughout history. Socio-political events and movements have been instrumental in determining both the historical and contemporary value of objects. In the sixteenth century, statues from Roman Catholic churches were torn down, smashed to pieces, and thrown into rivers. Today, the rubble dredged from the rivers can be found in the museum (Figure 5).

As discussed in the opening of this chapter, contestations over the ownership of church buildings did not end after the Reformation but continue to this day. Even people who rarely visit the St. Catharine's cathedral and never attend services claim the building as part of 'their' national history and identity. While churches become a sort of 'public good' in these contestations, the objects inside them are often neglected in public and academic debates. The history of religion in the Netherlands has been a history of continuous mobility and (re)valuing of objects and their role as markers of religious affiliation. In the iconoclasm of the *beeldenstorm*, the value of church objects as mediators between humans and the divine was criticized. In their destruction, however, their value was also affirmed. Museums, as "temples in which sacrifices are made to apologize for so much destruction" (Latour 2010, 69), today display the items which were destroyed in this period to inform about and redeem that violent past. A similar reflection and attempts at redemption are found with regards to the more recent second *beeldenstorm* after Vatican II, where a lot of statues and images were again thrown out of Catholic churches, although this time by the Catholics themselves. Museum Catharijneconvent was established as a direct response to this perceived loss. Iconoclasm and destruction have pervaded Dutch religious history, and show that the contestations over the meaning and value of church objects has constituted a large part of this history.

Changes in socio-political circumstances gave rise to a rich Roman-Catholic devotional culture which has directly influenced the abundance of church and devotional objects on the 'religious antique' market today. After the 'emancipation' of Catholicism in the nineteenth century, aided by industrialization and the re-establishment of the episcopal hierarchy, the reclaiming of public space was instigated materially. The *Rich Roman-Catholic Life* constituted a visible presence in the pillarized Netherlands and neo-gothic Catholic churches towered above the city once more. These developments situate the current rapid decline in church attendance, and the rapid increase of the need to repurpose buildings and objects. In the last decades an emphasis on Christianity as national history and as an important ingredient of the Dutch identity has incentivized the collection and exhibition of this kind of 'religious heritage'. Indexation and valuation of church objects have become part of these processes and bring about new relationships between church objects and humans, in the contexts of church, museum, and market.

2 Sacred, waste, sacred waste



Figure 6 The now-empty sacristy of the St. Gertrudiskerk. Photo by author.

“Do you mind if I take some pictures?” I ask, intrigued by the sight pictured above (Figure 6).²⁷ “I do not mind that”, church administrator Ton Fonville answers as he continues to show me around the room. “And that is the vault that holds all the chalices and the like, I did not bring the key.”²⁸ The sacristy of the St. Gertrudiskerk, devoted to Saint Gertrude of Nivelles in Utrecht’s Rivierenwijk district, is mostly empty. The vault is still full of ‘holy dishes’, waiting to be retrieved by their new owners. The same goes for the wardrobes along the other walls of the room, which are filled with various vestments: Albs, stoles, chasubles and other liturgical garments have been

²⁷ “Vindt u het trouwens erg als ik wat foto’s maak?” TF-060618

²⁸ “Ik heb daar geen probleem mee.” “Ja, en dat is de kluis waar alle kelken en dergelijke in staan. Geen sleutel van mee.” TF-060618

mostly repurposed and are also ready to be picked up. Ton is in charge of the repurposing process for the St. Gertrudiskerk. He has shown me around the church and all the objects which are still inside it. Chandeliers, (procession) crosses, various prie-dieu, moving boxes and an electric floor polisher are grouped together along the southern wall of the church's nave. Most items are accompanied by a print-out from the inventory file of the church with detailed information about the object, and a note with the name of the church where it is to be repurposed. On the altar in the side-chapel lies the cross that used to hang above it, obvious from the marks it left behind on the white wall behind it. Although the items are still technically 'in the church', they are also out of place, contrasting starkly with the familiar architecture of the cruciform church and its stained-glass windows, frescoes, and statues affixed to the pillars of the nave. Ton expresses his unease to the matter: "Every time you come inside it is a strange feeling. But I have come here so many times in the past weeks that I am used to it now."²⁹ Somehow, my mind's image of what a church should look like does not correspond with the state I am currently observing it in. At the same time, it is intriguing.

In making sense of various processes of valuation of objects from churches, the 'empty' church can tell us a lot about the importance of objects to it and its members. The image above is easily identified as part of a church, even though no material objects relating to lived religion remain in the sacristy. The trace of a crucifix on the wall directly refers to Christianity, the built-in vault is a common sight in a sacristy as well. Those familiar with such places will likely recognize in the niche of the wall the sacrarium, a drain for holy water which leads directly to the earth below the church. Even in the absence of the actual objects, the imaginative registers in our minds are still able to make sense of the place that the missing objects used to belong to.

In this chapter, I will examine the reasons why certain objects have to be removed from churches before the building can be repurposed, and the influence of this removal on the value of objects from churches. The abundance of different objects that reside in churches are classified into different categories with different importance. Interlocutors distinguish between *kerkelijk* (ecclesiastical) and *niet-kerkelijk* (non-ecclesiastical) objects. The former class of objects broadly consists of things instrumental to the Eucharist and church service, whereas the latter class pertains to the rest of the objects present in a church. Although for some objects it is sometimes unclear to which of these two categories they belong, the distinction is instrumental to the rules and guidelines which affect the possible further trajectories of objects from churches. I will examine the process of repurposing objects from churches through the lens of official rules and guidelines from Vatican Canon law and the interpretation of these laws by the Utrecht diocese, and juxtapose them with the valuation of objects from the perspective of the people actually engaging with these objects in their daily use.

²⁹ "Ja, elke keer dat je binnen komt is toch een vreemd gevoel. Maar ja. Ik ben nu al zoveel keer binnen geweest de afgelopen weken, ik ben eraan gewend nu." TF-060618

The care exhibited for church objects in everyday interactions and during the repurposing process blurs the strict boundary between ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical items. Both classes of objects are part of what David Morgan (2018, 97) calls an ‘encompassing ecology’ of images in the church: a group of objects and images which constitutively work towards the ‘making present’ of the divine. Consecrations and blessing sacralize the objects, and the rules and guidelines which are designed to keep them sacred restrict their circulation, gathering the objects in the ‘sacred economy’ of the church. In the messy process of repurposing objects from closed-down churches, the abundance of objects makes it difficult to repurpose all the sacred items. The items which have become obsolete for a church community become ‘sacred waste’. Although they are unused and do not serve much of a purpose anymore, the objects are still deeply cared for. After a brief description of the repurposing process of church objects in Utrecht, I show how a hierarchy of objects is constituted through rules and guidelines imposed by the diocese and Vatican. The ecclesiastical items are protected in this hierarchy through rules detailing the ways in which objects can be consecrated or sacralized, rules which are grounded in a framework of theologies and laws. Some lower-class, ‘non-ecclesiastical’, objects are sacralized too. This happens more ‘naturally’ in a different way, through the affective personal relationships that people form with them. ‘Sacred waste’ in the context of the repurposing of church objects is more than an analytical description of the state of objects. Rather, both the object’s sacredness and ‘wasteness’ are performed through active valuation in which a surplus of goods is imbued with a surplus of meaning.

Rules and regulations

The St. Gertrudiskerk closed after the celebration of Easter on April 1, 2018. Before the final service, the small Catholic community in this neighborhood to the south of Utrecht’s city center came together in the rectory connected to the church, to save on heating costs. The recently merged Utrecht parishes were planning to decommission this church eventually, but when the fire department inspected the building and designated its fire safety plan as insufficient, the decision was quickly made to close the building and rectory entirely (*RTV Utrecht*, March 30, 2018). In accordance with prescriptions, the church board appointed Ton Fonville as the administrator overseeing the process of repurposing the inventory of this church. As part of the Utrecht diocese he is required to work together with Museum Catharijneconvent in order to make up an inventory and repurpose all the materials in the correct manner.

The first step in the process is to update the inventory. For the St. Gertrudiskerk this meant locating the objects on the old inventory list and taking new pictures of them. Ton followed the instructions of the “Guidelines on Ways of dealing with Religious Objects” to the book, so he first reached out to other churches in the city. “I sent an email to the churches in

Utrecht, so they could come and take a look,” Ton tells me, “and after that round, I wrote to churches in the area”³⁰. By slowly broadening his search field, and inviting several priests and other representatives to come and take a look at the available objects, Ton was able to repurpose most of the items via his own networks. The rest of the objects, he put on the *vraag-en-aanbod* (supply and demand) page of Museum Catharijneconvent. This online environment is designed as an international marketplace for religious items, only accessible to church-affiliated persons and organizations, and allows them to exchange surplus objects from churches (see chapter 3). *Vraag-en-aanbod* allowed Ton to reach an international audience, again broadening his scope. “The big advantage that I had now, is that every priest or [representative of the] local board, the people, I had them here, and I even spoke to them. [...] Most of them have spent over an hour here, so I was able to speak with them and know where they come from. See, that is more personal.”³¹ Ton feels very responsible to get the objects a ‘proper’ new home, saying that he was happy to be able to largely circumvent the *vraag-en-aanbod* page: “It is my goal to be able to say, to everyone, that the things end up in the right place.”³² When everything has been assigned a new destination on paper, a Catharijneconvent staff member checks whether the proposal follows the rules of the diocese and national heritage laws. After this, it is signed by the parish board, who are the official owners of the church and its inventory, and the new owners can arrange to pick up the objects. After all objects have been repurposed, Ton made an Excel sheet detailing the new locations and the contact persons responsible for the objects. Employees of Museum Catharijneconvent update their online archival database (see chapter 3) with this information after receiving Ton’s Excel sheet, concluding the repurposing process.

Various actors work together in a network which regulates the circulation of objects from closed-down churches, showing that the ‘afterlives’ of these objects are important to multiple parties. The value of these items, while sometimes contested, is visible both in the care that goes into the process and in the fact that everything is strictly documented and archived. Ton follows all the rules and guidelines which are in place, and feels he should be accountable, writing the following in a letter to his fellow parishioners after the objects were picked up by their new owners:

³⁰ “In eerste instantie heb ik een mail gemaakt en die heb ik dus naar de kerken in Utrecht gestuurd, en die konden dus komen kijken en: jongens, wat kunnen we gebruiken voor herbestemming. En toen ik die ronde gehad had, toen heb ik dus de kerken in de omgeving aangeschreven.” TF-060618

³¹ “[H]et grote voordeel dat ik nu heb gehad is, dat ik elke pastoor of locatieraad, de mensen, dat ik die op bezoek gehad heb, en zelfs gesproken. [...] De meesten zijn hier meer dan een uur geweest ook, dus ik heb daarmee kunnen praten, dan weet je ook de achtergronden. Kijk, dat is persoonlijker.” TF-060618

³² “Het gaat mij er om, dat ik ook, dat eigenlijk naar iedereen toe, dat ik kan zeggen van: de spullen komen goed terecht.” TF-060618

The church building looks very meager now a large part of the inventory is gone. It is good for us all to know that objects from the inventory of the Gertrudiskerk, which so qualified, have found a good purpose in churches/chapels in Utrecht, Amsterdam, Maartensdijk, Nijmegen, Vreeswijk, Culemborg, Zwolle, Wageningen, IJsselstijn, but also in Belgium (Halle), France (Cerizay) and Austria (Maria Enzersdorf). [...] I made this overview to inform you as to how, after 93 years of churching in the St. Gertrudiskerk, the carefully assembled church interior and liturgical garments, funded in part by parishioners, has found such a purpose that it will be used again in churches, before, during, and after eucharistic/liturgical services (Fonville 2018, *translation mine*).

The sense of accountability that Ton exhibits here somewhat faded on his next project, where he volunteered to help coordinate the repurposing of objects from another church in Utrecht, the St. Antoniuskerk (dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua) in Lombok, which had to close in September of 2018. In the latter instance, Ton did mostly use Museum Catharijneconvent's *vraag-en-aanbod* page, because working for a different community was a bit difficult. "I did not go and lobby in order to get rid of stuff under the table"³³, he says, meaning that he did not go through the time-consuming process of contacting his own personal networks but instead opted to use the online platform from the beginning. This shows that he did not feel obliged to exhibit the same care that he did for the objects of his 'own' St. Gertrudiskerk. It is definitely not that he did not care for the objects in the St. Antoniuskerk, but his personal relationship with them was very different: Ton's emotional attachment to these objects was lower and therefore he did not feel the same sense of accountability towards the parishioners of the St. Antoniuskerk as to his own community.

Ownership and classification

All church objects are part of the 'Temporal Goods' of the church: "Under the supreme authority of the Roman Pontiff, ownership of goods belongs to that juridical person which has lawfully acquired them" (CIC c.1256).³⁴ The question of ownership is, although thoroughly defined in this law from the Vatican Canon, a difficult point for the people involved in the repurposing process. Ownership of the church and its inventory officially lies with the parish board. Five Utrecht parishes, including the parish of the St. Gertrudiskerk, merged into the St. Martinusparochie (Saint Martin's parish) in 2010. This means that the parish board, which since 2017 is the board of

³³ "Ik ben niet gaan lobbyen om dingen onderhands te slijten" TF-020419

³⁴ I use the regular system to refer to specific chapters and paragraphs in the *Codex Iuris Canonici* (Canon Law), in this case referring to chapter or canon 1256 of the latest iteration of the Canon law of 1983. The complete CIC can be retrieved in English from http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html Accessed August 22, 2019.

the Personal Union and thus the board of all the Roman Catholic churches in Utrecht, are the official owners of the church building and its inventory. The board consists of people from various parishes and churches, and not necessarily all of them are represented. The final verdict over church buildings, objects, and the people frequenting them, can thus be in the hand of people who have little to do with the location itself. To guard conflicts of interest, every church has a *lokatierraad* (local council) which can advise the board on their decisions.

Especially with regard to the question which churches have to close down, and which ones can remain open, this structure has led to some internal animosity between churches and the parishes they belong to. This is also one of the reasons why, in 2013, the Utrecht diocese wrote up a number of guidelines detailing the procedures regarding the closing down of churches. Between the last service and the official decommissioning – also referred to as ‘withdrawal from worship’ (*onttrekken aan de eredienst*) — the diocese distinguishes four categories of items with different levels of importance. First, it is required to transfer the Blessed Sacrament in the form of the consecrated Host to a functioning Roman Catholic church “solemnly in procession” (Aartsbisdom Utrecht 2017, 7). Closely following the Blessed Sacrament should be the sanctuary lamp containing the everlasting fire, which should at this occasion also be moved to another church or extinguished. These two are considered the most important. Preferably in the same procession, relics, evangeliary, anointing oils, and the Easter candle have to be removed from the church.³⁵ The process that Ton is responsible for starts with a third category: the ‘ecclesiastical’ objects. Bert Vermeulen is assigned by the Personal Union board to oversee the repurposing processes of churches in the parishes. He supervised Ton Fonville during the repurposing process, and explained to me the rules that ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical items are subject to during the repurposing process:

That [pointing to the crucifix on the wall behind me], for example, is not an ecclesiastical item, but a chalice, for example, is an ecclesiastical item. [...] Well, for ecclesiastical items there is a rule: they can only go to other churches, or have to be destroyed. So, if you close so many churches so many times, then it will become a problem. There are also non-ecclesiastical items, and if they are non-ecclesiastical, then they can more or less be given away, thrown away.³⁶

³⁵ In practice, the last service and withdrawal of worship rarely coincide. This has to do with the fact that Dutch churches benefit from tax exemptions. Withdrawal from worship service effectively transforms an establishment from a church into a building, which means that insurance registers change and that the exemption on real estate taxes is revoked (Artikel 220d Gemeentewet). The official withdrawal from worship is thus usually done only after the building has been sold. See Beekers (2018) for a description of a procession which followed the final Holy Mass of the St. Jacobuskerk in Zuilen.

³⁶ “Dat is bijvoorbeeld geen kerkelijk attribuut, maar een kelk is bijvoorbeeld wel kerkelijk attribuut. [...] Nou, voor kerkelijke attributen geldt een regel. Die mogen alleen naar andere kerken, of moeten vernietigd

Examples of ecclesiastical objects are altar stones, chalices, monstrances, vestments, tabernacles, and what the diocese calls ‘other objects related to the sacraments’ (ibid.). These objects have to be taken into other Roman Catholic churches or appropriate storing facilities when they have to be removed from a church. The fourth and final category of objects, which also falls under Ton’s jurisdiction, consists of objects in the church deserving of ‘special attention’: valuable paintings and statues, but also crucifixes, holy water, and archival books with baptism and marriage registrations, for example. Only after these items have gained a new purpose – at least on paper—the church building itself can be relegated ‘to profane but not sordid use’ (CIC c.1222).

