Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe

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Gender and Christianity in Modern Europe: Beyond the Feminization Thesis.

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In 1923 the Dominican painter Raymond van Bergen (1883-1978) finalized a triptych depicting the three stages of spiritual development leading towards the union with God. Three friars posed consecutively for the panels reflecting the stages of purification (via purgativa), illumination (via illuminativa) and union (via unitativa). These stages were originally introduced by the neo-platonic philosopher Pseudo-Dionysius (about 465-490). The Dominican Thomas Aquinas would later associate them with the spiritual progress of the soul. Van Bergen’s impressive work of art, measuring over two metres in width and about eighty centimetres in height, is preserved in the Convent of Saint Thomas in the Dutch town of Zwolle, where the painter spent nearly his entire Dominican life. The triptych was exhibited in the first showing of Van Bergen’s work in 1924 and was appreciated for its “softly well-disposed contemplative stillness and modesty”, in contrast to “the ultra-subjective reproduction of things, which reveals the feverish artist rather than the object itself”. According to a reviewer of Van Bergen’s first retrospective, his portraits “guarded the inner secret soul of the human complex rather than exposing ‘la nudicité de l’âme’”. With the triptych Van Bergen engaged in the debate on identity among the Dutch Dominicans. It epitomized monastic life as an anchor of Catholic tradition in modern
society. This reference to monasticism not only entailed gendered connotations, but it was rather complicated in view of the history of the Dutch Dominicans. They were counted among the most influential religious institutes in the Netherlands, next to the Franciscans and the Jesuits. The Franciscans dominated in parochial pastoral care and outnumbered the Preachers by far. The Jesuits mainly competed with them in the domain of the intellectual apostolate. The Dominican community remained the third largest male religious institute until 1936, when it fell back to the fourth rank as new missionary congregations rose to favour with spiritually ambitious young men.

In their self-construction as high-profile Catholics, the Dominicans continuously shifted the emphasis from the clerical to the monastic dimensions of their identity, which in turn tied in with changing societal expectations of these men of God. At first glance, the continuous reassessments of Dominican identity between 1850 and 1940 seem to revolve primarily around contemplation and action, considered to be the key dimensions of Dominican life. A closer look reveals, however, that both aspects pointed at various repertoires of male religiosity that shed light on the gendered dimensions of processes of confessionalization since the mid-nineteenth century. The debates among the Dominicans on the fundamentals of their identity enable us to refine current concepts of Christian manliness that are still innately Protestant and tend to neglect the impact of denominational difference. Furthermore, these debates help to differentiate between forms or repertoires of manliness within Catholicism. This case study of the Dutch Dominicans elucidates that Catholic manliness in itself was by no means a stable or fixed category, but contained clerical, monastic, and secular manifestations of masculinity. These repertoires of Catholic manliness and their interplay reflected changes in the cultural and social meaning of religion starting in the mid-nineteenth century.

The Dutch Dominicans shared a particular characteristic of all male religious institutes in the Netherlands: due to the missionary nature of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands between 1581 and 1853, the clerical aspects of their way of life came to eclipse the monastic traits. The monastic reforms, in which these orders had invested at an international level since the mid-nineteenth century, could only partly redress this tendency. At first, the Dutch Dominicans merged monastic characteristics with current secular standards of masculine behaviour by underscoring the martial, even heroic features of their celibate life. They employed the monastic aspects of their way of life to emphasize its manly nature and to distinguish themselves thereby from the secular clergy.

Because of the process of pillarization (verzuiling), the monastic reform in the Dutch Dominican province only sank in partially. By the end of the nineteenth century the secular and regular clergy took the lead in the creation of an autonomous, self-reliant Catholic subculture which would enable the faithful to engage in modernity on the basis of Catholic principles. Similar processes of confessionalization took place in other European countries due to the separation of church and state, and entailed shifts in the public position and appreciation of the clergy. The Dominicans articulated both their status and their activities in the patriarchal terms that by then could be labelled hegemonic: men of God who would be good fathers to the offspring.

I dealt extensively with this question in Monteiro, Gods Predikers.
of the Church, depicted as their Bride. These articulations of Catholic masculinity mirrored the role of men as husbands and fathers and were essentially geared to consolidate the leading position of the clergy within the Catholic Church. Celibate masculinity required for priests was thus explicitly moulded according to the norms of manliness in secular society. These norms reflected in part the ideals of Christian manliness coined in Anglican circles, yet in a specific Catholic, celibate, translation that was - however chastely - sexualized nevertheless.

The case of the Dominicans indicates that this development should be interpreted in the context of the efforts of the Catholic Church to maintain a prominent position under liberal politics which made every effort to minimize the role of religion in the public domain. By re-shaping and strengthening the internal organization under clerical leadership, it faced up to common associations of Catholicism with a backward and essentially female confessional culture. By the 1920s, however, the essentially patriarchal mode of this clerical leadership was being challenged by rebellious young Catholic intellectuals, authors and artists whose support the regular clergy in particular tried to rally. These young men put forth more radical versions of Catholicism, denoted as virile. In this vein, they publicly dismissed the patriarchal masculinity of the secular and regular priests as an expression of clericalism to which they firmly objected. The Dominicans, who were trying to win the favour of precisely these young, in part academically trained Catholics, reacted differently to this challenge to clerical authority. Various reassessments of Dominican identity illustrate not only their attempts to reconcile tradition and modernity, but also the generational differences in the ways the Preachers attempted to profile themselves as “men of their times”. As good ‘fathers’ the members of the established generation attempted to safeguard the Catholic community from the harsh opinions and rash actions of the ‘sons’. These ‘sons’ defied patriarchal patterns with virile repertoires of Catholic masculinity, falling back on the monastic features of Dominican identity, discarding ‘the old world’ and attempting to replace it by a new one: fervently Catholic in orientation and led by spirited Catholics who surpassed the established clergy in its evangelical ardour.

