

'Ite ad Joseph'; A short survey on textual concepts in the neo-gothic interior decoration in catholic churches in the 19th and first decades of the 20th century

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Abstract

No other period in the history of religious art has shown such a great amount of textual statements on altars, walls, stained-glass windows, communion benches, pulpits, pietà, entrances in ex- and interiors, ways of the cross, vaults, floors and statues as the neo-gothic interior of Catholic churches all over the world produced in the period 1870-1919. During these decades the church artists adhered to the neo-gothic style introduced by Pugin in Great-Brittan and Viollet-le-Duc in France. A whole generation of clerics, monastic orders, guilds and devotional groups glorifying the ideology of Ultramontanism in all kinds of manifestations, such as international gatherings, expositions of church-art, the consecration of churches, processions and publications in all sorts spread this style. This ideology, with a strong emphasis on the power of the pope in heavenly and worldly matters, has inflicted the whole world. The utopian Christian society based on a false image of the Middle Ages had also to be implemented in the colonies, without any real concern for the indigenous peoples or knowledge of the structures and cultures of their traditional societies. This article focuses on the unprecedented 19th- century decoration program in churches based on a new devotion inspired by the Neo-thomistic philosophy, incorporated in the official policy of the Vatican. The author chooses S. Jozef as an example because his devotion was elaborated with the persona of 'patron of the church'. Not only the iconography had to be adjusted. For a good understanding words were necessary, also to stretch the difference with the patriarch Joseph of Egypt, a pre-figuration of Christ. The methodology chosen is based on elaborate research in parish-archives in the Rhineland completed with the study of primary and secondary literature. In the last category, the recent publication on de S. Jozef in Groningen is instructive. This research brought together all the inscriptions and textual concepts in the church for the first time. (Werf, 2012) The intensive research on the works of the Mengelberg-ateliers in the Rhineland is the backbone of this article (www.themengelbergstudios.com). The author is aware of the fact that this survey is just a modest try to investigate this very interesting aspect of the neo-gothic art.

Keywords

Ultramontanism, Neothomism, neo-Gothic style, textuality and textual concepts, colonialism and education.

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Introduction: The textual concepts of the shrines dedicated to S. Jozef and S. Joseph, 1837-1924

The theoretical approach to this topic, as it is in my previous essay (Abelman, 2017), is primarily based on Bruno Latour and his so-called Actor-Network-Theory, in which he pointed out new ideas on the crucial role of social networks in relations to the arts and on Benedict Anderson's view about religion as a kind of nationalism without borders. (Latour 2005 and Anderson 2006) Ultramontanism is the very vivid example of an international religious ideology without concern of borders or landmarks as it states that the pope is the only authority in religious and worldly matters.

The theory of Foucault on power and its fluid manifestations in society got more importance in the view of the activities of the Congregation of the Sisters of the little Infant Jesus in Indonesia in the field of education. (Foucault 1991)

New is the incorporation of Thomastic philosophy in this context. The rediscovery of the 13th - century philosopher Thomas of Aquinas, a student of Albertus Magnus, who became the patron of Catholic education, and his ideas was studied thoroughly by the eager priest-students and young, ambitious laymen. The encyclical ‘Aeterni Patris’ by Leo XIII in 1879 formed the culmination of this development. The battle for free confessional education is an important aspect of the glorious emancipation of the Catholics in Europe. The textual additions in the church interiors celebrate the victory of Catholic education.

On the forehand, it should be noted that for the period covered here, the economic situation in Western-Europe was periodically abominable, especially the agricultural crisis, caused by a severe potato-disease was destructive in the years 1845-1854. It caused what is regarded as the last official famine in Europe. (Segers 2004) These were also the years of spreading diseases which contaminated people and cattle and of extreme weather conditions, which impressed people. (Thoen et al. 2015)

Perhaps the most destructive of the crises has been the economic crisis of 1873-1896, known as ‘the Great Deflation’ or ‘Long Depression’, that shortly erupted after the Franco-Prussian war of 1871, with the defeat of France. It was the cause of great poverty among the working class in the industrialised countries and can be regarded as an announcement of economic developments to come. (Fisch 2002) The apocalyptic feelings of the end of this century were strong and influential as Weber (Weber 2000) has described so impressively in his last study.