In November of 2018, the Pontifical Council for Culture organized a conference titled: “Doesn’t God Dwell Here Anymore? Decommissioning Places of Worship and Integrated Management of Ecclesiastical Cultural Heritage”, addressing the issues that a decline in clergy and churchgoers bring with regard to church ‘heritage’ and in the form of buildings and objects. One of the main discussion points of this conference was a proposed guideline to decommission and ecclesiastical reuse for church buildings, an update of the 1987 pontifical commission document “Charter on the use of Old Ecclesiastical Buildings.” This charter focused mainly on church buildings in Western Europe and reaffirmed the roles which these (former) church buildings have in a socio-cultural context, employing a largely heritage-centered discourse. The guidelines published after the 2018 conference resonate very much with this charter, and with the guidelines that the Utrecht diocese commissioned in 2013, but include some comments on interior elements and ‘moveable goods’ in churches as well:

Regarding movable heritage removed from decommissioned churches (furnishings, objects, images, vestments, windows, etc.) – except for those tied by state legislation – an appeal is made to seek their continuity of use and life in other churches that are in need of these materials in the same territory, or in poor Churches as a sign of fraternal sharing. Objects that are removed from their original purpose and that have a special importance should be documented and placed in a museum, preferably a church museum, allowing for a new ecclesial function and for memory. It is necessary to follow any guidelines of the local episcopal conference (Pontifical Council for Culture 2018).

Noticeably, the guidelines express their concern just for the objects already belonging to the category of ‘movable *heritage*’. These rules emphasize that some items deserve ‘special attention’: church items with value from a heritage perspective. Dutch Roman Catholic churches and heritage agencies like Museum Catharijneconvent refer to these items as the ‘core collection’ of the church, consisting of all ecclesiastical objects and those non-ecclesiastical objects that are important to the local community or in the national context.

worden. Nou ja, als je zoveel keer zoveel kerken sluit dan wordt dat dus een probleem. Dan heb je niet-kerkelijke attributen, en als ze niet-kerkelijk zijn, dan mogen ze gewoon eigenlijk min-of-meer weggegeven worden, weggegooid worden.” BV-290518

This classification overlooks a large number of objects which are also part of the category of non-ecclesiastical objects, items which can be aesthetically or spiritually appealing to the people who have engaged with them during their lifetimes. These guidelines constitute a hierarchy which privileges ecclesiastical objects and non-ecclesiastical ‘heritage’ items which deserve ‘special attention’, effectively neglecting the non-ecclesiastical non-heritage objects also present in churches. Especially this last category contains items which can be of tremendous importance to the daily devotional practices of pious Catholics. In the next section, I will detail why this classification is made and why these ‘ecclesiastical’ items are so important to the hierarchy and sacred economy of the church.

Preventive iconoclasm

The way in which ecclesiastical objects are set apart shows how valuable they are for the institution of the church. In Vatican Canon law this becomes especially clear, because “those who impede [...] the legitimate use of sacred goods or other ecclesiastical goods [...] can be punished with a just penalty” (CIC c.1375), rendering lack of care for ecclesiastical objects a crime. The ecclesiastical objects are so important because they are consecrated, which means that they are irreversibly imbued with a sacred value. “In no circumstances,” Vatican law historian Cornelius van der Wiel (2000) writes about consecrated objects, “may they be relegated to profane use, unless they lost their consecration or blessing or are deconsecrated” (54). The method for deconsecrating ecclesiastical items is not taken up in Canon Law, but a provision in Canon 19 states that if a law is ‘lacking’ it must be resolved through similar laws, which is why the rules for the deconsecrating of buildings are applied analogously to objects. Ecclesiastical objects which cannot be repurposed in other Roman Catholic churches, thus have to be destroyed because they are in those cases considered analogous to a ‘sacred place’ which “loses their dedication or blessing if they have been destroyed in large part, or have been turned over permanently to profane use by decree of the competent ordinary or in fact” (CIC c.1212).

The St. Gertrudiskerk is not yet sold and has already been able to repurpose most of its items, but other churches were not always so lucky. Bert, who has supervised the repurposing processes of various churches in Utrecht, told me about one of the tabernacles in the St. Jacobuskerk (dedicated to James the Greater) in Utrecht, a church which closed in 2017. The tabernacle was supposed to be repurposed to Sri Lanka via a Dutch NGO in the business of furnishing churches in ‘developing countries’. “But when they came to pick it up”, Bert says, “that thing could not be lifted even by three men.”³⁷ The tabernacle remained in place, and was eventually destroyed before the church was handed over to the new owners. To prevent sacrilege

³⁷ “Maar hun (*sic.*) kwamen het ophalen, ja, dat ding was met drie man niet te tillen.” BV-290518

or ‘sordid’ use of ecclesiastical items, a preventive iconoclasm is carried out by the church. Daan Beekers has described the process of removing signs reminding of the ecclesiastical use of buildings (like stained-glass windows or the covering of mosaics with biblical depictions) before repurposing a building as a ‘self-imposed’ iconoclasm.³⁸ For ecclesiastical objects, which are dealt with in a similar fashion, I use the term ‘preventive’ iconoclasm because the explicit intention of the destructions are to prevent ‘sordid’ use -profanation.

Laws and guidelines restrict the movement of ‘ecclesiastical’ items to such an extent, that they have to remain part of the ‘sacred economy’ of the church. Structuring, in David Morgan’s terms, “an ongoing relationship between the sacred and the divine”, a sacred economy is a medium of exchange wherein images and objects are circulated (2015, 74). In interactions and exchanges between people, these objects, and the divine, ‘the sacred’ becomes tangible. Ecclesiastical objects like altars and chalices figure as prime examples of this, because these objects are quite literally consecrated, (from Latin *con-secrare*, with dedication). Anointed with oil and blessed by clergy, they reside in a safe or secure building for most of their lives, where their sole interactions with human beings revolve around the Eucharist and other sacraments. They are put to use in the making present of the divine, and therefore a part of that divine is considered to be embedded in them. The only way to retain the sacrality of these objects is to prevent them from coming into contact with the profane. The architecture of Roman Catholic churches shows how this is achieved, for example by restricting access for tourists and parishioners to the choir, altar, and relics. Iconoclasm, as discussed in chapter 1, is often intended to harm the meaning and value behind the thing or image which is destroyed. At the same time, destruction also acknowledges the value in the thing: “those destroying an image in an iconoclastic act actually produce it as an idol” (Meyer 2019, 85). In acts of self-imposed or preventive iconoclasm this holds true as well. Aiming to prevent profanation of consecrated object, destruction prevents the objects from exchange and from engaging in new relationships which can imbue the object with different values. In a way, the preventive iconoclasm locks the sacred inside the object as its final valuation. Iconoclasm, the destruction of “physical representations of the divine, the sacred, the transcendent” (Asselt et al, 4), has multiple effects. It protects the boundaries of the sacred economy by preventing circulation of the object outside it, and simultaneously prevents further acts of iconoclasm with the intention of harming the object and its meaning.

Church buildings sometimes go through similar trajectories. Destruction has sometimes been preferred over repurposing (Beekers 2017, 179). The complications involved in finding a ‘profane but not sordid use’ are numerous. For example, apartments or commercial functions for repurposed church buildings are not preferred because these forms of re-use are not in line with the values of the church (ibid., see also Bisdom Haarlem, Bisdom Rotterdam, Projectbureau

38 <http://www.urban-sacred.org/amsterdam-chasse/> Accessed August 22, 2019

Belvedere 2008). Ecclesiastical use, sometimes by Protestant denominations, or a socio-cultural purpose is often preferred, since these uses are seen as more in accordance with the function of the church building in the first place. As I alluded to in the previous chapter, there has been a change in perspective on the proper ways to deal with religious heritage, both mobile and immobile. Whereas many church buildings were destroyed or neglected from the 1970's onwards, today committees for the protection of religious heritage are abound. Around seventy percent of the ministry of OCW's (Education, Culture, and Science) budget for repurposing and maintenance of monuments goes to (formerly) 'religious buildings'.³⁹ The same can be said for ecclesiastical objects, since these objects were quite 'uncaringly' expelled from churches during the second *beeldenstorm* around the time of Vatican II, the results of which are still to be found in many antique shops and 'relimarkets' (see chapter 4). This signals a change in the perspective on the rules and regulations, which were already in place before these events but have since become more emphasized and specified. In the contemporary moment, strict control over ecclesiastical objects is exercised and heritage institutions support the church in exercising this control. Ecclesiastical objects therefore have to remain part of the sacred economy of the church or have to be destroyed.

Technologies of presence

"A Catholic church also is a consecrated space," the Reverend Ton Huitink, former Utrecht parish priest explains to me. "And what is in it belongs to that consecrated space. And that also means that you cannot just do anything with it. In the Catholic church, we have consecrations of all sorts of things, but also of ecclesiastical... of statues, of chasubles of chalices. Those are all consecrated items. You cannot just say: well, that is all not there anymore."⁴⁰ The perspectives on rules and regulations have changed with the liturgical practices in the Dutch Roman Catholic church themselves. Changes in what can and cannot be consecrated have taken place under historical circumstances as well. In the first chapter, for example, I discussed how items of personal piety like Agnus Dei could not be consecrated any longer after Vatican II. These changes also apply to larger items. We can understand the division between ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical items in terms of consecration, where those items that are consecrated – and especially those relating to the Eucharist – are considered of a higher order than officially

³⁹ Frank Strolenberg, *Bouwhistorisch Platform*, February 20, 2019

⁴⁰ "Een katholieke kerk is ook een gewijde ruimte. En wat er in staat behoort ook tot de gewijde ruimte. En dat betekent dus dat je er ook niet zomaar iets mee kunt gaan doen. We kennen in de Katholieke kerk eigenlijk de zegening van van alles en nog wat. Maar ook van kerkelijk... van beelden van kazuifels, van kelken. Dus het zijn allemaal toegewijde attributen. En daar kun je niet zomaar van zeggen van: nou, dat is het allemaal niet meer." TH-120219

unconsecrated items in the church. Art-historian and former Museum Catharijneconvent curator Casper Staal tells me how consecration used to be reserved for those items relating to the Eucharist, and for a specific reason.

There are consecrated vessels and unconsecrated vessels, that is the first difference. That is an ancient difference, which was made already in the early church. And the consecrated vessels, that are the chalice, the ciborium, and the monstrance. These come into literal contact with the Host. Literally. All of the other silver and gold is not consecrated.⁴¹

As the Reverend Huitink pointed out, the church today knows all kinds of consecrations and blessings, making the category of consecrated items much broader than only those items relating to the Eucharist. A theological distinction which is made between different kinds of consecration can explain this. In the Canon Law of 1917, van der Wiel (2000, 40) points out, the Roman Catholic church distinguished ‘constitutive’ and ‘invocative’ blessings. Invocative blessings did not change the profane use or state of objects or people, but were merely meant to appeal to God’s blessing over a person or item. ‘Constitutive’ blessings, on the other hand, actually moved the object or person from the realm of the profane into the realm of the sacred. Consecration, van der Wiel shows, is called *benedictio constitutiva*, when it applies to persons or objects (41). In the Roman Catholic law and imaginary, consecration *constitutively* transforms matter, moving it from the profane to the sacred – an alchemic change. From a Marxian perspective, the act of blessing can be seen as labor. “Expressed as one of the objective qualities of that article”, labor transforms an object into a commodity (Marx, quoted in Appadurai 1986, 8). This commodity is not to be exchanged for money on a commercial market, however, it mediates exchanges between God and people in the sacred economy of the church. Therefore, it is protected by the church from circulating elsewhere. Constitutive blessings or consecrations have come to apply to various categories of objects, not only to the items related to the Eucharist, but to all things – as the Utrecht diocese put it – ‘related to the sacraments’ (Aartsbisdom Utrecht 2017).

In the rituals of the church, most notably in the Eucharist, consecrated objects are required for further blessings and consecrations. David Morgan, in his call to understand material religious objects as technologies, defines technology as “any arrangement of interacting parts that operate together in place of or in tandem with the human body in order to produce work more efficiently or work that would otherwise not be possible” (Morgan 2015, 5). A point in case is the Eucharist, where anointed humans, and various consecrated items (including, but not limited to an altar, tabernacle, ciborium, and chalice) operate together in order to transform a piece of

⁴¹ “Je hebt gewijde vaten en ongewijde vaten, dat is het eerste verschil. Dat is een heel oud verschil, dat heel vroeg gemaakt wordt in de kerk. En de gewijde vaten, dat zijn de kelk, de ciborie en de monstrans. Die komen letterlijk in aanraking met de hostie. Letterlijk. Al het andere zilver en goud is ongewijd zilver en goud.” CS-070619

unleavened wheat bread into the literal body of Christ through the process referred to as 'transubstantiation' (see Orsi 2016). While at first sight it seems like a bit of a stretch to consider the working together of objects and humans as a technology or a machine, the Eucharist actually has a history of being depicted as a technology in its own right, showing by this panel from a German altar retable, currently to be found in the Hannover Landesmuseum collection (Figure 7).⁴²



Figure 7 "The Eucharistic Host Mill" from the Göttinger Barfüßeraltar. Image courtesy of David Morgan.

The figure was painted in 1424 by the German "Meister des Göttinger Barfüßeraltars." It is the eleventh panel of a twelve-panel retable, and it is situated on the lower half of the left door, visible when the retable is closed. The figure depicts the 'Eucharistic Host Mill', which is prominently shown in the middle of the painting. Above it is Jesus Christ, and below him are the four evangelists in angelic form, recognizable by their respective symbols, who pour their texts into the mill. Apostles on both sides of the mill turn the handles, while the church fathers are on the receiving end of the mill with a chalice containing a second Jesus: the physical body of Christ

⁴² Courtesy of David Morgan, who provided me with this image and literature on this particular motif.

(Schawe 1989). Part of a broader trend of depicting the Eucharist as a machine rendering the body and blood of Christ present on Earth, we can understand the Eucharist and its surrounding objects as technologies of presence.

Presence is an important concept in the study of Catholicism most significantly discussed by Robert Orsi (2016), and is even considered by anthropologist Annalisa Buttici (2016) to be one of the central characteristics of Roman Catholicism. ‘Catholicity’, for Buttici, is a characteristic that refers to the conflation of matter and spirit and “generates perceived real presences of divine and supernatural powers pulsating in the material world, in nature, objects, and substances, as well as in the human body” (Buttici 2016, 8). Generating these presences does not happen by itself, but through specific aesthetic practices involving materials, bodies, and the senses. The Eucharist, using a set of technologies which render the divine present, is thus an example of religious mediation which achieves specific effects by being performed (Meyer 2012, 26), a ‘sensational form’.

Tradition, grounded in theology and in laws and guidelines, authorizes certain aesthetic practices (Meyer & de Witte 2013) like the Eucharist and the sacraments and renders the objects used in these ritual practices more important than the non-ecclesiastical items which only deserve ‘special attention’. This is why these objects are only allowed to circulate within the ‘sacred economy of the church’ and can only be repurposed in other churches or have to be destroyed when that is not possible.

Non-ecclesiastical heritage

Besides the authenticated and controlled sacralization and circulation of ecclesiastical objects, a large range of objects which are part of the category ‘non-ecclesiastical’ is present in Roman Catholic churches. Although church administrator Bert Vermeulen says that, theoretically, you can just give or throw this stuff away, this is not necessarily the case. The Reverend Huitink puts it quite eloquently: “The faith of people is in [those things]. That is eventually what it boils down to. You have to treat that with care. Because it was used in a worship service, or it was just present in the church, and people have, consciously or unconsciously, fed their faith with it in one way or another.”⁴³ Both ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical objects, according to the priest, have something sacred in them, something which Daan Beekers (2016, 39) fruitfully described by the term ‘sacred residue’: “[T]hat quality of a religious site, or of specific things within that site, that –

⁴³ “Daar zit dus het geloof van mensen in. Daar komt het eigenlijk op neer, he. En dan moet je bij voorbaat daar al heel prudent mee omgaan. Want dat is gebruikt tijdens een eredienst, of het was gewoon in de kerk aanwezig. En mensen hebben daar omheen, bewust of onbewust, ja, toch hun geloof ook mee gevoed op de een of andere manier.” TH-120219

in the perception or feeling of beholders – persists after the site has lost its original religious function.” The objects in question are important items because they directly mediate the divine to the pious lay believer, and therefore also require special care. Much more than ‘the bible of the illiterate’ as the Council of Trent affirms (chapter 1), the devotional items in this category make the church a sort of home to the congregation, which means that they are embedded with a lot of emotional value. Dick van der Horst is the sole remaining sacristan of the Draaiwegkerk (dedicated to Saint Joseph). As Dick kept emphasizing throughout our conversations: this church is not yet closed. However, no Eucharist is served there any longer, and the community has largely broken up or visits the St. Raphaelkerk in Overvecht where baptisms, marriages, and funerals can also be held. As a sacristan, he exhibits special care for all objects in the church, but especially to the non-ecclesiastical objects which are close to his heart.