CHRISTIAN MANLINESS DIFFERENTIATED

This case study of the Dutch Dominicans puts current notions of Christian manliness to the test. In general, social and cultural constructions of manliness form a rather new domain of academic interest. Zooming in on the Dominicans as prominent representatives of the regular clergy in the Netherlands enables us to overcome the binary opposition between hegemonic and Christian manliness which has come to dominate the rather young field of research on religion and masculinity. In Geschicrte der Männlichkeit (1450-2000) the Austrian historian Wolfgang Schmale, for instance, argues that the formation of nation-states during the nineteenth century entailed an eclipse of Christian definitions of masculinity by secular varieties. These hinged

\[\text{van Zuthem, Heelen en halven. See also van de Sande, “Decadente monniken en nonnen”. Cf. also the argument Gross made for the German situation in The war against Catholicism.}\]
upon able-bodied strength, rationality, independence and responsibility and gradually came to represent the dominant or hegemonic form of manliness. This idea may fit in neatly with the master narrative of the secularization of society in the course of its modernization, but hardly holds up when analysing nineteenth- and twentieth-century conceptualizations of Christian manliness more closely.

The intellectual father of the notion ‘Christian manliness’, Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), preferred this term to the tag ‘muscular Christianity’, which originated in a review of his novel Two Years Ago (1857). In his introductory essay to the volume Muscular Christianity Donald E. Hall stresses that it was Kingsley’s primary intention to unite physical strength and religious conviction and to define this union as truly masculine. A closer analysis of Kingsley’s work reveals his personal preoccupation with sexuality and his anxious attempts to reconcile his sexual identity, needs and passions with the prevalent prim standards of Christian virtue. His definition of manliness was not only inherently Protestant, but was in fact prompted by a rejection of Catholicism which he associated with the weakening of the proper social and gender relations. Hall points out that the adherents of Kingsley’s concept of Christian manliness were deeply troubled by complex contemporary questions regarding class, gender and nationality. The modernization of society and the process of industrialization profoundly changed social structures. According to Hall, the discourse on Christian masculinity formed a crystallization point in the ensuing shifts of power that involved class, gender and race in the nineteenth-century British Empire and essentially revolved around national identity. Consistent attempts to Christianize masculinity by entwining moral and physical vigour thus not merely reflect the release of the religious fervour of white middle- and upper-class males, but also reveal the patriarchal web within which they continuously attempted to subject underprivileged men and women.

The elitist and essentially Protestant features of Christian manliness were by no means monopolized by Anglicans, but affected Catholics and their conceptions of gender and religion as well. Yet, according to the editors of the volume Masculinity and Spirituality in Victorian Culture, the dominant Anglican matrix of Christian manliness in Britain obscured alternative significant patterns of masculine religiosity. Implicitly, they reject a general concept of Christian masculinity, pleading for the analysis of multiple masculinities in religion instead. The conceptual differentiation they propose hinges around class, ethnicity and sexual preference, but should, in my opinion, also include denominational differences. The relevance of confessional differentiation is underlined by a recently published volume on Christian manliness in Scandinavia, edited by the Swedish historian Yvonne Maria Werner.
herself elucidates Catholic varieties of Christian manliness in her contribution on Catholic missionaries,\textsuperscript{13} whereas the German historian Olaf Blaschke draws attention to differences in masculine Christian repertoires between Catholic laity and clergy.\textsuperscript{14} The contributions to this volume, moreover, generally point at the heightened impact of religion between 1830 and 1940, for women as well as for men. As such, they put the thesis of the feminization of religion in this time frame into perspective. As Peter Gay already pointed out in \textit{Schnitzler’s Century}, the nineteenth century was the era of Darwin and the Virgin Mary, of scientific progress as well as of heightened religious fervour.\textsuperscript{15} He argues that the mental landscape of the middle class in Western Europe in particular revealed a tendency to scientification and declericalization of culture and society on the one hand, and on the other to modern mysticism, pilgrimages and revelations. The impact of the Industrial Revolution and science on the individual and collective meaning of religion and religious experience was shaped by differences in class, gender, age or location. It is for this reason that the historian Hugh McLeod proposed that religious transformations since the nineteenth century be defined in terms of pluralization rather than secularization, in order to allow for the inclusion of experience and perception in the re-conceptualization of religion.\textsuperscript{16}

The relevance of this recent research for the analysis of Catholic repertoires of masculinity is twofold. Firstly, the findings in general contradict the thesis that Christian conceptions of manliness in general were slowly but surely pushed out by secular and hegemonic notions of masculinity. Although this contention, as mentioned before, seems to fit in neatly with general theories about the marginalization of religion in the process of the modernization of society, it obscures the tenacity as well as the malleability of Christian definitions of manliness and specific masculine patterns of religiosity. This calls, secondly, for refining the general concept of Christian manliness, taking into account different dimensions of identity as well as denominational diversity. For instance, the male religious institutes prospered in the Netherlands during the interwar period, when the level of vocations to the priesthood reached its peak.\textsuperscript{17} Such findings weaken simplified assumptions regarding the marginalization of religion in general, and challenge the claim to a habitual relationship between modernity and hegemonic masculinity. The case of the Dominicans presented here, moreover, elucidates various repertoires of manly religiosity and religious manliness within the Dutch Catholic culture. A brief overview of their history illustrates that their self-conception traditionally reflected clerical and monastic aspects, whose mutual relations and gendered attributions and associations alternated as the circumstances changed over time.

\textsuperscript{13} Werner, “Feminin manlighet? Katholska missionärer I Norden”.
\textsuperscript{14} Blaschke, “Fältmarskalk Jesus Kristus”, 23-50.
\textsuperscript{15} Gay, \textit{Schnitzler’s century}.
\textsuperscript{16} McLeod, \textit{Secularization}, 10-11.
\textsuperscript{17} Dellepoort, \textit{De priesterroepingen in Nederland}, 42.
CONSTRUCTIONS OF DOMINICAN IDENTITY

In 1910, the historian of the Dutch Province, Augustine Meijer (1857-1925), explicitly referred to the fact that Dominic or Domingo de Guzman (1170-1221) founded his Order as a mendicant order in reaction to the established religious institutes of the Benedictines and Cistercians that were firmly embedded in medieval feudal society. As Francis, the other prominent founding father before him, had done, Dominic opted for an active, evangelical and personal spirituality. The apostolate of their respective foundations revolved around preaching and confession, capitalizing on the spiritual and pastoral needs of the inhabitants of the new towns in Western Europe. Contemplation and action, in the form of preaching, represented the fundamentals of Dominican life. Meditation and study were practised for the benefit of one’s preaching, which was geared to the salvation of the faithful. The organization of the Order as well as its internal division of labour favoured structural opportunities for contemplation for the ordained members. The motto of the Dominicans, *contemplari et contemplata alis tradere*, expressed the functional relationship between the active and contemplative dimensions of Dominican identity. To Thomas Aquinas the purpose envisaged by Dominic epitomized the apex of religious life: to contemplate and share the fruits of contemplation with others.