As religion is the core business of this article, it is obligatory to indicate the definition I follow, formulated by Davies:

‘Religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that these moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic’. (Davies 2011, 30)

About religious feelings he writes:

‘We are also alert to the equally obvious fact that different societies and religious groups emphasise some part of the wide spectrum of possible human feelings, framing it with nuances of their moral value and undertaking to cultivate and control it for the good of their community.’ (Davies 2011, 1)

Regarding these definitions, the use of textual applications may enhance the impact of the importance of the devotional objects on and the framing of the (aspirant) believers. They were in these days mostly illiterate and impoverished peasants, unemployed or freelance proletarians and lower working class members in the European countries and completely ‘ignorant’ peoples in the colonies. The use of Latin reinforces the superiority of the learned clergy and higher educated lay-men and silenced critical voices. Wealthy Catholics dedicated the shrines, statues and other church objects supplemented with beautiful painted or carved dedications with names, dates and thanks in gothic style on prominent places.

The use of the vernacular language became again popular at the end of the 19th century as the common man was discovered as possible ‘*milites Christi*’, soldiers of Christ and his children as the Catholic pupils for the confessional schools.

The following paragraph focusses on the persons and veneration of two Josephs: the patriarch Joseph of Egypt and the foster parent of Jesus, Jozef. With these two saints, I want to give an insight into the use of words and images and prove the importance of texts as such and as icons.

The textual concepts were already in 2012 elaborately gathered in the research on the S. Jozef in Groningen. (Werf, 2012) The reason for the application of so much textual information, however, was not investigated. To give a beginning on the answer on this question, elaborate research on objects and in parish archives was necessary, accumulated with the study of secondary literature. Till now, no one has ever dropped the question about the huge amount of textual concepts in neogothic churches.

1. ‘*Ite ad Joseph, gaat tot Joseph, gehet zur Joseph*’, ‘Go to Joseph’; the multi-layered persona of Jozef.

Joseph of Egypt, vice-king and later patriarch was the prefiguration of Christ. Like Jesus, his brothers betrayed him, and during a journey for their father, they threw him, the dearest loved son in a well, dressed in a multicoloured robe, awaiting certain death. After some time he was rescued by tradesmen and brought to Egypt, where he developed himself to an important man at the court of the pharaoh. Theologist interpret the dreams he had during his stay with his family as the prediction of the arrival of the new kingdom of Christ. His colourful robe reflects not only his identity but also that of the human nature of Christ. Jesus lost this natural body on the cross like putting of a robe of many characteristics. All this makes Joseph to a predecessor of Jesus but also as an identification figure for Jozef, as the foster parent of Christ.

The words ‘*Ite ad Joseph*’ were found on multiple altars in the Rhineland produced by the Mengelberg-studios f.i. in the S. Michaël in Harlingen (1882) and the Munster in Bonn (1894). The Mengelberg-atelier was beside the workshop of Pierre Cuypers the most important atelier in this field. The words point to the statement of Pius IX in which he declares that the meaning of the words ‘Go to Joseph’ refers to the holy church under attack by various enemies and can be

equalled to ‘Go to Jozef’, the foster parent of Jesus and patron of the church. When we pray to Joseph or Jozef, that will help us to overcome the assaults on the church. (Buil 1915, 35) The assaults were f.i. the loss of the papal states and the Vatican, the struggle in Germany between Prussia and the Catholic church, the uprising in France in 1871 and all the modernities since the Enlightenment.

The eldest altar with this text we find in the S. Michaël in Harlingen, in the far North of the Netherlands. Wilhelm Mengelberg (1837-1919) carved Jozef as a freestanding statue with a tondo and the ship of the church in his left. With his right hand, he gives his blessing. The relation with Joseph we see on the wings where he is painted as vice-king of Egypt with the wheat in his hand and with King David with his attributes of the crown and harp on the other side.

On the triptych in Bonn, a painted Jozef is shown as half figure with a branch of lilies in one hand and a carpenter’s square in the other. The dedication says: ‘Ersetze ihn zum Herrn/ über sein Haus’. What means: ‘give Jozef the lead over his house’. The family of Carl Hopmann donated it to the church: ‘Zum Andenken Gatten u. Vater Carl Hopmann gestiftet von der Familie 1894 RIP’. The persona of the carpenter was an object of devotion for the young working class. These Catholic young men were often members of the ‘Josephgesellenvereine’. But Jozef is also shown as a protector of the church with the dedication.