We are the only [church] in the Netherlands who has a proper ‘Pentecost group’, actually, with the twelve apostles and some sort of fire as well. They used to be on display in this church during Pentecost. But because we did not use them anymore, last year –in collaboration with the Raphael[church] and the priest, priest Smits—we made an arrangement. I find it such a shame to keep the Pentecost group stored away in the closet, so nowadays it is in the Raphael. But it remains our property!⁴⁴

Dick shows exceptional care for these objects, which are not part of the ecclesiastical objects which bring the body of Christ to the congregants, or assist in the transformation of an unsaved child to a saved child in the act of baptism. These objects help parishioners feel at home in the church and the community. Numerous stories like these exist, for example Bert told me about the old ‘Emmaüschurch’ in Utrecht’s district of Overvecht, which for the past decades has functioned as a mosque. The building was already too big for the number of Catholics in the neighborhood when they finished building it, so repurposing the building was inevitable. The parish relocated to the protestant Johanneskerk, which they were able to share with the existing communities there. The Emmaüs parish took with them their own tabernacle, cross, baptismal font, and a statue of Mary – an uncommon sight in a protestant church.⁴⁵ Although a baptismal font and a tabernacle would today be considered part of the category of ecclesiastical objects, when the Emmaüschurch repurposed in the 1980’s, the rules seemed to be far less strict which allowed the parish to take these ecclesiastical and sacramental items to a Protestant church to continue their use. This not

⁴⁴ “Wij zijn de enigste in Nederland die een echte Pinkstergroep hebben, eigenlijk, met de twaalf apostelen en dan een soort vuur ook. Tijdens de pinksterdagen stond die altijd hier in de kerk, maar ja, doordat wij zelf daar geen gebruik van gemaakt hebben, heb ik sinds vorig jaar ergens—in samenwerking met de Raphael en de pastoor, pastoor Smits—afgesproken. Ik vind het zonde om die pinkstergroep in de kast te laten staan, dus nou staat tegenwoordig die pinkstergroep in de Raphael. Maar hij blijft wel eigendom van dit!” DvdH-230119

⁴⁵ <http://wp.johannescentrum.nl/over-ons/geschiedenis-van-het-gebouw/> Accessed August 22, 2019.

only shows the importance of non-ecclesiastical items to the church community, but also shows that the rules and regulations have come to be applied ever more strictly since the 1980's. Today, the Johanneskerk is an ecumenical center where the original Dutch Reformed and Christian Reformed users celebrate their services together with the remaining Catholics of the Emmaüs parish. The members of the St. Antoniuskerk in Lombok also kept part of their inventory during the recent repurposing process. The parishioners who were the original owners of the church, are still able to rent it back from its new owner and use the church on Sundays for services. Since the building has been relegated to 'profane use', however, the ecclesiastical objects cannot remain in the church. Chalices, ciboria, and tabernacles have indeed been repurposed, which means that the Eucharist cannot be served anymore, and Catholic weddings and funerals cannot be blessed and held in the church. Prayer robes, candles, and even the altar – but without its relic and altar stone – have remained in the church, so the community is still able to come together in the church and worship there.

The number of objects in this non-ecclesiastical category is vast, consisting of everything which is not part of the limited category of ecclesiastical objects described previously. Statues and statuettes, pews, organ(s), pulpit, lectern, stained-glass windows and icons are just a few examples of easily noticeable objects belonging to the non-ecclesiastical category. Sometimes less obvious, but also included in this category are for example candles, stations of the cross, missals, and *priedien*. In the repurposing guidelines of the Utrecht diocese, these objects are classified as requiring 'special attention' (Aartsbisdom Utrecht 2017, 7). To prevent estrangement or loss, they argue, these objects should be treated with extra care. Blessed holy water should be properly distributed through the 'holy drain' (sacrarium) or directly into earthly soil, registers containing the names of those buried, married, or baptized through the church should be properly archived, and blessed palm branches should be buried or burned for use on Ash Wednesday. "Crucifixes and statues, paintings, and other objects of exceptional spiritual or art and cultural-historical value" also deserve special attention, since "[s]ome objects are museal and, in consultation with the diocese, should be repurposed accordingly" (ibid.).⁴⁶ The latter is indeed the case, and I will address this collaboration and the stakes the museum has in this process in detail in chapter 3. Non-ecclesiastical objects are by far the most diverse and numerous objects. When the inventory of a church is made up, a pre-selection among these objects is already made in collaboration with the heritage experts of Museum Catharijneconvent. Objects with special importance to the local church community are assigned the label 'core collection', which means that – together with the ecclesiastical objects – these items have to be repurposed to other Roman Catholic churches, or at least deserve the 'special attention' because of their art-historical value. These 'museal' objects, as

⁴⁶ "(Kruis)beelden, schilderijen en andere voorwerpen van bijzondere geestelijk of kunst- en cultuurhistorische waarde. (Sommige voorwerpen zijn museaal en in overleg met het bisdom wordt gekeken naar een passende bestemming.)"

the diocese calls them, are sometimes transferred to the museum in the repurposing process. Since museums and churches are often full of these objects, however, this category of objects becomes quite problematic.

The previously discussed St. Jacobuskerk in Zuilen before its closing contained the inventories of three churches: the Ludgeruskerk (dedicated to Saint Ludger, an eight-century missionary who was born in the region), which was closed and demolished in 1977; and the St. Salvatorkerk, which after its closure in 1979 has gotten several purposes as a protestant church and a gym, after extensive alterations to its appearance it is currently used as a Coptic church. With the exception of the parishioner who was an art-historian, many of the objects were unfamiliar to the parishioners: “They were just in the attic, and nobody knew those things”, Bert tells me.⁴⁷ The non-ecclesiastical objects, and the care for them, is as such very specific: their value lies most significantly in the relationship people have with them. Care is an important aspect of valuing things. “When a person cares about something”, writes Christoph Baumgartner (2018, 333), “she regards it as important in the sense that her desires and wishes are structured by what she cares about, and certain wishes are deemed more important than others.” Care thus goes out to specific objects of interest to a person and, while shaped by socio-cultural conditions and context, creates value through the affective relationship between a specific human and a specific object. “[C]aring ‘incorporates’ the thing a person cares about into their identity’ (ibid.). For sacristan Dick, the ‘Pentecost group’ might be used in another church – a church where he himself is also an active parishioner—but he still emphasizes that it remains the property of the church and community with which he most strongly identifies. Bert Vermeulen explains that taking into account the relationship and history between a community and object constitutes a large part of the repurposing process: In the St. Jacobuskerk “there was an altar for Mary which [the parishioners] considered important, the organ was also important. And why was the organ important? Because, fifteen years ago, they [the parishioners] took actions to restore the organ. So, there were people who collected money for it, and therefore the organ was important.”⁴⁸

Unfortunately, the existence of three church inventories in one place also lead to a surplus, which Bert expresses in strong terms: “I mean, there were like fifty crucifixes there. Nobody was interested in them. There was also a lot of stuff of which you could just give away: just take it.”⁴⁹ For Bert, as a relative outsider to the parish and its affairs and items, this might be somewhat overstated, but the abundance of objects necessarily renders some items unfamiliar,

⁴⁷ “Die stonden gewoon op zolder, niemand kende die spullen.” BV-290518

⁴⁸ “Er was een Maria altaar dat vonden ze belangrijk, het orgel was belangrijk. Waarom was het orgel belangrijk? Omdat ze 15 jaar geleden een actie hebben gevoerd om het orgel op te knappen. Dus er waren mensen die geld verzameld hadden, dus het orgel was belangrijk.” BV-290518

⁴⁹ “Ik bedoel, er hingen wel vijftig kruisbeelden daar. Niemand interesseerde zich ermee. Er waren ook een heleboel dingen bij, die kun je gewoon weggeven: nou neem maar mee.” BV-290518

uncared for, and therefore less valuable. Even though some objects from the Ludgerus and Salvator are assigned as part of the ‘core collection’ of the St. Jacobuskerk by virtue of their art-historical value, these objects were unknown by many active parishioners and therefore required less specific care in the repurposing process. Only some non-ecclesiastical objects, therefore, require special care. Most of them can be given away, or even sold.

Non-ecclesiastical, non-heritage

Although I cannot present specific data about the number of items which are removed from closed-down churches, just the core-collection of the St. Jacobuskerk consists of nearly one hundred objects, the non-ecclesiastical items which are not part of the core collection quickly outnumber those. There is a huge surplus of objects coming from churches, which all have ‘something sacred’ in them, a sacred which, in Daan Beekers’ words, is “generated in the encounter between people and things” (2016, 39). Objects play an important role in these encounters. They are part of an ecology of images which consists of the artifact itself, its maker, other artifacts with which it comes into contact, viewers and users, the place where it is set and other actors and actants in its network. In collaboration with the church and the other items in it, these artifacts render the divine present through a collective sacralization. “The faith of the people is in there,” as the Reverend Huitink pointed out, arguing that utmost care for these items is required. The question remains what happens to the faith imbued in non-ecclesiastical items when these encounters are made impossible, either through the closure of the building, or through the destruction or the obscurity of images and objects stored in boxes? While, on the one hand, the Reverend Huitink points to the sacrality of all the objects present in a church, he also acknowledges that the encounters are what contribute to the importance of objects: “The relationship that people have with regard to ecclesiastical goods, and the valuable things, that goes so far as people are familiar with them. People have no idea what is in these safes here, I don’t even know it myself.”⁵⁰ There is definitely a ‘surplus’ of items ready to be either repurposed or thrown away.

Different people told me stories of how, rather than finding another purpose or throwing things away, church communities have brought objects without a clear purpose with them to their new churches. This was the case for the community in the St. Jacobuskerk, which moved to a Protestant church across the street from their old church to share the building. Bert Vermeulen says:

⁵⁰ Ja weet je, de relatie die mensen hebben tot de kerkelijke goederen, en de waardevolle dingen. Dat gaat zo ver als dat ze er bekend mee zijn. Mensen weten helemaal niet wat hier allemaal in de kluizen staat he, ik weet het zelf niet eens.” TH-120219

They think they have a lot of space there, but that is not at all the case actually. So now, a lot of items go into storage. I also heard that they took an altar, for example. Yes, that is going to be thrown away now. That is fine and all, because the altar stone was removed from it, so it can be destroyed. But like that, a lot of things are not there anymore, because they took it and then they didn't.⁵¹

The parishioners who cannot throw away their statues and altars, affirm the sacredness of these objects by performing their willingness to care deeply for these objects, even without the space to store them or the possibility to use them properly. The objects have become 'sacred waste': "[M]aterial residues and surpluses that cannot be disposed of as just garbage (or rubble), but neither can be kept or left alone" (Stengs 2014, 235). They are put in storage and they become unused as mediators between humans and the divine. To unbecome 'sacred waste', however, these items have to undergo special treatment: repurposing or (ritual) desacralization. The altar in this example is already officially desacralized: its altar stone and relic are removed. This official desacralization has however not removed the sacredness that is attributed to the item through the affective personal relationship that it has with the parishioners. The altar remains sacred and needs another method of desacralization. By storing the item rather than dealing with it, the item is suspended in a state of 'sacred waste'.

Taking the objects with them, parishioners have helped these (non-ecclesiastical but still important) items to escape the sacred economy of the Roman Catholic church. The altar is taken out of the circulation within Roman Catholic churches. Because the items they took are not part of the core collection of ecclesiastical or important non-ecclesiastical objects, and because the altar has been deconsecrated, Bert Vermeulen expresses his disinterest in what happens to them: "that is fine and all." For Bert as a church administrator, and for heritage agents and ecclesiastical personnel who guard and maintain the boundaries of the sacred economy of the church, the contrast between ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical objects remains important. Parishioners who bring 'their' objects with them, prioritize differently from the diocese and the Vatican. Instead of the Eucharistic items like chalices and ciboria, parish members here focus on objects with which they have personal and emotional connections and interactions. Crucifixes, statues, and baptismal fonts are examples of objects which are used by parishioners in their everyday devotion or have been of importance to their Catholic lives. This preference should be understood in the context of a long tradition of private devotion, a focus which is in part informed by the increasing role the parishioners have been forced to play in their own worship practices in the last decades due to a

⁵¹ "In dit geval gaan ze dus naar een andere kerk, daartegenover, protestantse kerk daar gaan ze in. Waarbij ze dus denken heel veel ruimte te hebben, maar helemaal niet eigenlijk. Dus nu gaan allemaal spullen inde opslag, en ja, nu hoorde ik ook bijvoorbeeld dat ze een altaar hebben meegenomen. Ja, dat wordt nu gewoon weggegooid. Nou kan dat, omdat die altaarstaan eruit gehaald wordt, dus hij mag dan gewoon vernietigd worden. Zo zijn er een heleboel dingen die dus eigenlijk niet meer, die ze hebben meegenomen maar toch achteraf niet." BV-290518

decline in available clergy and the increasing focus on an internalized and more reflective religiosity.

Conclusion

Strict control on the circulation of objects from churches brings these items together in a ‘sacred economy’. Church administrators, heritage agencies, dioceses, and the Vatican collaboratively construct, police, and maintain the boundaries of this economy. Rules and regulations, authorized by tradition, restrict the movement of objects in order to keep them circulating within the sacred economy of the church. Ecclesiastical items – which have to be repurposed in Roman Catholic churches or have to be destroyed when that is not possible – are considered the most important items to the integrity of the sacred economy. The objects relating to the sacraments come into direct contact with the sacred and therefore mediate in the exchanges between humans and the divine. They make tangible and present the divine on earth. Touching the ‘profane’ is out of bounds for these items, therefore they have to be protected from ‘sordid’ use by means of preventive iconoclasm or careful reuse in an appropriate setting.

The division that is made between ‘ecclesiastical’ and ‘non-ecclesiastical’ items in rules and guidelines shows how a hierarchy is made in the classification of Roman Catholic church objects. Non-ecclesiastical items, although not officially protected, can function as mediators between humans and the divine as well. Some non-ecclesiastical items do require ‘special attention’, however. Employing a heritage discourse, recent guidelines published by the Vatican acknowledge the importance that some non-ecclesiastical items can have for local communities or in a national context. A different form of sacralization is in order here, in which items are imbued with sacredness through ‘intensive interpretation’: the emotional value embedded in the objects sacralizes them and makes them part of the sacred economy of the church. The care expressed for these objects clearly shows the value that is attributed to these items. Due to the high number of churches closing down, many objects, both ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical, cannot be repurposed and have to be destroyed or thrown away.

The tabernacle from the St. Jacobuskerk, which was destroyed, was of art-historical importance and in the first place had to remain in the Netherlands. Only when this proved to be impossible, it was allowed to be given to the church-furnishing NGO. The physical properties of the item, however, disallowed movement, which meant that it had to be destroyed after all. Only in the moment of immanent exchange, it became clear that the item restricted revaluation. For decades, it had stood in a church without problem, but only after the event of church closure, its physical properties constituted a problem for the people interacting with it. In these moments, objects are able to exert their agency and challenge the previous valuations attributed to it. To

prevent it from ending up in the abyss of sacred waste, it was eventually destroyed, locking the sacredness in the item and preventing it from escaping the sacred economy of the church.

Waste is a 'residual category' outside the 'normal schemes of classifications' (Douglas 1966, 45). The many objects from churches which are not considered ecclesiastical or deserving of 'special attention' fall outside the schemes of classification and are, although part of its 'encompassing ecology of images', not part of the sacred economy of the church. Technically, they are waste, but the care exhibited for them and the values and sacredness still 'sticking' to these items cannot be so easily disposed of. Putting them in storage suspends objects in this state of 'sacred waste', where a surplus of interpretation has sacralized them, and a surplus in numbers and their 'uselessness in any political economy of the sacred' (Chidester 2014, 240) renders them wasteful. Only the repurposing or (ritual) desacralization of these objects can remove them from this category, but as of yet no formal rituals or purpose for them exists.

3 Re-presenting religion

The idols fall down, struck by the axe of Martin. Let nobody believe that they are gods, who so easily fall.⁵²

This inscription is found on “Saint Martin’s Hammer”, one of the most prominent relics in the collection of Museum Catharijneconvent (Figure 8). Saint Martin is a fourth-century bishop and the patron saint of Utrecht. The inscription on the hammer refers to a story from Saint Martin’s hagiography, in which he demolishes a pagan worship site. Allegedly using this hammer, Martin starts cutting down a tree which is worshiped as a god. When the pagan farmers show up to protest this act, Martin argues that the tree is devoted to a demon, and the opposing parties come to an agreement: the pagans themselves will cut down the tree, but only if Martin is placed under it. The farmers start cutting the tree and “nobody doubts the place where it is going to fall”, when a sudden whirlwind makes the tree fall in the opposite direction. The pagans are nearly crushed by the tree, and convert to Christianity after this act of god (Sévère 1967, 35; Vos 2007, 204). The Hammer itself was retrieved from the old-Catholic St. Gertrudiskapel *schuilkerk* (see chapter 1) in the late nineteenth century and is also understood to have shown up on sixteenth century inventory lists of Saint Martin’s Cathedral in Utrecht (de Kruijff 2011, 97). Its whereabouts between the sixteenth and the nineteenth century remain unknown.