The monastic traits of the identity of the Dutch Dominicans, however, had become rather atrophied between approximately 1600 and 1800. Catholicism was suppressed in the Dutch Republic in favour of the Dutch Reformed Church as publicly privileged Church. As a result, convents were closed and the clergy formally banned from the country. Secular and regular clerics, however, clandestinely travelled round to administer the sacraments. By the middle of the seventeenth century an intricate system of paid tolerance of minority religions had come into being, which allowed for the development of stations where Catholic worship was maintained. These missionary stations mostly survived on lay patronage and shaped a particular Catholic culture that continued to determine parochial pastoral care long after these stations had become full-blown parishes again after the restoration of Episcopal hierarchy in the Netherlands in 1853. Nearly a century later, the Dutch Dominicans acknowledged that their influence still depended upon the parishes, which provided income, an influential social network and vocations for the Order. By then, they also had several convents in the country as a result of the restoration programme of the Dominican Order under the leadership of its Master, Vincent Jandel (1810-1872). This programme put their attachment to the parishes as well as the actual identity of parish priests under severe pressure. Jandel put forth a set of reforms that met with approval of the Holy See and greatly emphasized monastic observance, not only to restore a rigorous discipline within the Order, but also to reconstruct its proper tradition.

In the broader perspective of Roman Catholic Church politics, the stress put upon monastic observance served as an instrument of internal confessionalization

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18 Meijer, *Studiën*, 4-8.
19 Vicaire, “Dominique (saint)”, 1526-1530.
20 Barendse, *Thomas van Aquino*.
21 Parker, *Faith on the Margins*.
aimed at the reinforcement of a uniform Catholic identity which buttressed the ultramontane ideology. Blaschke coined the notion innere Konfessionalisierung in “Der Dämon des Konfessionalismus”. Religious communities performed a key role in this process, as is illustrated by, for instance, the appointment of vicar generals of influential institutes such as the Dominicans. Jandel’s appointment was instrumental for the pursuit of administrative centralization envisaged by Pope Pius IX, as were similar appointments for the Benedictines (1850), the Redemptorists (1853) and the Franciscans (1856 and 1862). The pope attempted to tie these religious institutes more closely to the Holy See, thereby enlarging his own sphere of influence. Jandel’s programme of reform became synonymous with a strict observance of the rule and the constitutions of the Order.

His programme of re-monasticization met with resistance, not only in his own country, France, but also in Italy and in the Netherlands. Objections were essentially rooted in the question of what was imperative for the Dominican identity. As far as the Dutch province was concerned, Jandel’s programme played into the hands of the Dutch provincial, John Dominic Raken (1798-1869), who regarded the strengthening of the monastic aspects of Dominican life as instrumental for the transformation of rather heterogeneous group of parish priests into a more uniform group of men religious. As parish priests, the Dominicans had grown self-reliant and had outgrown the convent life with which they had had at most a passing acquaintance in their formative years. Until the end of the eighteenth century they usually spent these years in a convent in the Southern Netherlands. After the closing of these convents in the aftermath of the French Revolution, such a convent training became an exception to the rule, reserved for the happy few of which Raken himself had been one, spending his years of religious and clerical training in Rome between 1818 and 1821. Without opportunities to cultivate the monastic dimensions of Dominican life, Raken had no doubt that they risked becoming clerics rather than men religious. Yet he was well aware that some influential fellow brothers had raised fundamental doubts as to whether the strict monastic observance was a Dominican characteristic at all. Some pointed out that a rigidly ascetic regimen could probably be more easily maintained by those brothers in other provinces who could indeed enjoy convent life, but not by the Dutch Dominicans themselves, as their pastoral duties severely challenged their physical constitution.

Pressured by the master general, Raken managed to craft a compromise between the monastically oriented international reform programme and the parish-oriented Dutch Dominican culture. While the Preachers held on to ‘their’ parishes they also founded new convents, first in Huissen (1858), a small town in Gelderland, followed by the Convent of Saint Thomas in Zwolle (1901) mentioned earlier and the Convent of Saint Albert the Great in Nijmegen (1932). On an ideological level they

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22 Blaschke coined the notion innere Konfessionalisierung in “Der Dämon des Konfessionalismus”.
21 Cf. De Maeyer, Religious Institutes.
25 Walz, Compendium, 442-444.
26 Cf. the debate between Jandel and Henri-Dominique Lacordaire: B. Bonvan, Lacordaire-Jandel.
27 PAOD 8097b, Mk 1 en Mk 14: Letters of Th. Van der Heijden to provincial Raken, Nijmegen, 13 December 1848, 10 December 1848 en 30 January 1850. See also PAOD 8097b, Mf 14: Letter of Peter Sjoukes to Thomas Sjoukes, Amsterdam, 26 January 1851.
put explicit effort into the cultivation of a double identity: clerical and religious. The circular letters from the subsequent fathers provincial to their subjects testify to this effort. They associated a courageous, decisive attitude with the active and clerical dimensions of Dominican life, and a more submissive and receptive attitude with its contemplative and religious aspects. The Dutch Dominicans were expected to cultivate these characteristics equally. This, in turn, was presented as somewhat a hopeless aim, since the majority of them remained active as parish clergy. As such they partook in a clerical culture, which mirrored that of the secular clergy. The particular way of life in the parishes became scorned, while the efforts the Dominican parish priests put into the cultivation of the monastic dimensions of their Dominican existence were depicted as heroic.