2. ‘Non possumus’, the policy of Pius IX

The ‘Ite ad Joseph’ adoration was embedded in the policy of Pius IX known as ‘Non possumus’, (‘we can not’) officially declared in ‘Quemadmodum Deus’ (1870). It was the outcome of the loss of the papal states, the fall of the Vatican, the captivity of the Pope and the final defeat in the battle against Garibaldi. This assault on papal power led to this concept of ‘non possumus’ inspired by the story of the martyrs of Abitinae who were killed in 304 by Diocletian for worshipping on Sunday. Clemens VII used it in the conflict with Henry VIII to state that the Holy See cannot discuss with other, worldly parties and certainly cannot give in in these matters. This policy came only after Vatican II to an end in the sixties of the 20th century.

In the difficult times for the church in the 19th century the devotional companies, guilds and movements like the already mentioned ‘Josephgesellenvereine’ in Germany, ‘Kolpingvereine’ in the Rhineland and the Bernulphusguild in Utrecht, modelled after the Belgian S. Thomas and Luc guild played a dominant role in the spreading of the Catholic word and image, such as that of S. Jozef.

Wilhelm Mengelberg signed for the design of the new prototype of Jozef as presented in the S. Michaël in Harlingen. This design was copied many times in- and outside his workshops. It was a challenge to invent a devotional image because Jozef was a ‘young’ saint as patron of the Church. Jesus is still asleep. The stormy weather and other turmoil must someday wake the one and only captain. Jozef is probably the most depicted saint in 19th-century religious art together with Mary. Both figures play however a very modest role in the New Testament and their venerations were inventions of the post-Tridentine era and the second half of the 19th-century.

3. Two Jozef- shrines in Bonn: S. Marys and S. Mary Magdalen

The altar dedicated to Jozef in the Marienkirche in Bonn dated from 1893 and was a gift to the new parish by Joseph Hoffmann. We learned these facts not only by studying documents but also because Mengelberg painted an elaborate dedication on the wing with the words: 'Josephus Alexander Hoffmann hoc altare sancto Josepho posuit ut felix sit finis' ('Josephus Alexander Hoffman dedicated this altar to S. Joseph and will happily die'). And on the statue itself, we read: 'Ecce electus meus reliqui domum meam.' ('Here is my house that I have chosen'). Hoffmann was a wealthy merchant who paid the amount of 7000 Reichsmark for the object for his patron. The artist presented Jozef in the persona of the protector of the church. He is in the good company of S. Frances as patron of the poor. The strong visual depiction of the merciless dismissal of the couple in Bethlehem by the innkeeper enhances the protective role of Jozef over his wife is. The pastor characterised this scene as 'umbarmherzig abgewiesen', 'send away without mercy'. (Bonn, archives S. Marien nr. 271, p. 3) This merciless treatment had to evoke a lot of emotion on the worshippers and strengthen them in the role of devoted husbands and fathers.

A year later the neighbouring parish of S. Mary Magdalen ordered also an altar for S. Jozef by Wilhelm Mengelberg. It was realised with the assistance of his younger brother Edmund. Isabella Martini dedicated the shrine, and it was much cheaper than the one Hoffmann gave: only 2250 Reichsmark. The phrases on this altar were: 'Ite ad Joseph', 'David reviv.' and again 'Ite ad Joseph et quidquid differit facite'. (the last words mean 'he will do what is necessary'). Here again, Jozef is presented as a foster parent of Jesus and as a patron of the working man with a branch of lilies and the carpenter's square. The patriarch Joseph of Egypt and King David accompanies Jozef.