The myths and socio-spatial webs in which the Hammer is situated, make it a good carrier for stories about the Christening of the Netherlands. That is also the reason why it is assigned as one of the ‘masterpieces’ in the *Canon van Nederland* (the Canon of Dutch History).⁵³ The hammer is on display most of the time in the museum. When it is not found in the permanent exhibition of the museum, the hammer figures in temporary exhibitions, which it did at multiple instances in the last years. During the winter of 2017, the hammer was on display in an exhibition about Reformation theologian Martin Luther. The accompanying description outlines how Luther got his first name after the aforementioned bishop, which incidentally connects the figure of Martin Luther to the city of Utrecht. In an exhibition on relics, in late 2018, the Hammer was accompanied by a plaque describing how relics like the Hammer used to travel around to

⁵² “De afgodsbeelden storten neer, getroffen door de bijl van Martinus. Laat niemand geloven dat zij, die zo gemakkelijk neerstorten, goden zijn” (Raaijmakers 2006, 10).

⁵³ <https://www.canonvannederland.nl/museumcatharijneconvent> Accessed August 22, 2019.

churches in the region so all pious believers could have the chance to touch, kiss, or worship it. In this instance, the artifact was presented through its function as a relic. Where in the Middle Ages the Hammer supposedly circulated among clergy of different churches in the Low Countries, today it circulates within the halls of the museum. For this object, various measures are in place to prevent escape from the museum: glass display cases, security camera's, guards, walls, insurance, and extensive documentation are all systems which lock the object inside the 'sacred economy of heritage'.



Figure 8 Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht. Photo by Ruben de Heer.

In this chapter I ask how the value of church objects changes when they enter into the heritage economy. They do not have to be assumed into a museum collection to become heritage: as I showed in the last chapter, the Vatican and Utrecht diocese already acknowledge many church buildings and objects to have value in a heritage perspective. Not all church objects are however eligible to become heritage. The formation of heritage requires a 'politics of authentication' and an 'aesthetics of persuasion', anthropologists Birgit Meyer and Mattijs van de Port (2018) argue. This means that heritage does not merely 'exist' in the world, it is created through networks of power which authenticate some objects, spaces, and practices as heritage and not others. Similar to the rules and regulations which shape and influence which church objects can be consecrated and which objects can be 'thrown away' if obsolete in the ecclesiastical economy, political processes of

authentication shape and maintain the boundaries of the heritage economy. Museum Catharijneconvent, as a national museum for religious heritage, is tasked with the indexation and documentation of ‘religious heritage’, and in that role maintains the boundaries of this economy. The museum uses the term ‘religious heritage’ to refer to churches, objects from churches, and popular devotional culture in the Netherlands, claiming “there is no other museum in the Netherlands that manages religious heritage on this scale and covers the entire scope of Christianity, from Roman-Catholicism to the Orthodox Protestant movements” (Catharijneconvent 2015, 7, *translation mine*).

In the previously discussed ‘Guidelines on Ways of Dealing with Religious Objects’, which lists a number of values which can be attributed to church objects in varying levels, two values are of special importance to the museum. ‘Documentation’ and ‘presentation’ value largely overlap with the previously mentioned ‘politics of authentication’ and ‘aesthetics of persuasion’. In this chapter, I will first show how heritage is authenticated through extensive documentation of information about objects in databases. This is a process through which objects become part of larger networks of data, including information and narratives. Heritage is valued for its ability to convey stories about (national) history and placing objects in these networks of information, enabling them to ‘mediate’ these stories. Next, I will show how different ‘aesthetics of persuasion’ are employed in museum exhibition to give ‘essence’ to the authenticity that is created through rules, regulations, and documentation. The ‘presentation’ value highlights the aesthetic characteristics of church items: iconicity and aesthetic beauty are after all what attract visitors to the museum. In the museum, church objects enter into different relationships with people than in a church. They are no longer valued for their ability to mediate between people and the divine. Instead, a church object becomes valued as an art-object, which imbues it with a different kind of ‘sacredness’ (Morgan 2017). I will examine the concurrent processes of ‘heritagization of the sacred’ and ‘sacralization of heritage’ (de Witte & Meyer 2013, 277), in order to understand how the value of ‘religious heritage’ is different and similar to the value of ‘religious objects’.

Politics of Authentication

Described as the “*sine qua non* of heritage formations in our time” (van de Port & Meyer 2018, 13), authentication is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon central to the construction of heritage. We can understand authentication as a process taking place in the social, scientific, political and economic realm. The Hammer of Saint Martin, for example, is authenticated as Dutch heritage by various processes, including but not limited to the following (f)acts: 1) it has been taken apart in the early twentieth century to examine its materials, revealing the greenish serpentine rock which is axe-shaped on one side and blunt on the other and the wooden handle under the silver encasing; 2) it is placed in a tradition of other dual-ended rock-axes in the Eastern and Northern

Netherlands to show that it once likely functioned as a pagan ritual object, and not as a tool (Achterop & Brongers 1979; Kruijff 2011, 97); 3) the Hammer is researched and found to be described in other sources like the fifteenth-century inventory lists of Saint Martin's cathedral;⁵⁴ 4) it has been assumed into the collection of the Old-Catholic museum and later into Museum Catharijneconvent; 5) it has been insured; 6) it is documented in the online collection database of the museum and provided with numerous textual sources where the item is mentioned; 7) it is on display in various museum exhibitions. Altogether, these developments and practices have come to authenticate the item as deserving of the status of 'heritage', and even as 'national heritage'. In the museum, many of these processes come together. Rules and regulations regarding heritage, like the rules and regulations controlling the movements of objects in the sacred economy of the church, are instrumental to the authentication of heritage.

"WBC-listed, that is about the highest you can get as an object. You're like a national monument, but then as an object", a heritage expert of the Catharijneconvent tells me.⁵⁵ WBC stands for *Wet tot Behoud van Cultuurbezit* (Law to Conservation of Cultural Possessions), and comprises a list of items, buildings, and sites which are deemed important to the Dutch national tradition and thus should be preserved. Since 2016, this law and other laws relating to the safekeeping of material and immaterial heritage have been bundled into the national *Erfgoedwet* (Heritage Law). Control over what is and what is not included in these lists is in the hands of the national government, specifically with the *Rijksdienst Cultureel Erfgoed* (Cultural Heritage Agency; RCE), a subsidiary of the ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (OCW).

Objects that are important to these actors are also closely related to the aforementioned *Canon van Nederland* (hereafter: Canon). In 2006, a committee was assembled by then minister of Education Maria van der Hoeven. Utrecht University professor Frits van Oostrom presided this committee, which eventually bundled fifty events, persons, and books which are deemed instrumental to a good understanding of Dutch national history.⁵⁶ Currently, the Canon shapes the history curriculum in secondary education, is materialized in national museums,⁵⁷ and is emphasized by the current government which proposed to present young adults with a book

⁵⁴ <http://adlib.catharijneconvent.nl/ais54/Details/collect/41976> Accessed August 22, 2019

⁵⁵ "Lijst WBC, dat is het allerhoogst dat je kan zijn als object (lacht). Een soort rijksmonument, alleen dan object." PM-170518

⁵⁶ At the moment a new committee is being assembled, with the explicit goal to focus on the 'shadow sides' of Dutch history and on making the Canon more inclusive to different perspectives. University College Utrecht Dean and professor of modern Dutch history James Kennedy will lead this committee. Further reading on the recent critiques: <https://www.oneworld.nl/opinie/nederlandse-geschiedenis-is-nooit-neutraal-geweest/> Accessed August 22, 2019.

⁵⁷ The Holland Open Air Museum in Arnhem opened their permanent exhibition called 'de Canon van Nederland' in 2018.

detailing the events which are part of the Canon on their eighteenth birthday.⁵⁸ Top-down, a specific category of objects is assigned the status of heritage and as such is instantly authorized. This category of objects is political, not just because they are assigned this status by a governmental institution, but also because they figure into a specific narrative about Dutch national history. The heritage expert who works at Museum Catharijneconvent is very critical of this form of listing for a different reason. She argues that, when an object enters the museum, the value of the object immediately decreases up and against its use in a church setting. “Indeed, we always say from the museum, that the best precondition for conservation is ecclesiastical use.”⁵⁹ As long as the church community keeps using the objects, its original value remains attached to it. That is also why they favor the repurposing of objects from churches in other churches over repurposing them in museums. Only when an object is extremely valuable in a national heritage perspective, fills a gap in the current collection, or is likely to otherwise leave the Netherlands, the museum will consider taking it up into their own collection.

To streamline this process and to help them determine which objects should and should not be assumed into the collection, the museum uses several databases. The department *Erfgoed in Kerken en Kloosters* (Heritage in Churches and Convents, EKK), the same department which helps church administrators in the repurposing process, uses these systems to collect and archive data about Dutch religious heritage of all sorts. I will briefly introduce three systems which the staff rely on: *Adlib*, *Vraag-en-Aanbod*; and *Kerkcollectie digitaal*.

*Adlib*⁶⁰

Of the various systems used to document objects of importance to the museum, Adlib is currently the most important one, because it contains all the information regarding Museum Catharijneconvent’s own collection. Every object which is assumed into the museum collection first enters into this public database, which is built on widely used archival software. When new objects enter the museum – like a set of vestments from the recently closed Gertrudiskerk (chapter 2) which the museum assumed into its collection – every item is assigned a code in a specific format. The capitalized characters refer to the underlying foundation collection which the piece will become part of (see chapter 1): ABM for *Aartsbisschoppelijk Museum*; OKM for *Oud Katholiek Museum*; BMH for *Bisschoppelijk Museum Haarlem*; SPKK for *Stichting Protestantse Kerkelijke Kunst*; RMCC for *Rijksmuseum Catharijneconvent*; or StCC for *Stichting Catharijneconvent*. The various foundations which have merged their collections under the foundation ‘Museum

58 <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/regering/regeerakkoord-vertrouwen-in-de-toekomst/1.-investeren-voor-iedereen/1.5-cultuur> Accessed August 22, 2019.

59 “Ja, wij zeggen zelf altijd vanuit het museum, inderdaad, dat de beste voorwaarde voor behoud is kerkelijk gebruik.” PM-170518

60 <http://adlib.catharijneconvent.nl/ais54/search/simple> Accessed August 22, 2019

Catharijneconvent' still exist separately and own the items in their collections. The new vestments, for example, have become part of the ABM because they come from a church in the Utrecht diocese and it would not make sense to assume them into a collection from a different diocese or denomination. The foundation code is followed by a character detailing the 'core collection' of which the item is part. For example: s for *schilderij* (painting); b for *beeld* (statue, often followed by a letter for its material: e.g. h for *hout* (wood); s for *steen* (stone) etc.); t for *textiel* (textile), and so on. Three or four digits at the end of the code specify their number within these core collections. Other data about the objects is archived here as well. For example, the name of the artist or firm that made the object, the year of its origin, material, its size, any defects and deviations like scratches or broken pieces, and whether it is currently on display in the museum. Many items also contain a brief description by a curator. Below, a list of literature references about the object are given if available. *Adlib* also has the ability to display pictures for each item, pictures which are shared with the public national heritage database of the RCE, Wikipedia, and sometimes are used on social media as well. Used for their own administration but also for research, this database is largely public. At the bottom of each entry, it provides users with the opportunity to email the curators with additional information or proposed corrections. As such, the database does not only collect information about the numerous objects in the museum collection, but also provides the objects with intertextual data: sources and traditions against and in which the object is situated.

*Vraag-en-aanbod*⁶¹

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this database functions as a sort of marketplace for items from churches. Only churches and some church-affiliated or otherwise spiritually aimed organizations (e.g. funeral homes or hospital chapels) are allowed on this platform, although an occasional exception is made for researchers or a private collector of religious art who wanted to see his collection repurposed in a church.⁶² The SKKN (*Stichting Kerk- en Kunstbezit Nederland*, see chapter 1) previously ran this system, but when the EKK took over its tasks it was digitalized and moved to the website which is currently used. While its explicit purpose is to make the task of EKK staff easier, it also allows them to curate and closely follow the processes of repurposing that churches engage in. Signing up for the service goes through Museum Catharijneconvent. Although members are able to log in and monitor everything themselves, the museum is able to intervene and advise as necessary.

⁶¹ <http://vraagenaanbod.catharijneconvent.nl/> Accessed June 17, 2019

⁶² "Ik heb ook wel eens ooit een particulier gehad. Die zien we dan wel als een soort uitzondering." PM-170518

*Kerkcollectie digitaal*⁶³

Launched in 2015, this database contains information on religious heritage in churches and convents in the Netherlands. *Kerkcollectie digitaal* (Digital Church Collection) is a private database, accessible only by employees of Museum Catharijneconvent's EKK department and church administrators. EKK staff has access to the entire database. Church administrators or board members – the owners of the objects in question – are only able to see everything relating to their own church(es). Every church has its own page, administrators are able to register objects, change information about objects, upload new pictures, and access inventory reports to easily export the entire inventory including descriptions and status of the item (whether it is part of the core-collection of the church). This database is also grounded in the work previously done by the SKKN, but optimized in an online digital archive by EKK. *Kerkcollectie digitaal* is considered the official national database for religious heritage.

Together, these systems encompass an extensive inventory containing all of the indexed 'religious heritage' in the Netherlands – and to an extent abroad. When objects are repurposed to other churches in the Netherlands or abroad via *vraag-en-aanbod* or if they are destroyed, their new 'location' is noted down in *Kerkcollectie digitaal*. This form of curating carefully circumscribes the boundaries of an economy of heritage. In the previous chapter, I referred to the Reverend Huitink, who explained that everything in a church is sacred to an extent. It has been in contact with other objects and people in the context of a church and therefore is part of the 'ecclesiastical economy'. The items in the heritage economy undergo the same process: they are collected and assembled in a digital heritage database. All items in this database immediately become 'heritage' because they are authorized as such by heritage agencies – with the support of the national government. Well-documented items that connect 'intertextually' to other objects, stories, and places, are valued higher than others in the heritage economy.

Every policy period, the priorities the museum follows in its collection practices are detailed in a collection plan. Museum Catharijneconvent distinguishes seven 'core collections': medieval and renaissance sculpture, textiles, handwriting and prints, painting, gold- and silversmithing, cultural-historical collection, and remembrance stories. Next to the core collections, the museum has smaller collections of ivory, prints and etchings, medieval pipeclay statues, sculpture after 1600, contemporary art, stain-glass, photography, coins and tokens, and icons (Museum Catharijneconvent 2016, 8-21). When an item or artwork is offered to the museum, the head of the collection committee checks it against these core collections:

I also see if we already have things. I can easily look up in the collection database, look up comparable pieces, so I learn: do we have it, is it interesting, are there hundreds or are there

⁶³ <https://kerkcollectie.catharijneconvent.nl/> Accessed August 22, 2019

none? And then I can already reject some things because they are not relevant. [...] For example, a beautiful statue that was offered to us once in the past. [...] It is a Spanish statue, which can be dated to the seventeenth century. Well, actually the alarm bells already go off when I hear that it is Spanish, because we focus on the Netherlands [...] It does not end up with the committee.⁶⁴

Like in any other museum, Museum Catharijneconvent privileges certain works of art and items over others. The focus on items important in a national perspective, however, provides a lens through which to examine these practices. Two values, detailed in the ‘Guidelines on Ways of Dealing with Religious Objects’, are especially important for the museum in the collection process: the ‘presentation value’, which I will return to in the next section, and the ‘documentation value’. The latter describes the relationships an object has with different objects and narratives.

C5. Documentation value. When an item is well documented, this can increase the value with respect to comparable objects which are less well documented. For example, if there are designs, contemporary descriptions of the object, receipts, or correspondence with the artist available (Catharijneconvent 2011, 39, *translation mine*).

Documentation is very important to heritage collection. This is visible especially from the recent focus of Museum Catharijneconvent on *herinneringsverhalen* (remembrance stories). Often connected to temporary exhibitions, the museum collects written stories, videos, and audio where people tell about their experiences with religious and non-religious practices related to things.⁶⁵ Museum Catharijneconvent also invites people to send in their stories relating to objects from the collection. For example, in the category ‘Stories about Mary’ the museum asks visitors to the website to send in personal stories about objects relating to devotion to Mary, like a plastic water bottle or and statuette of Mary from the pilgrimage to Lourdes. The collection of these stories, like the collection of many kinds of material heritage, builds on the assumption of an eventual loss. The museum posits in their policy plan:

The urgency of collecting in the area of remembrance stories from the twentieth and twenty-first century is high. After all, we can still capture these stories now. Because of unchurched

⁶⁴ “Ik kijk ook of we dingen al hebben. Ik kan heel makkelijk in de collectiedatabase zoeken, vergelijkbare stukken zoeken, zodat ik een beetje weet: hebben we het, is het interessant, zijn er honderd van, of is er niks van? En vervolgens kan ik sommige dingen al afwijzen omdat ze niet relevant zijn. Bijvoorbeeld zo’n mooi beeld is in het verleden ooit aangeboden. [...] Het is een Spaans beeld, te dateren in de 17e eeuw. Nou, eigenlijk gaan de alarmbellen al af als ik hoor dat het Spaans is, want wij hebben een focus op Nederland. [...] Het komt niet bij de commissie terecht.” RH-080519

⁶⁵ <https://www.catharijneverhalen.nl/> Accessed August 22, 2019

and secularization, the number of people that can recall these first-hand experiences becomes smaller (Catharijneconvent 2016a, 17, *translation mine*).