The circular letters reflect what specific religious masculinity was required for the Preachers. By their vows of obedience, chastity and poverty, they renounced the general social standards of self-determination, material wealth, and legitimate offspring for male adults of the middle class from which they themselves descended. The Belgian historian Jan Art has pointed out that living by these three vows required virtues which were essentially qualified as feminine, such as humility, obedience, self-renunciation and self-sacrifice. Although this is certainly true, in the context of male religious institutes like the Dominican Order, the sacrificial character of religious life was directly associated with physical endurance and moral strength typified as masculine qualities. The capacity to live according to stringent internal discipline and to bow to hierarchical authority was denoted as ‘manly’. Celibacy, on the one hand, set the Dominicans apart from lay men, joining them closer to God than any non-celibate man. Rigorous monastic discipline, on the other hand, set them apart from the secular clergy. This internal discipline was principally geared to one’s obedience to God, as well as to his earthly representatives, the religious superiors. Martial terms were used in descriptions of their regimen of prayer, seclusion (often temporary) and fasting. Such descriptions not only underscored the pious militancy of their choice to become a priest and to contribute to a truly Christian society, but also the manly character of this endeavour.

This did, however, not solve the basic tension between the active (clerical) and contemplative (religious) dimensions of their identity. Around 1910 the Dutch Dominicans started to distinguish more clearly between identity and position. Their identity rested upon monastic fundamentals, whereas their position had mostly become intertwined with parochial pastoral care. The confidence in their superiority to the secular clergy remained untainted. This sense of superiority gradually trickled down their ranks. Within the international Order, however, the Dutch Dominicans with their parish responsibilities turned into the exception to the rule that the Preachers essentially were religious who kept their distance from activities which would frame them in the diocesan structures. The Dutch Dominicans clearly could not easily reconcile

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28 With one major difference: the master of the order insisted that the members who were engaged in pastoral care did not live all by themselves, as was customary for secular priests. Therefore, the Dominicans often lived in small groups (two to four) in the presbyteries of the parishes they administered.

29 Art, “Mannen als bruiden”.

their historically evolved responsibility for over ten, mostly inner-city, parishes with the monastic characteristics which the Order claimed and promoted internationally as Dominican.

**CLERICAL LEADERSHIP OF THE CATHOLIC SUBCULTURE**

Attempts to balance the contemplative monastic aspects of Dominican life with its clerical components proved to be rather fragile as Dutch society was reshaped along denominational lines during the process of ‘pillarization’ (*verzuiling*). Between 1890 and 1920, Catholic and (orthodox) Protestant politicians came to agree upon the principle of largely self-contained and self-supporting denominational subcultures or pillars (*zuilen*) as a means to advance their social and cultural emancipation while preserving the Christian character of society at the same time. For the Dutch Catholics, over a third of the entire population around 1900, emancipation went hand in hand with a religious revival in a largely separate subculture dominated by their own schools, newspapers, social, political and charitable organizations.

Historiographical evaluations of pillarization in general roughly vary from describing it either as an essentially conservative response to modernity employing modern means, as the Swiss historian Urs Altermatt put forward in his *Katholizismus und Moderne* (1989), or as a reflection of modernization of religion itself, as argued by the Belgian sociologist Staf Hellemans in *Strijd om de moderniteit* (1993). In both theories the process of pillarization hinges upon fundamental changes in the relationship between religion and society under the influence of industrialization and urbanization in large parts of Europe. These developments undermined traditional patterns of behaviour, status and power related to agrarian society and entailed the dislodgement of the social, political and economic domains from the direct and indirect sphere of influence of the Church. This was exactly what the Church sought to prevent by designing an autonomous, self-supporting Catholic subculture which made it possible for Catholics to actively be a part of processes of modernization, albeit on religious principles which underscored its fixed and God-given nature. The Catholic subculture which came into being in the Netherlands was subdivided by gender, age and social status but, in contrast to largely similar subcultures in Germany and Switzerland, also highly clericalized.

This pillarization process clearly fostered and strengthened the clerical dimensions of the identity of regular priests such as the Dominicans. Although the internal stability and the monolithic nature of the Catholic pillar in the Netherlands have been questioned, most forcefully by the historian Paul Luykx, the domination of the Catholic subculture by the secular as well as the regular clergy is incontestable. While transforming into the organizational backbone of the Catholic subculture and contributing to the shaping of a distinct Catholic identity, the clergy extended its influence far beyond the actual ecclesiastical domain. Necrologies of Dominicans

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30 See also Hellemans’s recent study: *Het tijdperk van de wereldreligies*.
32 Luykx, *Andere katholieken*. 
show us just how far their span of control expanded. Pastoral guidance evolved into extensive moral control exercised by priests who watched closely over their flock and stopped their parishioners to learn why they had missed Mass. Interestingly enough, typologies of clerical authority and clerical manliness were moulded into the secular, patriarchal mode of masculinity of lay bourgeois men as dedicated, decisive husbands and fathers.

Men of God were men of the Church, depicted as the Bride whom they could make bear fruit by preaching, administering the Sacraments, and tending to the pastoral needs of the faithful. The mystery of the motherhood of the Church, in other words, relied upon them. This responsibility required a dedicated spiritual life, qualified as “manly and earnest”. Although they were celibate, men of God ought to be true men, who could prove their manliness by profiling themselves as strong leaders of the Catholic community, being compassionate pastors as well as competitive priests, militant and submissive at the same time. As they were exempt from military service - in contrast to their colleagues in Belgium, for instance - the Catholic subculture remained the privileged arena in which Dutch priests could prove their masculinity. While the older patterns of asceticism served to distinguish the Dominicans as regular priests from the secular clerics, by the 1920s they had gradually become aware that men were increasingly turning away from parish-based organized religion, and they now employed the exercise of a stringent asceticism to set the men of God apart from the female faithful and their religious practice. This decline was particularly manifest in the male membership of the Dominican Third Order. Moreover, it was proving increasingly difficult to attract and keep young, academically trained Catholics committed to the parishes or the apostolate beyond the parishes. This awareness is mirrored in the describing and denouncing of parish-based religious practices as feminine.