During the writing of this article a further persona of Jozef appeared in the research of the archives of the congregation of 'Zusters van het arme kindje Jesus' in Simpelveld in the surroundings of Aix-la-chapelle. The sisters moved their convent during the Kulturkampf over the German border and created an impressive atelier for religious paraments and wax figures, transported over the whole globe. They used an image of Jozef reading the Bible to Jesus, so as a teacher. This is a very unique image, that accentuates the importance of education for the sisters. Their institution can be regarded in the context of the very strong charitable movement in Aix-la-chapelle under the guidance of pastor Sartorius. Wilhelm Mengelberg was admitted to his circle during his years in Aix-la-Chapelle. The congregation worked in the colonies esp. in Indonesia, where they are still active in education and health-work. This will be a topic for further research in the near future. It links perfectly to the statement of Foucault of power as a regime of truth. (Foucault, 1991) There is a positive aspect of power in its producing reality, domains of objects and rituals of truth. In these surroundings the powerless gain education and literacy.

4. New devotion by word, icon and rituals spreads over the world

These examples may prove that the interpretation of the scenes and figures on shrines in neogothic churches was not very easy for the common believer in general and in the devotion of S. Jozef or S. Joseph in particular. Symbols and tools for understanding the devotion and above all the words were necessary to guide the Catholic in his or her devotion. These texts were

incorporated in various rituals on special days and written down in the ‘Manuale Romane’. The prescriptions for these theological and art- historical knowledge was spread by the already mentioned guilds like the Thomas and Luc- guild in Belgium, the Bernhulphusguild in the Netherlands and the ‘Verein für christliche Kunst’ with branches in different parts in Germany.

As the birthplace of the spread of the neogothic ‘word’ and icon must be regarded Great-Brittan. Here the Oxford-movement with the Irish Cardinal John Henry Newman and his colleague in England, Henry Edward Manning revived Catholicism in a very ardent way. The art- historical group of the ‘Cambridge Camden Society’, followed up by the ‘Ecclesiological Society’ would give the final impulse for the restyling of churches all over Europe in a neo-gothic way. The key figures in this movement were Viollet le Duc in France, Pugin in England, Bethune in Belgium, Reichensperger in Germany and Alberdingk Thijm in the Netherlands. The words penetrated in the lives of the Catholics using the spreading in the various magazines and newspapers and richly illustrated low-budget publications.

It should be realised that these textual conceptions in neogothic interior decorations also entered the lives of the peoples in the colonies with the mission and the plantation of churches. The use of Latin enhances even more than in the mother countries the distance between the indigenous peoples and the Catholic colonists (in the case of the Dutch they were by far in the minority compared with the Protestants). The coloniser often used his mother tongue in which the education was set up. Till now I have not come across 19th-century shrines with dedications in the vernacular. Finally, I present here an example of a Catholic colonial church as a ‘pars pro toto’.

Conclusion: The cathedral in Jakarta dedicated to the Virgin Mary again

‘Beatam Me Dicentes Onmes Generationes’ is a quotation of the text above the entrance of the cathedral in Jakarta. It means that all generations will venerate Mary as the blessed Virgin. The cathedral is marked with the traditional neogothic layout with a high altar dedicated to the celebration of the Eucharist in the main choir. Mengelberg made this shrine for the ‘Paterskerk’ (‘Friarschurch’) in the eighties of the 19th century in Groningen Together with the pulpit and various statues of saints it was transported to Jakarta in 1956.

For the right wing, atelier Ramakers produced the shrine dedicated to Mary (1915). In the left choir, the Jozef-shrine dates from the year 1922. It is completely styled in the neogothic ways, which was by then already old fashioned. It strengthens the idea that this can be the late product of the Mengelberg-studio led by the brothers Otto and Hans Mengelberg after the death of their father. The saint is symbolised with a branch of lilies and carries the Child Jesus on his arm. He is shown here as the foster parent of Jesus. The baby holds a globe as a sign of his powers and gives us his blessing. Two scenes of the life of Jozef accompanies the statue. On the one side, we see the Holy Family in the carpentry studio. Maria is spinning, and Jozef stands aside her with the child Jesus between them. The child holds a hammer, symbolising his foretold death on the cross. Such images of the Holy Family were an example for the indigenous people of Indonesia, living according to roman-catholic rites in the way the church and the ruler wanted. ‘Ite ad Joseph’, Joseph will lead you here and after death. For his guidance and that of S. Joseph of Egypt words were necessary for understanding the message. Words that were not only used for a better understanding as such but also as icons and decorations. The understanding of words was taught

by the Sisters of the poor Infant Jesus and provided the poorest of the colonies knowledge and means of communication, not only suppression and abuse of power.

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