Collecting remembrance stories also figures into a broader focus of heritage agencies on so-called immaterial heritage. Both this focus and the valuation of objects in terms of their ‘intertextual’ reach with regards to documentation figure into the idea that objects in and of themselves cannot convey the actual experienced meaning of heritage but require additional sources in order to construct narratives.

“Now they come and ask me for those stories”, former curator Casper Staal tells me. After the museum was privatized in 1993, much of the collection data was digitalized. “This kind of collateral information was often not taken into account, because it was not on paper [...], an entire crew of temporary workers were typing what was on the sheets, to get it into the computer. They had length, width, height, size, material, things like that, but not the stories.”⁶⁶ Digitization of both the collection and the available heritage in the country seems to have a double effect, even though the internet and digital media make it easier to record experience stories, there are archives full of stories relating to objects which are not (yet) digitized and thus not available to ‘the public’.

Various online and offline, digital and analog systems thus work together in the registration, indexation, and valuation of (im)material religious heritage. All of these systems are mostly curated by the museum, an institute which functions as an executive power in the creation of an economy of heritage. Besides documentation, the material properties of the objects in question add to both authentication and heritagization of items circulating in this economy. In processes of authentication, selections are made. “Not everything is honoured,” heritage scholar Regina Bendix (2009, 254) writes, “some aspects must be forgotten, so as to increase the potential for identification of what is selected.” The Guidelines on Ways of Dealing with Religious Objects were published in 2011 as the result of a collaboration between Museum Catharijneconvent, the SKKN, RCE, the Roman-Catholic, Old-Catholic, Evangelical-Lutheran, Mennonite, Remonstrant, and Protestant church (Catharijneconvent 2011, 9). The document is specifically meant for church administrators to help them value and repurpose objects from their church when the need arises. The document explicitly situates itself in a context where it deems the proliferation of Dutch Christianity to be under pressure due to de-churching and declining church-affiliation (*ibid.*, 11). In the document it is not argued that Christianity will disappear, but emphasis is placed on the idea that the way in which it was experienced historically will eventually be lost. Although the foreword states that the guidelines are made with new Christian movements,

⁶⁶ “En nu komen ze mij dus die verhalen vragen hier, he.” “Dit soort zijdelingse info is vaak niet meegenomen, want die stond niet op papier [...], er werd als een gek gewerkt door een hele ploeg ingehuurd mensen die alleen maar typten wat er op die vellen stond, om het in de computer te krijgen. Die hadden lengte, breedte, hoogte, maat, materiaal, allemaal van dat soort dingen, maar niet de verhalen.”

Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism in mind, representatives of these traditions have not gained a seat at the table during the development of these guidelines, also because the decline in affiliation currently does not really affect these movements (ibid., 9). This makes church closure and the accompanying threat of heritage loss into factors privileging certain movements and denomination in the heritage selection process.

Authentication shows to be a complex process wherein selections are made, and some stories and cultural and religious groups are included while others are neglected. The example of the Hammer of Saint Martin, with which I started this chapter, illustrates how one story becomes privileged over time. Although the database and the sources within it list the object as ‘the Hammer of Saint Martin’, this claim was contested by a Frisian journalist in 1953, who writes: “As of yet, in Friesland, the full attention has never fallen on a most curious object, that is conserved in Utrecht and of which tradition tells that Boniface was killed with it” (van der Meulen 1953, *translation mine*). The journalist continues to argue that there is nearly no evidence to substantiate the idea that it was Boniface (death 754 A.D., more than 350 years after Saint Martin’s death) who was killed with the Hammer. It is however even less likely that this hammer has ever belonged to Saint Martin either, since the double-sided stone hammerhead is understood to come from an area in the North-Eastern Netherlands where Martin has never set foot. Still, this is the story that the hammer is best remembered by. The preservation of this tradition through fifteenth-century inventory lists and an inscription in its silver handle, both recorded and preserved in Utrecht – the city where the archbishop is seated, and thus effectively the Catholic center of the country — have undoubtedly contributed to the authentication of this tradition. It was only after the emancipation of Catholicism in the Netherlands that the hammer was found in the Old-Catholic clandestine church in Utrecht’s Mariahoek. Even though almost everything we know about this object was retroactively determined through careful examination of sources and material, this tells us little about the lived traditions concerning this hammer through time. Its continuous importance for different people in different times is however rather uncontested. The instrumentalization of the Hammer and other items in various contemporary exhibitions is a specific moment in the lived traditions of which these objects are part.

Aesthetics of persuasion

Documentation is not the only factor in the authentication and heritagization of religious heritage. As briefly mentioned before, another value is important for the Museum Catharijneconvent, the ‘presentation value’ of religious objects.

If a (group) of object(s) can show religious traditions and uses in an appealing manner, it has presentation value. An object can evoke a certain atmosphere, express a certain mystery, or just be imposing through its antiquity, use of materials, size, use, or design. This can make an

object attractive for an audience, which makes it suitable for presentation or education. Presentation value is important for objects that are assigned to the museum. Furthermore, through an increase in cultural tourism, the presentation value also becomes increasingly important for objects which are kept in churches. The objects can also offer starting points for conversations about faith, which connects to the missionary tasks of the church (Catharijneconvent 2011, 39, *translation mine*).

The museum is quite explicit about the connection of this specific value to its purposes. Without a certain aesthetic attraction, people will not come to the museum to see the objects. The national heritage guidelines, assembled by the aforementioned RCE (Cultural Heritage Agency), provide an additional ‘value’ which is connected to this. They call it *economische waarde* (economic value) when an object or an assemblage of objects participates in generating income for the place where they are displayed. With economic value they do not mean the financial value which the object would have on the market, but the quality of an object to attract people to visit a place which in turn brings in money. Of course, the aesthetic qualities of an object are not the only requirement for this, since knowledge about the object –the previously discussed wider authentication— and the myths, legends, and stories constructed around the objects are also important in order to generate attraction. Nonetheless, the presentation value places the religious heritage objects inside an economy of heritage, which has become subordinate to the neoliberal market economy which authenticates heritage in its own way: if the heritage object is uniquely appealing through its aesthetic qualities or its story, it becomes marketable and as such becomes legitimized and worthy of care in preservation and display.

“The uniqueness of a work of art is identical to its embeddedness in the context of a tradition” writes Walter Benjamin about what he calls the ‘aura’ of artworks (Benjamin [1934] 2010, 16). The value of some artworks, for Benjamin, lies in their *Kultwert* (cult value). The work of art is important insofar as it is visible not to humans, but to the cult deities for which it was made: “what matters is that the spirits see it” (*ibid.*, 18). Objects with a *Kultwert* have a tendency to remain largely hidden – secrecy being a necessary characteristic of sacralization (Chidester 2018, 97). A good example of this would be the ‘macchina barocca’ in the San Ignazio chapel of the Jesuit Church in Rome (*Chiesa del Gesù*). Built towards the end of the seventeenth century by the Jesuit brother Andrea Pozzo, the ‘baroque machine’ consists of a large painting which slides down into the floor every day in the church, revealing the hidden statue of Saint Ignatius. Though the machine itself is visible, the statue hidden behind it is made to convey a sense of ‘magic’ in the context of the ‘cult’, the irregular visibility increases awe once it is revealed.

Another value of artworks is found in their ‘exhibitability’ (*Ausstellbarkeit*), which increases to the extent that an object is ‘mobile’. *Ausstellbarkeit* applies directly to the display of the Hammer of Saint Martin in the museum exhibition on relics, where the viewer was reminded by the accompanying plaque that the object used to travel around from church to church. The

Ausstelbarkeit of this object is high due to its portability. In an age of technological reproduction, Benjamin argues, the exhibitability of art increases because it can be easily reproduced. It takes on new meanings in this context, like the items from the *Rijke Roomse Leven* (Rich Roman-Catholic Life) which have today gained a significant cultural value rather than the devotional value these items used to have.

Inspired by Benjamin's distinction, I understand both the documentation and presentation value, outlined the Guidelines on Ways of Dealing with Religious Objects, as part of this spectrum. Countless documented objects, like the destroyed tabernacle discussed in the previous chapter, but also nearly all objects inside the storage facility of the museum, remain hidden, increasing their cult value in the sacred economy of heritage. Documentation and preservation as practices sacralize these objects: items in museum exhibitions and collections are rendered untouchable, often invisible, and become subjects of intensive care. In the first chapter, I discussed the 'consecrated vessels' of the church which are subject to similar practices. The chalice and ciborium, like Ignatius' statue and most objects in the museum collection, are only visible at specific times at specific occasions, which increases their *Kultwert*. The presentation value of objects is closely related to their *Ausstelbarkeit*. The aesthetics of the object determine its ability to convey certain documented stories and their ability to move around and be displayed in various exhibitions within and outside of the museum. Objects in Museum Catharijneconvent's collection, and many objects in the online database *Kerkcollectie Digitaal*, are not well-documented or presentable and lack the personal relationships and mediation which are required to sacralize an item. Although not part of a 'sacred economy' of heritage, they are still very much part of a heritage economy, because their movements are strictly controlled and leaving the valuation of 'heritage' behind is nigh impossible.

The 'beyond' (Meyer 2012, 23) which is addressed in the sacred economy of heritage, becomes visible in collection and exhibition practices in the museum. In exhibitions especially, the aesthetic dimension of objects is instrumentalized and combined with stories to paint a picture of this beyond. Anique de Kruijf, who is the director of the EKK department told me in an interview that the focus in exhibition will shift in the coming years from what she calls *het cognitieve* (the cognitive) to *de beleving* (the experiential). What she means is that up until this day, many objects are primarily displayed to convey certain stories in exhibitions, and that a lot of additional text and explanation is needed in telling these stories. In the future, the museum aims to let the objects speak more for themselves. In the spring of 2019, for example, the museum hosted an exhibition on the *Münster Domschat* (the Treasure of Münster). I visited this exhibition shortly before my interview with Anique, and we talked about this 'shift to the experiential' in relation to this exhibition. The *Münster* exhibition is structured on a comparison between works of art from the *Domkammer* in Saint Paul's cathedral in Münster, with written records about the inventory of Saint Martin's cathedral in Utrecht. Records about many of the objects in the former church were

destroyed in a big fire in the sixteenth century, whereas many of the objects from the Utrecht cathedral were sold or otherwise lost before and during the *Beeldenstorm* in the same period while the records remain. From the beginning, the emphasis on the experiential dimension is visible in videos starring the curators of this exhibition, who tell stories about the use of these objects through the centuries and the meaning that the objects on display are supposed to have had to people when they still were ‘in use’.

The move from ‘cognition’ to ‘experience’ figures into a contemporary understanding of society as more individualistic. This is emphasized by the museum in their policy, where they see the “rise of individual forms of meaning making, based on Christian traditions” as a trend on which the museum is able to respond (Catharijneconvent 2016b, 6). This means that grand narratives about communal identity communicated in the ‘cognitive’ exhibition practices, have to make way for exhibition practice geared to personal experiences of people through time. The museum is able to do this, due to its large collection in personal devotion objects, which came especially to the fore in their exhibition on relics in the last quarter of 2018. The last exhibition room was themed *‘privé’* (literally: private, ‘home’ in the English guidebook), and featured contemporary ‘personal relics’ such as a picture signed by a Dutch popular singer, a necklace made of hair from somebody’s deceased pet, or inherited family jewelry. Signage on the wall invites people to send in pictures and stories about their own ‘personal relics’ by postcard when leaving the exhibition. Since the early years after its establishment, the museum has collected all kinds of personal devotion items. Casper Staal tells me how the first director of the museum went to an auction and came back with a collection of gypsum statuettes: “The museum did not use to have those. We neatly had everything made of wood, but gypsum, you did not do that at the time. He was the one who initiated that: your average Joe has other things with which he is concerned.”⁶⁷ He places this in a larger tradition of what a friend of his, another museum director, used to call ‘Low Life’, as opposed to ‘High Art’ (see also Myers 2002, 33). The focus on ‘low life’ helps to bring objects closer to the everyday experiences of contemporary visitors, who might have less experience with experiencing religion, and it allows them to form their own opinion and find common ground with people who consider themselves religious.

“[A]ny artifact, creature, place, or practice is set off from the world around it as special – for a moment or much longer – and serves as a way to join human beings to a larger reality”, writes David Morgan (2017, 17). He argues that both devotional items and works of fine-art aim to connect people to a larger reality, a ‘divine’. For different reasons and with different goals, objects mediate in these relationships and become integral parts of different ‘sacred economies’ (Morgan 2018). In recent years, sociologists Jan-Willem Duyvendak en Eveline Tonkens argue,

⁶⁷ “Dat had het museum niet. We hadden keurig alles wat van hout was, maar gips daar deed je niet aan. Dus hij [Henri Defour] is eigenlijk de eerste die daar een kleine aanzet toe heeft gegeven, zo van: Jan met de pet heeft andere dingen waar ‘ie mee bezig is.” CS-070619

the search for a Dutch national identity has increasingly played out along the lines of citizenship and belonging, two areas where the vocabulary largely revolves around ‘culture’ (Duyvendak & Tonkens 2016, 3). What the museum is able to do in exhibitions, is to assemble church-art objects in such a way that they address the longing of people “to be enticed, captivated, convinced and mobilized to see such forms as *their* heritage: something that belongs to them and that underpins their belonging, and hence is part of *their* identity” (van de Port & Meyer 2018, 20, *emphasis in original*). They figure into an idea of citizenship on the basis of belonging. Enticing people to see former church objects as *their* heritage, means that the divine which is mediated in the ‘cultural’ context of belonging, becomes a carefully curated version of Dutch identity. Art is often employed in the construction of this narrative. For example, in the aforementioned Canon, Rembrandt visualizes the Dutch ‘Golden Age’, van Gogh stands in for a modernizing Netherlands, and Mondriaan and Rietveld embody the purity and the Dutch landscape with the straight lines and basic colors of ‘De Stijl’. Fine art is employed as heritage, church and art objects become part of a sacred economy.

Conclusion

“An object can evoke a certain atmosphere, express a certain mystery, or just be imposing through its antiquity, use of materials, size, use, or design” (Catharijneconvent 2011, 39, *translation mine*). This description holds true both in the context of the church and in the context of the museum. Whereas a church object has a high cult value, in Benjaminian terms, in the context of a church, the same objects may regain a high cult value in the context of a museum. Indexation and documentation offer an in-between state. Confined to the sacred economy of the church, the object is unable to leave because of its sacred value and no other valuations can apply to it. When a church object is valued for its quality as heritage, however, its value becomes contested. It has been enabled to circulate across the sacred economy of the church and the heritage economy, its value is no longer set, and its sacredness cannot remain fully protected. Aesthetic of persuasion – through presentation and exhibition – imbue church objects with value in a heritage economy. The museum has locked the object in the heritage ‘cult’ through its placement in exhibitions materializing national narratives, where the object is able to mediate in the sacralizing relationship between people and national identity.

4 Rescuing Jesus

Following Gert into the basement, I am greeted by the smell of old wood and cloth. On the bottom step of the stairs, Gert has to push aside the coat rack with dozens of albs and chasubles on it, in order to allow us passage into the storage room. Under the metal stairs we just descended, hundreds of picture frames containing lithographs and paintings are stacked into rows on the floor, still waiting to be sorted out. In the aisle to my right copper candlesticks are stacked on shelves. To the left of the aisle, small statuettes up to around sixty centimeters tall are neatly organized according to likeness. A couple shelves are entirely dedicated to mass-produced gypsum statuettes, all with a slightly differently paintwork, some missing a hand or toe. “Jesus with the wandering hands,”⁶⁸ Gert calls them, explaining to me that you used to be able to order new and easy-to-replace hands on wooden pegs separately. At the end of the aisle, over fifty blue crates are stacked against the wall, all filled to the brim with small wooden crucifixes (Figure 9). Most of the stuff down here, Gert was able to gather through his campaign *Red Jezus van de Afvalhoop* (Rescue Jesus from the Trash) in 2013 and 2014. Every weekend, he would go into malls across the southern Dutch province of Limburg and collect all kinds of devotional items that people wanted to get rid of, promising them to take good care of them.

In December of 2018, Gert opened his religious antiques shop. Specializing in statues, most of them over a meter in height, the ‘Relimarkt’ store on the edge of the towns of Hoensbroek and Brunssum in Limburg attracts visitors from far and wide. In the days I spent in the store I learned that Gert’s visitors and customers come not just from Limburg, but also from East-Germany, the French-speaking parts of Belgium, all the way up to Den Helder in the opposite corner of the Netherlands. I mention both visitors and customers here, because the Relimarkt is a space in between a shop and a museum. Many people who visit the store do nothing more than look around and admire the art, without touching it, as I did myself the first time I visited. Others, sometimes more experienced in handling statues and precious metals, touch everything and pick up objects to find Gert and ask him for the price, something I felt more comfortable doing as well on my second visit.