The Dominicans were explicitly admonished to refrain from a piety that consisted of external “forms, practices and devotions” which was said not to go beyond the mere sensitive aspects of piety and which only induced sentimentality. Superiors insisted that their fellow brothers give up all devotions that were considered “weak and sentimental”. Instead, they were admonished to lead a sincere, manly life, cultivating a piety without any sentimental tendencies. The adjectives “sentimental” and “weak” undoubtedly referred to the female sex and were used to ostracize specific forms of piety by labelling them feminine. Apparently, the terms “piety” and

33 As was said, for instance, of the Dominican Raymundus N.G. Orie (1863-1944). Hermans, “Em. Pastoor Orie”.
34 Cf. for similar gendering of clerical identity in the Protestant and Anglican tradition since the late nineteenth century Bos, “A Good Enough Parson” and Mews, “Clergymen, Gentlemen and Men”.
35 Stockums, Priesterschap en ascese, 262. Interestingly enough, such qualifications of religious leadership and inspiration were metaphorically denoted as forms of spiritual motherhood in the High Middle Ages, which was even ascribed to Jesus Christ. Bynum, Jesus as Mother.
36 Cf. Stockums, Priesterschap en ascese, 178.
37 PAOD 2574: Membership of the Third Order, including intellectuals and priests.
38 PAOD 6393: Conferences during retreats (15 until 22 September 1937) 12, (25 July until 3 August 1940) 11. See also the criticism of Petrus van den Tempel O.P. in the apologetic periodical Het Schild, May 1931, cited by Van der Plas, Uit het rijke roomsche leven, 135-136.
“pious” had become tainted and were replaced with notions such as “contemplation” and “contemplative”, which were contrasted with devotional patterns of religious practice. In Dominican circles contemplation was now described as an act of inner discipline, denoted as masculine, while at the same time representing a necessary check on the pastoral duties and the apostolate that were labelled as action. Yet, the Preachers could hardly ignore the fact that within the clericalized Catholic subculture it was precisely these forms of action that underscored the manly character of their presence.

Faced with an increasingly feminine presence in Church and with what they referred to as “the men’s question”, by the 1920s some Dominicans were also becoming aware that the clericalization of Catholic culture could potentially harm the spiritual prestige of the clergy. Catholic emancipation seemed to be complete with the settling of the long-lasting controversies over state funding of confessional schools in 1917 and universal suffrage in 1919. This political success started to compromise the prominent role of the clergy in the Catholic milieu. The Dominicans were not the only incumbents who had to face up to questions and criticism from young educated Catholics, whose support they actually tried to rally in their intellectual apostolate. In their case, the criticism induced them to reconsider the parameters of their identity as priests religious, bringing up old questions concerning the balance between action and contemplation, characteristics that were linked to connotations of decisiveness (action) and passivity (contemplation) which, in turn, were tacitly or overtly connected to definitions of masculinity or femininity.

RE-EVALUATIONS OF FAMILIAR PARAMETERS

A series of commemorations provided an opportunity for intensified reflections on Dominican identity. In 1921, the seventh centenary of Saint Dominic’s death was celebrated, in 1923 the sixth centenary of Saint Thomas Aquinas’s canonization, and finally in 1934 the seventh centenary of Saint Dominic’s canonization. The Preachers seized these opportunities to clarify and maintain their prominent role in the Catholic community and advance the position of this community in Dutch society. They not only had to deal with the criticism of lay intellectuals mentioned above, but also feared the indifference to Church and clergy of a growing group of Catholics.

In 1921 the philosopher Joseph van Wely attempted to reconcile the Order’s tradition with modernity. He set out to defend the rationale of the Order by contextualizing Saint Dominic’s foundation in the historical development of the religious institutes, as well as by pointing out the specific characteristics of the Dominican apostolate. Van Wely was trained as a philosopher at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland.
and was considered one of the promising Dominican intellectuals of the Dutch province. He argued that the religious project of Saint Dominic formed the link between the classical mode of monastic life grafted onto the *stabilitas loci* on the one hand, and the more modern and mobile religious way of life promoted by Saint Ignatius of Loyola on the other. This evolutionary perspective legitimized the existence of the Dominicans as a semi-modern order. Their rationale, Van Wely pointed out, was to be found in the connection between contemplation (guaranteed by the monastic life) and action (expressed in pastoral and apostolic activities). He acknowledged that the Dominicans could not monopolize the motto *Contemplata aliis tradere*, which Saint Thomas had coined for all apostolic institutes. Yet, this ‘pronouncement’ clearly reflected Saint Dominic’s ideals, as well as the “characteristic properties of the Dominicans” who stated that their preaching should invariably be rooted in the plenitude of the contemplation advanced by their monastic way of life (*ex plenitude contemplationis*).

While referring to the historical development of the Order and its characteristics Van Wely obviously accounted for the changing circumstances in which the Dominicans had to accomplish their specific calling. He self-critically remarked that it did not suffice to excel as proficient polemicists, skilful scholars, smooth preachers, or smart organizers. In order to capture the attention of the ‘masses’, the Dominicans had to express the “full Christendom which lives in us” in their sermons. They needed to be aware that they would not be judged by their words, but by their acts as well. In this vein they could and should contribute to bringing about “a new humanity” and “a new world”.

Whereas Van Wely emphasized the necessity of a revival of religious vigour in a familiar patriarchal mode, preferably with regular clerics as the Preachers in the lead, a group of young friars in Zwolle focused on the more passive aspects of Dominican life instead, accentuating the need to lead a life of love and suffering. They did so in a collection of poems and essays brought out as a special edition of the Dominican periodical *De Rozenkrans* (The Rosary). The authors are of the same generation as the three young friars depicted by Van Bergen in his triptych, born around the turn of the twentieth century. Their contributions to the debate over Dominican identity in fact reflect the ambiguity of this painting, glorifying the decisive strength of Catholic tradition in modern society embodied by contemplative friars submitting to God’s will. Postulating the resemblance between Saint Dominic and Christ, the contributors to the special issue of *De Rozenkrans* depict the founder of their Order alternately as a humble and meek man and a powerful warrior of God who fought heresy and enlightened the world with his apostolate. The heroic qualities ascribed to Saint Dominic clearly echo an older discourse articulated in the circular letters of the superiors during the first two decades of the twentieth century. More important here, however, is the emphasis young Dominicans put on the obedient and submissive atti-

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tude of Saint Dominic. According to them, he thereby testified to his personal insig-
ificance, glorifying Christ and His willingness to suffer and even die for His faith. In
the weight they ascribe to Saint Dominic’s martial martyrdom the young friars were
able to connect contemplation and action along different lines than Van Wely, yet
with a similar outcome: a life of prayer would strengthen and prepare Dominic’s sons
for their main task: preaching. Yet, in contrast to Van Wely’s argument they implicitly
refuted his familiar, essentially patriarchal mode of the re-fashioning of Dominican
life and challenged its clerical foundations.