⁶⁸ “Jezus met de losse handjes” GdW-020219



Figure 9 Boxes full of small wooden crucifixes in the basement of the Relimarkt. Photo by author.

As I have shown in the previous chapters, religious objects from churches and in museums are subject to different regimes which control and often restrict their movement, often with the explicit goal to prevent items from ending up on ‘the market’. Nonetheless, Gert is definitely not the only collector in the Netherlands and is not the only director of an antique shop specializing in religious art and statues. Somehow, all these objects, which range from large statues, monstrances, and reliquaries clearly made for use in the ecclesiastical context, to smaller objects meant for personal devotional purposes, have ended up in this store. At the same time, the Relimarkt is not just a market. Gert has also collected a basement full of objects which he does not intend to sell, but which he intends to keep and eventually exhibit.

The space of the Relimarkt brings heritage, sacred waste, and value together in unexpected ways. The rules and regulations which govern ecclesiastical and heritage items and bring them together in sacred economies, have their influence on the commercial market in which the Relimarkt operates as well. The rules of supply and demand are disrupted by these regimes which control the movements of items from churches. Many of the items in the Relimarkt and on other markets for religious antiques, which are also found online, have circulated these markets for decades, most notably the many statues and ecclesiastical and devotional items which were thrown out of churches after the Second Vatican Council. First, I will introduce the person

behind the Relimarkt. Gert de Weerd started out as a collector of religious statues who eventually opened a small museum in an old convent chapel. His collection grew out of hand, which led him to open the Relimarkt in order to finance his hobby of collecting more and more beautiful statues. Although the Relimarkt is a commercial business and constitutes part of his full-time job, Gert frequently uses the term *erfgoed* (heritage) to describe the business he is engaged in, and points out that the people working in the shop are ‘*museum-mensen*’ (museum people) first and foremost. Next, I will zoom out to the to the space of the Relimarkt and some of the events which I have observed there. To highlight how museum, church, and market come together in one space, I use Foucault’s concept of the heterotopia. Heterotopias are intended to disrupt the binaries which are attached to spaces, and have the capacity to reflect the social world outside the space itself. I use Foucault’s six principles which describe the heterotopic space in order to understand how a space like this is neither public nor private and neither sacred nor profane. Finally, I will direct attention to the objects in the store, and how they are valued financially. In the absence of craftsmen and monastic orders which are able to produce new statues and vestments for churches, the Relimarkt has become a repository for churches to acquire goods as well. The statues, tabernacles, monstrances, vestments, relics, and candlesticks were once considered ‘waste’, but have gained new meaning and a new, financial value in the contemporary moment, which the Relimarkt is able to exploit.



Figure 10 The entrance of 'Museum Vaals'. Google Maps: Street view (June 2018).

Rescuing Jesus from the Trash

Vaals is a town near the border triangle with Germany and Belgium in the southern and predominantly Catholic province of Limburg. Driving down the hill and following the signs to ‘museum Vaals’, suddenly to our right a giant, Delft blue Jesus emerges, placed on a pedestal sporting a big Delft blue Superman logo (Figure 10). After a brief break in the museum café, which is named ‘*De Zwarte Madonna*’ (the black Madonna) and is furnished with church pews, prie-dieu, statues, and a bar made from two altars, we enter the museum. The reception space has several statues and statuettes tucked away in a corner, with the attached sign reading: “We also sell old church statues (ask about it at the desk).”⁶⁹ The creaking door leads us into a former convent chapel, where on both sides of a single aisle in the middle, a red-clothed stage is filled with over a hundred statues of saints, apostles, Virgin Mary’s and Jesuses. Choir music loudly plays through the hidden speakers, filling the chapel with an overwhelming aura. Responsible for the assemblage of statues and devotional items on the stages and on the balcony and altar is Gert de Weerd, whose presence is heard and seen in the museum via a tv-screen hidden away on the choir, showing a short documentary about him and his museum. Gert started out as a collector of statues on a Christmas market in Brabant nearly thirty years ago. He told me that he bought a baby Jesus there, and was immediately intrigued by the fact that he could haggle about the price of Jesus in the context of a market fair. When he got home, he showed the statue to his grandmother, a pious Dutch Reformed woman, who did not want to see it (*Nederlands Dagblad*, December 22, 2011). From the year 2000 on Gert started to collect statues as a hobby, which culminated in a collection of over 300 statues of saints, all placed in his house. Gert was later able to acquire the chapel of this closed-down convent, where since 2009 ‘museum Vaals’ is housed. Since the opening of the museum, which was blessed by the auxiliary bishop Everard de Jong of Roermond, the museum, its café, and the recently opened Relimarkt constitute Gert’s full-time job. Born in north-Holland, his previous job was as an accountant for the film industry in Amsterdam.

In 2013 and 2014, Gert organized the campaign *Red Jezus van de Afvalhoop* (Rescue Jesus from the trash). A newspaper from Limburg wrote the following about it:

The table is filled with a number of statues of Christ (both with and without hands), medallions, postcards from the pilgrimage to Lourdes, and an embroidered Lord’s Prayer. [...] We receive unexpected pieces. But surprises are the most fun. [...] People who hand something in don’t know what they should do with it, but museum Vaals does know. De Weerd: ‘First everything has to be restored, but eventually we want to add it to our collection. Perhaps in the format of a thematic exhibition about, let’s say, the holy Gerardus

⁶⁹ “We verkopen ook oude kerkbeelden (vraag hiernaar aan de balie).”

[Majella].’ When the collection campaign yields a lot, it could also become an independent museum (Bruls 2013, *translation mine*).

Gert told me that the yield was easily seven moving boxes per day. All in all, he collected over three hundred moving boxes full of devotional items consisting of statues, stoups, prints and paintings, crucifixes, bibles, and more. One elderly man with a terminal illness came to Gert with his own rosary and missal, because he could not use them anymore and trusted that it would end up in the right hands this way. Most of the items which Gert received came from inheritance or from dusty attics or storage places. In this regards, the campaign’s effects were quite similar to those of Museum Catharijneconvent. Casper Staal writes in an article about the musealization of religious popular culture:

Oftentimes it happened to me that people offered items to the museum with the question if it was something for the collection. If that did turn out to be the case, for example because it concerned a second specimen, then the question came up whether the museum could find another destination for it. [...] With another destination, people also meant the garbage bin, not the one at home, but the one in the Catharijneconvent. The sacredness still stuck to the item (*het heilige dat het voorwerp nog aankleefde*), was a reason not to pass a verdict, but to redirect it to the museum. (Staal 2003, 23-24, *translation mine*).

“We want to keep the cultural heritage and exhibit it in our museum. That is why we are conducting a ‘Tour de Limbourg’ across the municipalities in Limburg” Gert de Weert says in a newspaper (*De Limburger*, January 17, 2013, *translation mine*). Whereas Museum Catharijneconvent has to decline offers of this kind on a regular basis, Gert was happy to collect all these items, most of which currently reside in the basement of his shop. A number of years down the line, Gert is currently restoring an old church in Hoensbroek in order to finally be able to exhibit these items. The items in storage, Gert only rarely sells. First, he wants everything to be neatly sorted out, a job which will take some time, judging by the fact that almost two months after my first visit, one of the volunteers is still working in the basement the entire day to sort out the framed paintings, lithographs and pictures under the stairs. Second, he much rather wants to exhibit these items somewhere, which answers to the sense of accountability he feels towards the people who gave the items to him, because he promised to care for them.

Gert uses the term heritage in a similar way to Museum Catharijneconvent. He calls upon the ‘threat of loss’ with the same vocabulary as the heritage museum, predicting that, if he and others like him do not collect these items, “[i]n twenty years, it will all be gone” (*Nederlands Dagblad*, February 4, 2013, *translation mine*). Assigning an intern from the hospitality business who will join his venture in the coming months with the task to market towards adolescents, Gert hopes to give some knowledge about this heritage to future generations. He thinks that the statues and other items offer a space for peace and reflection: “You don’t even need to go to church in

order to bring it into your home,”⁷⁰ meaning that these statues have a universal power, regardless of a Catholic upbringing which attaches specific meanings to them.

Simultaneously, the combination of restaurant, museum, and market constitutes for Gert his full-time job. Although he is helped by two enthusiastic volunteers who are also collectors and spend their every weekend sorting out pictures and restoring and selling statues and other ‘churchware’, the Relimarkt is very much a moneymaking business. While most of his inventory comes to him via intermediaries, whom Gert visits on his ‘free days’ at the beginning of each week, a thriving market in churchware is also found online. Gert and other people in the business of religious art and antiquities buy and sell statues via eBay, Dutch second-hand website *Marktplaats*, or the Belgian *tweedehands.be*, but also through online auctions such as *Cataniki*. Every once in a while, Gert is able to acquire items directly from a church or convent, usually free of charge: “You will get it [for free], rather than that you have to pay for it.”⁷¹ Collecting directly from churches and monasteries requires a well-maintained network, however, and has gotten more difficult in the last decades because of the cataloging projects by diocese and heritage agencies, both in the Netherlands as abroad in France and Belgium. There used to be so much on offer, that merchants used to break off the extremities of saints in order to fit more of them into a van or container, Gert tells me. Today, popular saints such as Anthony of Padua and Thérèse of Lisieux are abundant, but rarer saints like Nicholas and Christopher are seldom available and go for a lot of money. The market seems to work on a supply-and-demand basis, and because the supply is diminishing, prices are increasing. The reason that the supply is shrinking, however, has everything to do with the previously discussed ecclesiastical and heritage economies. The rules and regulations which govern objects from churches in the contemporary moment prevent items like statues and tabernacles from ending up on the market. Especially rare statues are far more likely to be taken into a museum or another church, which means that they cannot become part of a commercial economy. The church objects which do end up on the market today are therefore the items that are able to escape these economies, because they are not important enough in a heritage perspective or because they are so abundant that they become obsolete for a church, or via international markets where the heritage and church rules and regulations are applied less strictly.

A problem which is connected to this and which is faced by church and diocese, museum, and market alike is the problem of storage. “If you do not market it, but store it somewhere... At a certain point you will have to pay, for the storage, and that might become too much... Because you don’t make any money off of it”, says former museum curator Casper Staal

⁷⁰ “Je hoeft niet naar de kerk te gaan om het in huis te halen” GdW-020219

⁷¹ “Je krijgt het vaak eerder dan dat je moet betalen” GdW-020219

about the issue.⁷² The market, in this sense, can also function as a means which incorporates and circumvents dealing with the problem of storage. Gert has his own story about it, because the diocese of Roermond allowed him to use an empty church for storing his collections from the 'Rescue-Jesus'-campaign for a while. Suddenly, on orders of the diocese, he had to vacate it, so he bought the second-hand store which currently houses the Relimarkt. Although he is very happy with this new space, he finds it sad that the church he used to borrow remains unused to this day.

Marketization of objects and heritage from churches is also a way to allow continuous use of ecclesiastical and devotional items. Although the use may not always correspond with the intended use of these objects, circulation amongst collectors and other admirers of these specific kinds of art, is one way in which 'religion' gains new shapes. Returning to Tweed's (2006) vocabulary: circulation of church objects on the commercial market might be a branch away from the main river, but this river's current carries the same sediments and sometimes even return to the main branch. Recycling the items and using them in homes or on buildings (Gert tells me how he recently sold eight polyester golden angels to a developer who wanted to put them on an apartment building), however, profoundly changes the interactions with these items from their use in a church. Some objects are however easier to market than others. The objects in Gert's museum and Relimarkt differ significantly from the artworks in museum Catharijneconvent. Gert's focus is more on the experience and the emotions that the images evoke, rather than about the stories that mediate conceptions of belonging or identity which are materialized in the museum context. The Relimarkt specializes in a very different realm of 'art' – because Gert definitely considers these objects to be art.

Heterotopic space

Before discussing how the Relimarkt circulates specific forms of art which used to be considered 'waste', I want to describe the space of the store using Foucault's concept of 'heterotopia'. Heterotopias are 'other spaces', defined by Foucault as "places [...] outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (Foucault [1967] 1984). They show something about the society in which they are placed and the ideals which that society is able to strive for but is often unable to attain. The heterotopia complicates the strict boundaries between private and public spaces. Museums are a good example of this. Although most museums require an entrance fee, these spaces are 'public' but are only accessible at certain times and for certain people, requiring money to fund the visit and the 'cultural capital' to find them interesting. Physically existing in the world while also reflecting something of the ideals of the society in which it is set, the museum is a 'placeless place' caught between being public and being private. I

⁷² "Als je het niet in de markt brengt, maar ergens opslaat... Op gegeven moment moet je het dan betalen, die opslag, en als dat te veel wordt... Want je verdient er niks aan." CS-070619

have previously described the Relimarkt as a space where church, museum, and market come together. The heterotopia helps to understand the store as an in-between-space, where the public-private binary and the strict borders between religion, economy, and heritage are contested.



Figure 11 The facade of the Relimarkt. Photo by author.

The Relimarkt is located on a very busy road, making it difficult for me to get out of my car after parking it. Although the contents of the store are not something you see every day, from the outside it resembles many other (second-hand) stores (Figure 11). A few statues and banners are placed in the window and the logo made by tattoo artist Henk Schiffmacher, of which a limited-edition reproduction is for sale inside the Relimarkt, is displayed on the façade. Upon entry, the doorbell rings and I am greeted by the tattooed volunteer in his blue overalls. Nothing except a larger than life-size statue of a saint, probably a cardinal by the looks of him, prepares me for what I am about to see around the corner. After paying the €2,50 entrance fee, I am allowed to enter the store through the opening in the wall on the far left, after which I end up in a place which reminds me of a museum shop. Countless small statuettes are assorted on the shelves, along with neatly packed rosaries, candles, a display case with silver reliquaries and chalices, and a table full of small crucifixes. Walking to the main market hall, I have to pass through an aisle. On both sides of the aisle, church pews are set around tables, reminding me of the booths commonly found in American diners. On the wall behind the church-pew-café setting, twelve wooden frames containing a complete 'stations of the Cross' are placed. At the end of the aisle, two polyester golden angels of around two meters high welcome me into the market hall (Figure 12). Along the four walls of the hall, statues are placed on top of a red-carpeted stage. Above it, a

recurring motif of crucifix – bronze head of Mary – crucifix – bronze head of Jesus – crucifix, alternated with framed paintings, provide some cohesion in the somewhat chaotic assemblages of items across the room (*Figure 13*). Whereas the market stalls contain various items ranging from altar bells to nativity scenes, and from candlesticks to reliquaries, behind the market stalls a quite random set of church objects is placed in rows. Pedestals and collection boxes, tabernacles, a small organ, some statues, incensories, vestments, and other items are placed in curious assemblages. In the corner of the store is a bar, where free coffee is served to the customers and visitors. In the café-section of the Relimarkt, a small radio is tuned to a station playing popular music. While the overall atmosphere is built to communicate ‘market’, the visual stimuli provoke ‘church’ or ‘museum’, judging by some visitor’s responses to the space.

Space of deviation

The Relimarkt assembles items which are part of ecclesiastical and heritage regimes and economies, and sets them apart in the market space, a place for which they are not originally intended. Yet, at the same time, there is virtually no other place where they would be and fit, except for the dumping ground. The items which are available span the entirety of North-West European Catholicism, from ecclesiastical gold and silver, to prayer beads and cards. From large and expensive wooden or terracotta statues, to small gypsum statuettes available for a few euros. The commodities of interest are the *commodities of diversion*, those things which are – at least nowadays – specifically protected from commoditization, but become commodities nonetheless (Appadurai 1986, 16). Foucault understands that ‘heterotopias of deviation’ exist, specifically meant to store those beings and goods that are deviant, “rejected from our normal schemes of classification” (Douglas 1966, 45). Even though the rules and regulations regarding (non-)ecclesiastical items and heritage, the ‘normal schemes and classifications’ in Douglas’ words, prevent objects from ending up on the commercial market, the market has become a depository of objects which fall outside the normal categories. These deviant goods, however, serve a purpose. They are revalued on the commercial market, transformed into commodities and through these systems can be reused once again.

Changing function

Some sediments in this branch of the river, trickle back into the main stream. Gert notes that he receives many clerical customers in his store. Craftsmen and monastic orders, who historically were responsible for making vestments, chalices, and statues, have largely died out. If it is not due to ‘de-churching’, the changing liturgical practices of Vatican II have put them out of business. One priest even came all the way from Den Helder, from the opposite end of the Netherlands, to come and find a new gong. The statues which were turned into rubble to pave streets and fill up ponds sixty



Figure 12 Market stalls in the Relimarkt. Photo by author.



Figure 13 'Stage' with statues, most over one meter high. Photo by author.

years ago, are now valued again for their artistic and sacred characteristics. The function of the Relimarkt – and the market for religious antiques in general – has changed significantly from this period. In the late 1960's and 1970's, collectors could easily buy entire church interiors or even get elements for free. The market has functioned as a depository for waste (which was not even considered 'sacred waste') for decades. Even though many churches are currently closing down, and a lot of 'religious heritage' is available to be circulated among churches and museums, the function of places like the Relimarkt has transformed from a depository into a popular market for goods. The changing function over time is characteristic of the heterotopia, because it reflects the needs and ideals of society. As societies change, the function of certain places changes with them.