Van Wely as well as the young friars each attempted to reconcile the tradition
of their Order with the changing circumstances. The Dominicans hesitated to accom-
modate what they called “the spirit of the times”. This expression proved to be short
hand for modernity: everything that opposed and undermined the Christian char-
acter of society. As “men of their times” the Preachers set out to control this spirit,
drawing inspiration and legitimacy from their tradition. They considered tradition to
be the driving force of their religious life, which kept it in its proper track. Concern
for the tradition of the Order precluded disdain of the old and familiar in favour
of the new and unknown, the Dominican Jan Sassen explained in Het Klooster (The
Convent) in 1922. The essentials of this tradition were, however, put to the test by
representatives of the generation of the Dutch Dominicans who vented their vision on
the fundamentals of Dominican life in the special edition of De Rozenkranz of 1921.
Some of them proved to be susceptible to the viewpoints of their radical lay peers.
To them, the clerical dimensions of the Dominican identity should be kept in check
by the contemplative aspects, which were thought to foster the true internalization
of faith to which their apostolate should be geared. This viewpoint revealed reserva-
tions within the Church regarding the leadership of clerics who did not meet these
standards.

CLERICAL REPERTOIRES CHALLENGED

These young Dominicans could not easily slip into the patriarchal mode of Catho-
lic masculinity which had become familiar to their older brothers and torch bearers
of Dutch Catholicism. Most prominent among the latter were the professors of the
Catholic University of Nijmegen, founded in 1923: the exegete Reginald Jansen (1879-
1947), Jan-Benedict Kors (1885-1966) who held the chair in moral theology after 1928,
and Peter Kreling (1888-1973), chair of dogmatic theology beginning that same year. These Dominicans were educated during the struggle against modernism between
1908 and 1914. They inadvertently bore the stamp of a two-faced Catholicism: outwardly complacent, triumphant and sometimes even defiant, inwardly cautious...
and controlling. To Catholics of younger generations, they epitomized patriarchal clericalism rooted in unswerving neothomist schooling. Kors, for instance, was associated with various Catholic social and intellectual initiatives. Jansen literally seemed to embody the sturdiness of Catholic theology, “his massive head planted on his square shoulders”, at the same time reflecting the masculine character of a neo-thomist training, expressed in his “tough, truly manly mind [...] without any littleness, without sentimentality, professional, objective”.

Younger protagonists, by contrast, criticized the essentially clerical mode of Catholic masculine leadership, opting for what could best be termed as ‘reactionary modernism’. They strove to renew their personal faith and spirituality, not by ruling over the spirit of the times as older Dominicans had tried, but by actively resisting it as being materialistic and all too rational. While developing a radical religious agenda, they took sides with young Catholic intellectuals who publicly questioned the clericalization of the Catholic community and criticized secular and regular priests for forsaking their actual vocation. Dominicans met with their disapproval as well, as the criticism of the ex-seminarian, journalist and author Anton van Duinkerken (1903-1968) directed at Hyacinth Hermans O.P. (1876-1962) illustrates. In 1931 Van Duinkerken, well on his way to become one of the leading Catholic intellectuals in the Netherlands, painted an unfavourable portrait of this Dominican in an article entitled “The unrecognizable priest” (“De onherkenbare priester”). Hermans wrote for the influential, conservative newspaper De Maasbode and celebrated the 25th anniversary of his ordination that year. This newspaper then characterized him as “the least clerical of all Catholic journalists [...] whom only a few people will have ever spotted in his Dominican habit”. Van Duinkerken was outraged; he could not understand how this Dominican was honoured by De Maasbode for not being recognizable for what he actually was: a priest religious. Moreover, he attacked Hermans for admitting that he had become a journalist because he did not like the pulpit after all. Not only did the Dominican reveal his personal embarrassment over the actual goal of his life, as Van Duinkerken pointed out, but he was apparently unaware of the danger of the professional confusion in the Catholic community, where priests spent their energy on journalism or other professions, while neglecting their actual, pastoral duties. According to Van Duinkerken, these duties could not be performed by lay Catholics, unlike the activities with which the priesthood squandered its precious time. He scorned clerical efforts to engage the laity in pastoral duties in the parishes, for this would leave the faithful in the hands of pastoral amateurs.

Van Duinkerken’s philippic reveals the resistance to the clericalized Catholic culture young Dominicans had to reckon with. It was published in the periodical De Gemeenschap (The Community), founded in 1925 as a “monthly magazine for Catho-

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67 Herf, Reactionary Modernism; Golan, Modernity and Nostalgia, xiii.
69 van Duinkerken, “De onherkenbare priester”.
lic reconstruction” and as such it bore an anti-liberal, anti-individualist stamp. This periodical was the main mouthpiece of the ideas of the French convert Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) in the Netherlands - in fact, the editors even contemplated simply naming their periodical Maritain. Interestingly enough, the link with Maritain was strengthened by a Dominican, Casimir Terburg (1892-1968). In 1924 he published the Dutch translation of Maritain’s Art en scholastique (1920). As an unwritten rule the editors of De Gemeenschap did not collaborate with priests, but they made an exception for Terburg. In late 1924 he became one of the regular contributors to the magazine.