Space in time

On my second visit to the Relimarkt a woman and a man walk in, speaking in a foreign language amongst each other while the lady speaks to us in Dutch. She seems to have some knowledge about antique, and points to a stack of wooden frames in a corner of the store, a Stations of the Cross with captions in French. She wants to know its age, and the volunteer is quick to note that it is likely at least one hundred years old, after which she bows forwards and sniffs the art audibly. She recalls that her father used to say that a good antiquary can estimate age by the smell of the wood. In museums, time is accumulated and reshaped into specific narratives about history and identity (see chapter 3). In churches, time is accumulated indefinitely, religions necessarily build on a long tradition to authorize their practices, and eventual beliefs and dogmas. The heterotopia marks a break in this accumulation of time. Foucault refers to such a break as a 'heterochrony'. The Relimarkt does not exist in a vacuum, its existence is warranted by a specific moment in time. When walking into the Relimarkt, one cannot help but ask: how have all these items ended up here? In prompting that question, the Relimarkt space points to a specific period in time. Instead of indefinitely accumulating time, like the museum or the church, the Eucharistic dishes and tabernacles which are abundantly available in the market hall, reminds of a period in history where ecclesiastical items were neglected and valued differently. The Relimarkt space marks a break in time.

Incompatible spaces

"The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault [1967] 1984). The Relimarkt is an exceptional place in this regard. Gert has very purposefully tried to construct the room in such a way that it communicates itself as a market, for example by playing popular music and serving coffee in the space. This contrasts to the statue museum in Vaals where Gert has choir music playing in the old chapel and exploits a café and restaurant separately. In the Relimarkt, however, I have also witnessed people verbally and visually exclaiming awe through 'wow's and tears in their eyes. The

Relimarkt brings together church, museum, and market, spaces which are often seen as incompatible, in one and the same space. Combining the use of a heritage discourse, as noted in the first section of this chapter, display of Roman Catholic church objects, and the buying, selling and marketing practices of the market, the Relimarkt space and the assemblages within it mirror the entanglements of the world outside. The assemblages reflect what one of the volunteers calls the “*leefbaarheid*” (livability) that he thinks the objects should have. If he buys objects for his own house, he tells me, they should be functional as well: the prie-dieu in his hallway doubles as a shoe rack. He jokingly ascribes the popularity of the altar bells, which apparently leave the store as soon as they come in, to their usefulness as service bells to “ring you wife for coffee.” The Relimarkt space reflects this functionality in its assemblages, using a lectern decorated with gemstones to display flyers for Gert’s museum in Vaals, for example.

Incompatibility, in this sense, is also susceptible to change. Although churches and heritage agencies especially prevent church objects from ending up in places like this, Gert knows how to combine the strange conglomeration of the church, museum, and market atmosphere in the Relimarkt. He achieves this by asking an entrance fee, and having a sort of ‘museum shop’ with smaller and cheaper items set up directly next to the entrance and exit. The shimmer of gold, silver, and copper, and the smell of old wood and stone along with the visual aesthetics to Roman Catholicism evoke the sphere of a church. And all of it is for sale. In the heterotopic space, these ‘incompatible’ spaces come together and are rendered compatible.

Public and private

“The heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place. Either the entry is compulsory, [...], or else the individual has to submit to rites and purifications. [...] There are others, on the contrary, that seem to be pure and simple openings, but that generally hide curious exclusions” (Foucault [1967] 1984). Entry prices alone do not make a heterotopia. Antique shops and second-hand markets, like museums and some churches, ask for entry prices but are still freely accessible to most people. The same goes for the Relimarkt, which is in theory freely accessible to everyone. Still, Gert requires of both his visitors and his customers to be admirers of the stuff inside. The entry price prevents “all and sundry”⁷³ from roaming around the store. While Gert sells his churchware to anyone who wants it, he wants it to ‘feel right’ for him as well. A man came into the store and started haggling about prices, which Gert is more than willing to do, but once Gert figured out that the man wanted to buy only copper items for little money, he got suspicious and started to raise the prices. Limited accessibility is created, not only through the entrance fee, but also through the market atmosphere which is communicated. A cup of coffee or tea is offered free of charge to everyone in the Relimarkt, but if something feels ‘off’ the staff will not really

⁷³ “Jan en Alleman”

engage with the visitors. Passion for and interest in the items on offer are access cards for the Relimarkt.

Reflecting outside

Foucault's sixth and final principle of heterotopias dictates that they say something about all the other space outside them. Both of the Relimarkt volunteers I spoke to have described the store as a 'paradise' and a joy to work in. This says something as well about the world outside the Relimarkt. Although the Relimarkt is situated between various shops on a busy road, it attracts attention in newspapers, on Facebook, and in town. It is situated in Limburg, a predominantly Catholic part of the Netherlands which is also affected by rapid unchurching, with multiple closed down or demolished churches – places just like those from which the items on sale inside the Relimarkt originate—in the near vicinity. Being in this space reminds of the problems that (Roman Catholic) churches in the Netherlands currently face. Therefore, the existence of this space directs attention to the world outside of the store as well. It points to the heritage that is presumed to be lost, and the alternatives to heritage preservation outside the museum context which are possible.

The Relimarkt space contrasts and contests the previously described boundaries of ecclesiastical and heritage economies. It subverts the rules and regulations which are in place there and which maintain the boundaries of these economies. There are objects inside which were once sacred, but the atmosphere created in the space itself does not evoke sacrality. Popular music from the radio, a mix of smells of coffee and old wood, a notable lack of smell of incense which usually accompanies the items on display all add to the disruption of a sense of sacredness which is expected to come with these items. This sense of sacredness is found in other spaces where these items are displayed: both in the church – where the *Kultwert* is high because of the relative invisibility of the item, and in the museum – where its untouchability, aesthetic presentation, and the narratives and tradition in which it is placed evoke a sense of sacredness. The Relimarkt space also upsets boundaries between public and private which have persisted throughout the history of Christianity in the Netherlands (chapter 1). Although the space is publicly accessible, full access to the Relimarkt is curated by the owner and volunteers. Not least because of the entrance fee, which is specifically meant by the owner to prevent busloads of tourist from coming in and just looking around – Gert would rather welcome these tourists into his museum and café. This disruption also figures into the disruption of labels attached to the space. The Relimarkt is part museum, many people come in to just look at the items with no intention of buying something. It is part church, a certain aura of sacredness persists and remains attached to the items, although nobody I have seen will kneel and pray to a statue. Above all, the Relimarkt is a market, but not

everything is up for sale and not just to anyone for any reason: “If it goes to a brothel, [I would] rather not [sell it].”⁷⁴

Revaluing sacred waste

In the hierarchies of art, kitsch is often seen as a threat to pure art and ‘in poor taste’. In his essay ‘on Kitsch and Sentimentality’, philosopher Robert Solomon argues that both kitsch and sentimentality or nostalgia are devalued because of the “excessive or immature expressions of emotion” attached to them (Solomon 1990, 5). The fear of certain emotions, often expressed in such terms as ‘tender’, ‘sweet’, or ‘nostalgic’, terms which are often mentioned by Gert and his volunteers in relation especially to the expressions of statues on display and sold in the Relimarkt, are what Solomon argues to be the undervalued and distorted emotions connected to the lower social classes. What Solomon proposes, however, is that these emotions are quite ‘natural’, and we should not be embarrassed by them, even if they are provoked by what is considered ‘bad’ art (ibid., 13).

The “beautiful despair”⁷⁵ in the faces of saints is something which, raised in a Protestant environment, Gert had to get used to. “It is refined stuff, because [the statues] have a silencing effect.”⁷⁶ Opening up to these emotions is something learned, and something which conflicts with Gert’s personal beliefs as a non-religious person. Gert notes that ‘luckily’, he has not seen crying statues yet. He does not really believe in those stories, although he once had a customer who, after buying a Holy Virgin statue from Gert, called him to let him know that it started to cry. The art in the Relimarkt is set apart through being ‘sacred waste’. As discussed in chapter 2, sacred waste consists of a category of objects which, by virtue of their value in a sacred economy, cannot be thrown away. The objects donated through the ‘Rescue-Jesus’-campaign are a good example of this, especially with regard to Gert’s hesitance to sell these objects or use them in other ways than exhibiting them in his new museum. Many objects in the Relimarkt attest to the refusal of people to throw certain things away. Monstrances, numerous tabernacles, baptismal fonts, relics, chalices, and over a hundred statues have resided storage facilities and markets for decades. Now they are popular again, and their prices have to be determined.

During my second visit to the Relimarkt, four months after the opening and two months after my initial visit, the staff was more open and reflective about their pricing process. The first thing I noticed was that the glass display case with precious items, such as the relic-containing monstrances and an expensive silver ciborium, had been moved to a new display case set in a

⁷⁴ “Als het naar een bordeel gaat, [verkoop ik het] liever niet” GdW-020219

⁷⁵ “Mooi leed” GdW-020219

⁷⁶ “Het is geraffineerd spul, want ze hebben een verstillende werking” GdW-020219

more central position. Many of the objects placed on the tables of the market stalls had been labeled with a price tag. The first time around, when I spent my day talking to Gert, we were interrupted countless times by the volunteers and customers who asked Gert for prices. Slowly, but steadily, they were pricing everything but the larger statues in the store. The pricing of objects is done collaboratively with both volunteers and Gert, all having their own expertise because of their long experience in collecting these items. All the new items that come in immediately get a price tag: you know what you payed when you bought them, so it is easier to determine a price, the logic goes. The first thing they look at is whatever the customer is willing to pay, but also *Marktplaats* or auction websites are helpful tools. Of course, the aesthetic qualities of the item are also taken into account: if a hand is missing, or if the face or feet are worn, the prices decreases. A second factor is the uniqueness of the piece. This makes it difficult as well, because if something is really unique it is nearly impossible to price it. A recent example of this is a statue that came in of the Virgin Mary nursing the naked baby Jesus using her exposed breast. This kind of statue is extremely rare and cannot really be priced. Comparison should thus be possible in order to determine a prize.

Compared to newly made statues, the Relimarkt items are relatively cheap. Gert wants to sell for 'fair prices' and criticizes others in the business of asking six to eight times the price of what the items are actually worth. Wooden statues are expensive, they can easily go for between two to five thousand euros, but a newly commissioned one can cost you almost tenfold. Customers told the volunteer multiple times, he says: "It is a lot of money, but it is not expensive."⁷⁷ The quality of objects, the Relimarkt staff also noticed, is subject to different regimes of valuation. I noticed on my second visit that several statues had been restored and were moved from the center of the hall to the red-carpeted 'stage' along the walls where the rest of the taller statues were staged. The smell of paint and polish was noticeable upon entry. This does not happen with every statue, however. This day, I spend my time chatting with the volunteers, because Gert is busy and leaves soon after I arrive. One of the volunteers briefs me on all the things they have changed, saying again that they are 'museum people', slowly learning the ropes of being in a commercial business. The most significant change, he tells me, is that they stopped restoring all the statues. Gradually, they found out that some customers prefer some wear and tear on their statues, rather than neatly restored ones. The unrestored statues are placed in the hall, not along the wall with the rest of the statues. The volunteer, who is a keen collector of church ware himself, notes that he would not in a hundred years put something like that in his house, but the customer is king.

This example, together with the existence of the Relimarkt in its own right, shows that waste is not a set valuation. In the 1960's, the items which are now sold for sometimes hundreds

⁷⁷ "Het is een hoop geld, maar niet duur" KS-070419

of euros, were considered waste by clergy and ‘the church’ (see chapter 1). Some collectors at the time did not agree with this valuation, and deemed the items worthy of collection and preservation. While they may have lost their sacredness temporarily, today these items are considered sacred again. The former parish priest of Utrecht tells me how he often visits antique shops or flea markets and keeps an eye out for religious items: “Of course there are many small stores in Utrecht. Well, I have procured a lot of things there, which has an ecclesiastical value for me. Commercially, it is not so valuable, but for me it is. [...] Yes, I consider that a sort of act of rescue, and if I can make a parishioner happy with it, they will get it right away.”⁷⁸ The priest, nowadays, considers even the simpler items without much artistic value to have some sort of ecclesiastical, sacred value, even though these items have been acquired on the commercial market. Although they were not considered sacred at the time immediately following Vatican II, now they can be seen as sacred again and therefore need to be ‘saved’.

Gert considers the sacredness of items to be removed when they end up on the market. He does not know whether items in his store are consecrated or not, and he does not really care. As a way of deconsecrating, showing by the statement that the Reverend Huitink makes, the market is not very effective however: the items are recognizable as Catholic objects and therefore the ‘ecclesiastical value’ remains visibly attached to them for the priest. This shows just how ‘sticky’ the sacredness is with which the items are imbued. The attempt to prevent objects from circulating in the commercial economy, recorded in rules and guidelines by Vatican and diocese, is aimed at preventing profanation. The sacred value of church items is not removed through circulation in a ‘profane’ economy. The commercial economy in itself is not effective in profanation or deconsecration, so the question remains why it is not allowed for church objects to end up here. The commercial economy does, however, provide ways into other kinds of profanation. The unrestricted economy of the commercial market allows ‘all and sundry’ to buy items. Even though Gert attempts to curate his customers to an extent, he cannot prevent circulation of church objects across other economic markets which could have the ability to profanize the goods. Although I would not consider it very likely to actually happen, a statue of Mary that ends up in a brothel could engage in very different relationships with people. In these relationships, new values could be created that might be very effective in brushing off some of the sacredness that still sticks to the item. It is this potential, the potential of profanization, that the rules and regulations of the church protect against.

⁷⁸ “In Utrecht heb je natuurlijk heel veel leuke winkeltjes. Nou, daar heb ik best al heel wat weggehaald. Wat voor mij een kerkelijke waarde heeft. Commercieel heeft dat niet zo veel waarde, maar voor mij dan weer wel. [...] Ja ik vind dat wel een soort van reddingsactie, en als ik er dan een parochiaan ermee plezier kan doen, dan krijgen ze dat onmiddellijk” TH-120219

Conclusion

Through the lens of the Relimarkt, the commercial market has proven to be an effective tool to preserve a specific part of 'religious heritage'. Although this part is easily relegated to the realm of kitsch, nostalgia for the times before the Vatican II and the *Rijke Roomse Leven* (Rich Roman-Catholic Life) constitutes a significant factor as to why this class of objects has been preserved. The adaptability of these items to a 'functional' purpose in a home or café, means that a statue or altar bell can acquire the ability to become more than a devotional or ecclesiastical item. In the contemporary moment where heritage in the form of narratives and histories is slowly making way for a more direct experience of various forms of art, curious assemblages of 'kitsch' in unexpected settings, and assemblages like those found in the Relimarkt can provoke specific emotions and feelings of nostalgia. These emotions are part of new and particularly affective relationships that church objects and people engage in. They are not dissimilar from the relationships that occur in the ecclesiastical or heritage economy: they still point to a certain tradition and the 'sacredness' of their original use still sticks to them. The financial value of objects from churches circulating on the commercial market is determined by many factors and not only shows how valuation is a complex and multifaceted process, but also shows that the previous values which are imbued in an object and still stick to it have to be taken into account when 'converting' an object into a commodity.

The circulation of money and churchware in the Relimarkt and the commercial economy also has the ability to constitute a different way of preservation. Exchanges of objects from churches which involve money can help to circumvent many of the problems which heritage and church regimes of preservation face. Not only does Gert not have to rely on subsidies and donations, but he is also able to quite easily sell lower-value items in order to preserve the higher-valued ones in his museum. While this might be a way around the continued preservation of 'sacred waste', some items remain impossible to be sold. The items in the basement, which were donated through the 'Rescue-Jesus'-campaign, attest to this. Accountability to the original owners, the stories which have come with the items, and the way in which they were collected through gift, have 'sacralized' these items for Gert to an extent. This sacralization clashes with their abundance. After all, what can you do with hundreds of rosaries and missals? The fact that Gert promised to care for these items has converted them into a form of 'sacred waste'. While the sacredness of items might indeed be diminished on the market, some items cannot get rid of the sacredness here as well.

Conclusion

When objects are required to be removed from a church, their value is inevitably contested. Items ask for reflection on value because of the ‘exchange’ they are (about to be) engaged in. The case of the Relimarkt shows this quite clearly: although the values attributed to them by their religious users and heritage agencies are still recognized and employed in the market context, their circulation in the commercial economy opens up avenues to use the items more ‘functionally’, for example as shoe racks or mere decorations. In this study I have explored the question how the values attributed to objects which have to vacate Roman Catholic churches are subject to change when they move across churches, to museums, or end up on the market. In the Netherlands the contemporaneous problematic of ‘de-churching’ – the decommissioning of churches due to declining membership and a lack of financial means to maintain buildings and communities which come with this – is very prominent and is widely discussed in public debates. Church buildings and devotional items have historically been a focal point around which contestations over place and belonging of Christianity have taken place. During the *beeldenstorm* after the Reformation, both Protestants and Catholics repeatedly engaged in iconoclastic destruction of each other’s buildings and items. Presently, items and buildings classified as ‘Christian heritage’ have gained new importance in the construction of a national identity built on a cultural understanding of Christianity set against cultural-religious Others, and most notably against Islam. These historical developments highlight the importance of church buildings and devotional items both in a local and a national perspective. Asking how the values of objects from churches are determined and contested across the contexts of church, museum, and market, this study has provided insight into the roles that various actors in these contexts play in processes of repurposing objects from churches in the Netherlands.