To young intellectuals in the circle of De Gemeenschap, Maritain’s reconciliation of modern art and Catholicism served as a more general framework to merge modernity with what was perceived as religious tradition. In his provocative study Catholicism in the Jazz Age, the American historian Stephen Schloesser S.J. explains how Maritain employed Thomas Aquinas’s theory of art in Art en scholastique to emphasize the importance of form in art as a means to visualize a deeper meaning intended by God. Using the scholastic notion of hylomorphism, Maritain mobilized this respectable tradition in order to glorify abstract modern art as the form of art which would transcend the mere imitation of nature by uncovering the internal and vital processes which animated nature in its very workings. Schloesser’s analysis not only sums up the agenda of an artistic avant-garde during the interwar years, but also clarifies its partially reactionary character. Moreover, his analysis explains the attraction of neothomism to dissatisfied young Catholic intellectuals in the Netherlands as it underpinned their efforts to bring about change in the hierarchical structures of the Catholic subculture. These structures had always been guarded as god-given, and were now challenged by new claims of new protagonists to true godly inspiration.

The Dominican Terburg took it upon himself to explain Thomas’s philosophy to a small group of these men, attempting to do what Maritain did: bridging the gap between Catholic tradition and modern culture. He thus initiated laymen in a philosophical and intellectual mindset that had been reserved to its future elite within his own Dominican community. Only those friars who were destined for an intellectual or administrative career within the Order concentrated directly on Thomas’s Summa during their training in theology. This thomistic empowerment inspired some of Terburg’s listeners to more radical interpretations of their personal calling as Catholic intellectuals. Henri Bruning (1900-1983) was one of them and became one of the founders of the hypercritical periodical De Valbijl (The Guillotine, 1925) under which many a prominent priest was virtually executed. The editors of this radically religious, anti-democratic and anti-clerical periodical, which proved to be extremely short-lived, professed an uncompromising Catholicism, glorifying vigour and mascu-

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50 van den Haterd, Om hart en vurigheid.
51 Sanders, “Maritain in the Netherlands”.
52 Id., “Dominicus in de Jazz Age”, 51.
54 Ibid., 261-263, 268-276. See also Luykx, “Daar is nog poëzie”.
line vitality, against the tide of the modern, secularized world, but also against established Catholicism which, in their opinion, was wrongly satisfied with the existing balance of power, because it offended the original intentions of the Gospel.

Terburg’s conferences illustrate that he sympathized with more radical ascetic interpretations of Catholicism to counter the spiritual poverty and materialism of modernity. Materialism and egotism separated man from God and this separation could only be undone by mortification, submission to God’s will and by consistent prayer. It is difficult to precisely assess Terburg’s influence within the Dominican community. His ties with the dissatisfied young Catholics did, however, prompt the superior of the Dutch Dominicans in 1931 to forbid his censorship of yet another new, radical periodical initiated by some of the editors of De Valbijl, which by then had ceased publication. Though respected, Terburg was somewhat of an odd man out in his own community. His non-conformism was exemplified in the pastorate he single-handedly set up for a group of caravan-dwellers. His ties with the aforementioned Bruning go back to Bruning’s training at Saint Dominic’s College, the minor seminary of the Order where Terburg taught Latin and Greek.

During his school years Bruning also got acquainted with Raymund van Sante (1896-1946), a Belgian ‘army man’ with a strongly developed Flemish nationalist sentiment who had become a novice in the Dutch province in 1919. By 1931 Van Sante had become the key figure among a group of in part overzealous Catholic students who were attracted by his programme of religious renewal. This revolved around so-called lay core groups that were to co-operate with clerics prone to change in the spirit of the Gospel. Van Sante provided the thomistic underpinnings of their programme in a small study on authority (Gezag), in which he tried to turn the tables of authority, encouraging students to take it upon themselves to support the clergy, which he characterized as failing in its principal duties.

### SHIFTING REPERTOIRES

Needless to say, the proposed inversion threatened the hierarchy of the Dutch Roman Catholic Church, where lawful authority was synonymous with the control of the bishops over their priests, as well as with the power of these priests over the laity. The alliance Van Sante and Terburg forged with young Catholic intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s proved to be extremely fragile. Of more importance here, however, is that

56 Terburg, Het innerlijk leven. See also Van den Haterd, Om hart en vurigheid, 40.
58 Catholic Documentation Centre, Nijmegen, Archives Henri Bruning, nr. 520: Letter of Bruning to Raymundus van Sante, 16-05-1931; Kieft, Het plagiaat, 25.
59 See the chapter by Marieke Smulders (chapter 8).
60 van Sante, Gezag; Catholic Documentation Centre, Nijmegen, Archives Henri Bruning, nr. 520: Letter of Bruning to Raymundus van Sante, letter of Bruning to Van Sante, 14 March 1934. I dealt extensively with Van Sante in Monteiro, Gods Predikers, especially 181-183, 203-212.
the opposition between the established clergy and educated lay Catholics also reveals diverging conceptions of Catholic manliness. The group with which both Van Sante and Terburg associated themselves embodied a mix of vital vigour denoted as virile and a mystical submissiveness. Their proclaimed mission in the Church demanded what they defined as manly decisiveness. Yet, they also had to acknowledge the fact that they were neglected by Church authorities on account of their lay status and youthful inexperience. They were well aware that their sometimes uncompromisingly radical conceptions of Catholicism were kept in check by patriarchal organizational patterns guarded by older representatives of the clergy. They tried to come to terms with this tension by identifying themselves with Jesus Christ who served as a model of identification as a martyr for his faith and religious convictions.

The Dutch bishops recognized Van Sante as one of the main instigators of what was branded as ‘intra-church anticlericalism’, and consequently he was exiled from the Dutch Dominican Province in the spring of 1933. In the same year, Terburg distanced himself from Bruning and his circle when Bruning published a booklet entitled Onze priester (Our Priests), which breathed the vitalistic discourse of the radical young Catholics. He argued that many Catholics would leave their Church not only because of the “feeble predications” of the clergy, but also because the priests did not live by the moral standards they preached. The fact that the youngest generation of Preachers proved to be susceptible to the essentially anticlerical agenda of Bruning cum suis explains why the Dutch provincial of the Dominicans launched a counteroffensive. In a series of conferences for Catholic students as well as the young friars that same year, Kors, who had been highly critical of Van Sante’s opinion on authority, and Kreling, who did not share Van Sante’s views either, attempted to restore the patriarchal authority of the clergy against their rebellious ‘sons’, condemning the uncurbed idealism and activism of the radical young Catholics as anti-intellectualistic and anti-clerical. Terburg did his share in defending the status quo by distancing himself to some extent from the young men whom he had initiated in the principles of Thomas. In May 1933 he dedicated a conference to the theme of prudence, of which the “men of action” and “many youngsters among us” seemed to have such a low opinion. The virtue of prudence, Terburg lectured, saw to it that men would keep time in their moral actions and would fulfil the purpose for which God had created them.