In this conclusion, I will provide an overview of the changes that the objects undergo in their movements from church to museum and to market, and the values that change and remain attached to them throughout these movements. Next, I will focus on the theoretical contributions of this study, most notably the analysis of objects as circulating in different ‘sacred’ and ‘profane’ economies. Finally, I will reflect on some of possible avenues for further engagements with the themes of this study.

Indexation and valuation

In the repurposing process as described by the Utrecht diocese, a distinction between ecclesiastical items and non-ecclesiastical items is made in order to prevent consecrated items from profanation, going as far as destroying sacred items in an act of what I have termed ‘preventive iconoclasm’. Although destruction is harmful to the object itself, the preventive iconoclasm – aimed to prevent the profane and (as the Vatican terms it) sordid use of items — also prevents new values from being attributed to the object. It not so much removes the sacredness from the object, as that it indefinitely locks the sacredness in the now-destroyed item. The distinction between ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical is also disrupted by personal relationships between people and things. Statues and crucifixes, for example, although not officially sacralized in a ritualized act of consecration or anointing, can be sacralized in the relationships that people have with them. Mediating the divine to the believer, images carved or cast in statues or depictions of Christ are sacralized through prayers, the lighting of candles, or through touching and kissing, which are all acts of “intensive interpretation and regular ritualization” (Chidester 2018, 34-35). Everything in a Roman Catholic church, as the Reverend Huitink pointed out, is to an extent ecclesiastical or sacred, because the ‘faith of the people’ is imbued in the items there present.

Repurposing religious objects from churches has therefore proven to be a very complex process for all actors involved. Parishioners and church administrators, heritage agents, and I as a scholar are all professionally and emotionally invested in the process. For parishioners, the repurposing of items is part of an emotional mourning process attached to the closure of their church and often the disruption of their community. When an object has to leave the church it (originally) belongs to, the importance of that item for the local community often precedes its value in a national perspective. Some non-ecclesiastical objects which are especially important to the local community, like statues of patron saints, can become part of the ‘core collection’ which the ecclesiastical items are also part of. This means that they have to be repurposed in other (preferably Roman-Catholic) churches. The abundance of ‘core collection’ items available for repurpose, however, inevitably leads to many objects not finding a suitable repurpose, in which case they have to be dealt with in another way. Museum collections are also regularly deemed worthy destinations for these items, but their collections are often full as well. The surplus items become ‘sacred waste’: items without a clear purpose, not eligible to be thrown away and neither possible to keep using. They have become unfit for practical use in the ecclesiastical context and therefore often end up in storage, the attic of the St. Jacobuskerk (which contained the inventory of two closed-down churches before it had to close down itself) being a prime example of this.

Heritage agencies like Museum Catharijneconvent’s EKK department, help churches in the process of dealing with their surplus items. Closely following the ‘Guidelines on Ways of Dealing with Religious Objects’, the EKK takes into account the rules and regulations placed

upon objects by the Roman Catholic church, but also safeguards other interests. First and foremost, they help churches with the indexation and valuation of what they term 'religious heritage'. Heritage experts take note of the art-historical dimension of items in churches throughout the indexation process. Items crafted by important artists and distinctive artworks which remind of certain style periods or historical events, are set apart and valued for their aesthetic attributes or narrative capabilities. Noting down the art-historical value both on a local and a national level on valuation forms and in inventory reports, EKK staff authorizes certain ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical items and transforms them into 'heritage'. Documentation is a key step in this process. The EKK department curates large databases containing descriptions and pictures of thousands of items of religious heritage both in the Netherlands and abroad, situated in museums, churches, and even those items crushed to pieces resting on dumping grounds.

Despite overstocked museum depots, some items are eligible to become part of museum collections. Two values from the 'Guidelines on Ways of Dealing with Religious Objects' are of added importance to the museum: presentation and documentation value. The documentation value means that objects are provided with intertextual data, like descriptions, design drawings, or (remembrance) stories, which help to contextualize the items and situate them in a historical narrative. The presentation value highlights the aesthetic dimension of the object: when an object is visually attractive, it attracts people to the museum or church where it is exhibited. The aesthetic state of the object can also provide information about its purpose and use, for example through visible wear and tear or through the style in which it is fashioned. In Museum Catharijneconvent's exhibitions, these values can be seen and experienced. Museum plaques tell about the importance of certain items to Dutch national history, some items even being exemplary of a certain episode in the 'Canon of Dutch History'. The careful documentation, maintenance, care, and narrativization of religious heritage objects in the museum sacralizes these items in yet another way. They are 'intensively interpreted' through their placement in a historical narrative which is deemed important to national belonging and identity, and 'ritualized' through their aesthetic appeal, relative inaccessibility, and irregular visibility, drawing on Benjamin's (2010, 18) understanding of items with these characteristics as having a high cult value (*Kultwert*). Whereas these 'religious objects' mediate between people and the divine in the context of the church, when placed in a museum exhibition they are able to mediate between people and a different 'beyond': a sense of belonging and identity provoked by the narratives of national history in which these items are placed.

Objects from churches can be repurposed in other churches or national museums and therefore remain useful in various sacred economies, either in an ecclesiastical or in a heritage setting. When they are no longer useful in a sacred economy, but are still imbued with a sacredness which is impossible to get rid of, these items are suspended in a state of 'sacred waste'. Shops dealing in 'religious antiques' have found a way to reuse these items by selling them on a

commercial market. The Relimarkt is an example of this, though it is not the only shop specializing in ‘religious’ antiques in the Netherlands. In many antique shops, second-hand stores, and thrift shops throughout the country, you may be able to find Roman Catholic devotional items like statuettes, rosaries, and prayer cards. Large statues, tabernacles, monstrances, and altar bells, however, are not so readily available. When found in the specialized antique stores like the Relimarkt, Fluminalis, or on *heiligenbeelden.com*⁷⁹, these items are often remnants of the aftermath of Vatican II, the council which profoundly changed liturgical and devotional practices in Dutch churches and their accompanying aesthetic expressions. Besides these items, many items from the category previously described as ‘sacred waste’ reside on these markets. Items which do not get repurposed, cannot just be thrown away, also do not have to be destroyed because of their sacredness in the ecclesiastical context, and do not end up in storage can end up on the commercial market.

New ecclesiastical items are produced in far lower numbers than sixty years ago, craftspeople specializing in religious art being rarely available anymore. This means that church art sometimes finds its way back to churches via the commercial market. Most of the items, however, end up in the hands of private collectors or entrepreneurs looking to furnish themed restaurants, movie sets, or homes. The objects available on the market require a translation of their value into financial terms. Heritage and ecclesiastical values often remain ‘stuck’ to the items to an extent, judging by the discourse employed by the Relimarkt owner who emphasizes the heritage status of many objects in the store, and the responses of some of his customers and visitors who express their awe physically and online. Because of their recognizability as Roman-Catholic objects, the sacredness of these items cannot be simply brushed off. Whereas sacred waste items like cuddly toys left at memorials can be cleansed and anonymized before they can be reused (Stengs 2018), the sacredness once attributed to church items sticks to these objects because of their recognizability. Anonymization is impossible, cleaning is not enough. The commercial market in ‘religious heritage’ is deemed ‘unworthy’ by church officials and sometimes heritage professionals as well: rules and regulations which control the movement of objects from churches are often especially designed to prevent items from ending up on the commercial market. To an extent, the commercial market indeed marks a space where heritage and ecclesiastical objects are moved into a ‘profane’ economy where items which were previously so strictly controlled become untraceable. On the other hand, circulation in commercial markets also enables a category of objects which would otherwise be stored away as ‘sacred waste’ to be actively used and preserved. Care for the aesthetic appearance of objects is needed in order to sell them, and the sale of these items to passionate collectors guarantees continuing care and use for the items, albeit not in their intended setting.

⁷⁹ <https://www.heiligenbeelden.com/> Accessed August 22, 2019

The changing values and engagement with objects from churches across the contexts of church, museum, and market, lead to various overlapping interests and contestations. Across the three contexts, however, care for these objects is apparent. The need for preservation is almost uncontested, although the means of preservation is up for discussion. A focus on the values that are attributed in and across different contexts has shown that sacredness, heritage, and aesthetics are employed and authorized in different ways in different contexts. In the church the sacredness of items and the personal relationships with them prevail, but increasingly the heritage discourse is employed by church officials as well. For the museum, which is a heritage environment *par excellence*, sacredness is taken into account when repurposing items from churches. The aesthetic and narrative dimensions of heritage are also emphasized, leading to a ‘sacralization of heritage’ (Meyer and de Witte 2013, 277) in its own right. In the market, these values come together and are employed simultaneously, but have to be translated into financial value as well. The aesthetic dimension is most important in the market, because the items eventually have to be sold. Although the objects from churches might end up in a ‘profane’ commercial economy, they are unable to completely lose their previous valuations.

Theoretical contributions

Things, in their relationships and configurations with humans and other things, are useful tools to understand how people shape their relationships with the ‘beyond’ which is important to them. Birgit Meyer (2012, 26) has coined the idea of ‘sensational form’ as “a configuration of religious media, acts, imaginations and bodily sensations in the context of a religious tradition or group,” which points to that ‘beyond’ which is so important to people. Paying attention to these sensational forms can help social scientists to understand the small acts and interests that people perform and express in order to make this ‘beyond’ seem tangible to themselves and those around them. This study has used ‘things’ (Brown 2001), in the form of objects from churches and their relationships with people, as focal points around which different sensational forms are structured. They figure in church rituals like the Eucharist, personal devotional practices, in exhibitions in museums, and as commercialized goods in the market for religious antiques. In all of these contexts interactions between people and things point more or less to different ‘beyonds’, though these practices and acts are not necessarily ‘religious’ in the conventional sense of the word. I have taken up the metaphor of the river in order to track, with Thomas Tweed (2006) the ‘organic-cultural flows’ which carry ‘sacred sediments’ with them. Religion *happens* in the moments that different currents – economic, political, cultural, artistic – converge. In these moments, the sediments settle down and religion becomes visible through convergences of the sacred in, for example, objects and their relationships with humans. I have shown how church objects in Museum Catharijneconvent, for example, are part of viewing and education practices about a

national history and narrative. They are not sacralized in the conventional sense through a formal consecration with oil by a priest, but through their function as mediators in the relationship between people and a 'beyond' in the form of a sense of belonging to a national identity.

In this study, I have looked at different practices of valuation as performed in the repurposing process of objects from closed-down churches. When objects move from one context to another, an exchange takes place in which reflection on the value of objects from closed-down churches is required. Authorized procedures, recorded in guidelines and rules and regulations, provide a lens through which to examine different valuation practices in play. Employing the language of economy and exchange has laid bare some of the different interactions that people have with different 'beyonds'. I have used David Morgan's (2015) concept of 'sacred economy' to understand how images and objects figure as mediators between humans and the divine. In different sacred economies, the medium of the church object mediates different 'beyonds'. This approach focuses not so much on what objects want, do, or enable people to do, but rather on the values which are imposed upon objects, and the networks of power that they are subjected to in transformative moments of exchange. As shown by the example of the tabernacle (chapter 2), objects themselves often resist the valuations attributed to them, in this instance by virtue of its physical properties. The tabernacle was an ecclesiastical object due to be repurposed in another church abroad. It was also an item important to heritage agencies, who tried to keep it in the country. Because it was too heavy to move, both valuations did not impact its eventual trajectory: instead it had to be destroyed when the new owner came to use the church.

When used in a Roman Catholic church, a church object is employed to mediate between humans and God. Humans want something from God, and God wants something back from them. Objects enable exchanges and communication between these two realms. Rules and regulations regarding the use and the mobility of these objects apply, and these circumscribe the boundaries of this sacred economy. Not all items in the church are part of this sacred economy, however. Even though all objects present in the church have something of the 'faith of the people' in them, as the Reverend Huitink put it, some items are lower in the hierarchy of sacred things and can therefore 'officially' freely circulate. Most of these items which are not sacred *enough* to be protected by rules and regulations, however, are nonetheless recognizable as Roman Catholic objects. They are part of the 'encompassing ecology of images' (Morgan 2018) in the church and therefore are part of its 'ecclesiastical economy'.

If a church has to close down, objects are required to move. Often this happens between and among churches, but this is not always possible. Before this happens, however, church objects in the Netherlands already become part of the heritage economy. Through indexation and documentation, the inventories of Dutch churches are assumed into a heritage database. Although every object is valued differently for its specific characteristics, the church objects have become

heritage objects through being recorded and valued as heritage. Whereas they were previously protected from different values being imbued in them through restrictions on their circulation, through sacralization and their destruction in a ‘preventive iconoclasm’, as part of the heritage economy these items have become susceptible to contesting valuations. They can now circulate across economies. Documentation makes objects ‘exhibitible’, in Benjaminian terms, which removes them from the sphere of the ‘cult’.

Church objects that do become part of museum collections, can be sacralized through exhibition too. Through ‘intensive presentation and regular narrativization’ the objects become embedded in a context where they materialize a curated narrative about national history. The politics of authorization which has documented them and connected them to stories, and the aesthetics of persuasion which has placed them in exhibitions where people can form relationships with them, lead not only the heritagization but to sacralization. The objects mediate between people and a new ‘divine’ in this context, a ‘beyond’ in the shape of a sense of belonging to a national identity – no matter how unclearly defined that identity may be.

Despite these restrictions on circulation of church objects in the ecclesiastical and heritage context, many objects still end up on commercial markets. There they are commodified: their value has to be translated into financial terms. The move from the ecclesiastical economy or heritage economy to a commercial economy changes the relationships that people and objects engage in. They are valued here for their previous values: as heritage, as sacred objects; or for their aesthetic value: as decorations, or as functionally and aesthetically pleasing objects. In the market, ‘sacred waste’ – objects with no apparent use in the sacred economy of the church, but which are too meaningful to throw away – can be revalued and reused. To be eligible for sale, the objects have to be maintained, which requires care and attention.

Removing the sacredness of objects from churches has proven a difficult task: “as a result of intensive interpretation and regular ritualization, we are left with a sacred surplus, and abundant surplus of the sacred, that is available for competing claims to ownership” (Chidester 2018, 34-35). Moreover, the sacred has proven to be very ‘sticky’ (Ahmed 2014): even after decades of circulation on the market, the objects can be reclaimed by the pastor as ‘ecclesiastical’ items in need of saving, or by visitors to the Relimarkt who display their awe and comment ‘amen’ on pictures posted on the market’s Facebook page. Although commodification is seen as disruptive to the meaning of church objects, the sacredness that is imbedded in these items is difficult to remove. This research shows how imbuing sacred objects with different valuations, like reinterpreting them as art and heritage, is more effective at ‘de-sacralizing’ than the translation of values into a monetary prize.

Sacred waste requires tremendous care and eventual anonymization in order to be reused. For church objects, because of their recognizability *as* church objects, this is hardly possible. Only

revaluing and re-sacralizing them in a different economy can brush off some of the sacredness which still sticks to the objects.

Final thoughts

This study opens up interesting new questions, both in the practical realm asking for more efficient ways to structure the repurposing process of religious heritage, and in the theoretical realm where a deeper understanding of processes of valuation and sacralization is required. We can learn a lot from these empty churches, seemingly endless databases, and thriving marketplaces with religious antiquities. I see this study as an example of how we can study the effects of secularization and de-churching from a material perspective.

Limited by time and resources, this study provides a narrow case-study of three context in which objects from churches circulate and are reinterpreted and revalued. The economic lens through which I have examined these processes has proven a useful tool to understand both how value is created in the relationship between humans, objects, and ‘beyonds’ (deliberately in the plural). Further research is however required to completely grasp the complexities of valuation and sacralization processes. A notable absence from this research has been the receiving end of repurposing processes. Using the extensive databases hosted by Museum Catharijneconvent, a quantifiable dataset could be created which shows the flows of church objects from the Netherlands to the rest of the world. This would also open up possibilities to extend qualitative research and include the values attributed to church objects by their new owners in churches and museums across the world.

A lot of interesting work has been done with regards to church buildings and how these large objects are valued by different kinds of people as well, and I see this study as an invitation to broaden the scope to the relationship between people and (church) objects. The material lens provides the study of religion(s) with a perspective which does not essentialize religion(s) to beliefs, practices, or mere material affiliations, but helps researchers engaged in social studies to unpack the complex socio-politico-economic interactions between humans, non-humans, and the various ‘beyonds’ which are important to them.

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