Against the background of this controversy over authority, the exchange of views among Dominicans on the balance between action and contemplation was gaining momentum. By 1933, action could easily be mistaken for one-sided decisiveness that disregarded customary patriarchal patterns of authority and could therefore be branded as anti-clerical, whereas the notion of contemplation ran the risk of becoming stigmatized as passive and frail. On the occasion of the seventh centenary of the canonization of the founder of the Order in 1934 the parameters of Dominican

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62 Bruning, Onze priester.
64 Catholic Documentation Centre, Nijmegen, Archives Henri Bruning, nr. 520: Letter of Bruning to Van Sante, 14 March 1934.
65 PAOD 8529: Lecture held on 14 May 1933 in Ubbergen near Nijmegen.
identity were once again pondered, this time, however, only by representatives of the established generation. While concentrating on the history of the reception of Saint Dominic they trod carefully, in order to position clerical energy and apostolic action well within the customary patriarchal order of things while avoiding the pitfall of passivity. As men of their times, Dominicans had to control the spirit of these times, for which they were excellently equipped, being clerically trained men of God, loyal to the Church. This patriarchal mode of manliness, however, lost at least some of its appeal among the young Preachers who wondered whether the changing times were not asking for a change in them, as they considered it their vocation not to control, but rather to understand the spirit of times. 66

CONCLUSION

Christian manliness proves to be a rather unstable and elusive category in nineteenth- and twentieth-century history. Although the concept of a de-Christianized hegemonic manliness fits in smoothly with the secularization theory, Christian masculinity and hegemonic manliness did not entirely part ways after the middle of the nineteenth century. Recent research has discredited the secularization theory as the master narrative of religious change, 67 as this master narrative largely neglects the heightened impact of religion precisely in the century between 1840 and 1940. Instead of being pushed to the margins of society by modernization or new conceptualizations of humanity derived from the Enlightenment, religion in its denominational variance propelled various processes of confessionalization to which both women and men were party and which were essentially gendered. Whereas the feminization of religion has received due academic attention, research on processes of masculinization is still in its infancy. This research should, in my opinion, take inter- and intra-denominational differences into account when assessing the impact of gender in perceptions and meanings of religion and religiosity on an individual and collective level.

This article has aimed to contribute to this assessment by offering an analysis of Catholic repertoires of Christian manliness, focusing on the Dutch Dominicans between 1850 and 1940. They then represented one of the most prominent religious institutes; the patterns of clerical and religious masculinity they cultivated are probably valid for other male orders as well. 68 Over a period of almost a century these patterns reveal significant shifts. As missionaries within the boundaries of the Dutch Republic, the Dominicans came to cultivate the clerical dimensions of their identity. During the restoration of the Order from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, however, the monastic aspects in turn were stressed due to an international monastic reform instrumental to the revival of the Order. Though not uncontested in the Dutch province, which firmly held onto its parishes, the Dutch Dominicans employed the monastic traits of their identity in self-appraisals in order to distinguish themselves

66 PAOD 5869: Verslagboek Lacordaire-debatingclub XVIII, 135-149, in particular 137 and 138.
68 Cf. de Kok, Acht eeuwen Minderbroeders.
from the secular clergy. During the process of pillarization between 1890 and 1920 their identity as men of God then became modelled after secular, bourgeois standards of masculinity. This patriarchal mode of manliness neatly supported the clerical leadership of the Catholic community.

Attempts to strengthen the sturdier, masculine traits of the clerical identity backfired once the process of pillarization reached its peak and Catholics came to question the clerical dominance outside the ecclesiastical domain. This clericalism was severely criticized by a new generation of educated Catholic men, who were not at all impressed by the spiritual heroism and innate virtue priests claimed on account of their (celibate) state in life and status as *alter Christus*. These Catholics set out to separate the spheres which had come together during the denominational segmentation of Dutch society. By 1920 the Dominicans saw themselves faced with the need to clarify their relevance in modern society. This triggered tentative reflections on the familiar parameters of their identity during the 1920s and 1930s.

These reflections are illustrative for the manner in which the Dominicans tried to reconcile tradition and modernity, thus profiling themselves as men of their times under changed conditions. These reflections not only circled around the well-known poles of Dominican identity, action and contemplation, but also reveal how these characteristics were gendered in the interwar debate over status and authority within the Catholic community. To the Dominicans, action was connected to the patriarchal pastoral span of control, kept in check by contemplation which guaranteed the prudence considered necessary. Young Catholic intellectuals who opposed the clericalized character of the Catholic subculture, however, glorified new conceptions of action, denouncing the patterns of action of the clergy as weak, effeminate and out of date. These ‘sons’ cultivated virile varieties of Catholic manliness that challenged the classical patriarchal order. Whereas the established generation of the Dominicans invested in an internal debate over the virtue of a well-balanced life of action and contemplation, this way of life was discarded as weak and ineffective, not only by representatives of the new lay intellectual elite, but by a few high-profiled fellow brothers as well. These Dominicans took up the ascetic traits of the monastic dimension of the Dominican identity in an attempt to regain some of their Order’s authority within the Catholic community. They thereby attempted to chart the prerequisites of Catholic manliness anew in the gendered opposition within the weakened clergy, in need of help of the ascetic strength of lay and religious men guided by a more profound Christian spirit than most ordained men of God.
Circa 18-year old ... at Saint Dominic's College, Nijmegen, 1936. In this closed Catholic institution, masculine socialization was influenced by various ideals and images of men and masculinity that stemmed from the Catholic tradition as well as from Dutch interwar culture.
[Sint Agatha, Erfgoedcentrum Nederlands Kloosterleven, PAOD]