

Monuments for catholic nuns in public space and the politics of religious memory

Autor(en): **Heijst, Annelies van / Oorschot, Ricky van**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kulturgeschichte =
Revue suisse d'histoire religieuse et culturelle = Rivista svizzera di
storia religiosa e culturale**

Band (Jahr): **106 (2012)**

PDF erstellt am: **23.05.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-390506>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

Haftungsausschluss

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

Monuments for Catholic nuns in public space and the politics of religious memory

Annelies van Heijst / Ricky van Oorschot

Dutch public space contains about 165 monuments for nuns, brothers and priests.¹ The first monuments were erected in the nineteenth century, while the most recent was unveiled on 20 April 2012 in Aarle-Rixte, dedicated to the Sisters of Charity of Tilburg and their educational activities. These monuments typify a specific genre within the range of monuments and can be viewed as both an expression of and a trigger for cultural memory. A monolithic positive narrative of gratitude and respect seemed to underpin the founding of this type of monument. Recently, however, their presence in the public domain has become contested. Rather than a sign of honour, some monuments are now viewed as a mark of shame. In reaction to the public debate on sexual abuse in the Dutch Catholic Church (a debate that was intensified by the work of the Investigation Committee led by Wim Deetman in 2011²) one monument was damaged, another was not replaced after restoration, and a third was completely removed.³

These events signal transformations in the politics of religious memory. Do they signify the end of the existing positive cultural remembrance of nuns, brothers and fathers, which used to draw on a consistent narrative? Has the chain of religious memory (which connected occurrences to real-life people with a face and a name) now broken abruptly, and for the first time?⁴ This article claims that there is indeed a rupture, but that the chain was broken earlier. In the late 1950s, Dutch nuns and brothers began to leave their charitable works in education and

¹ A national list was made by Jeanny Smeets and Annelies van Heijst in 2009.

² Wim Deetman/Nel Draijer/Pieter Kalbfleisch/Harald Merkelbach/Marit Monteiro/Gerard de Vries, *Seksueel misbruik van minderjarigen in de rooms-katholieke kerk, Part I & II*, Amsterdam 2011.

³ In 2010 the monument 'Sisters in Steel' was damaged, one monument for brothers was not replaced after the restoration of a building, and another monument was removed when it turned out that the honoured brother had perpetrated sexual abuse.

⁴ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a chain of memory*, New Brunswick NJ 2000.

healthcare and slowly to disappear. It is this long-term transformation, rather than the present-day attention to sexual abuse, which influences the current perception of Catholicism, including the cultural memory of nuns.

Reconstructing the process that led to the erection of two different monuments to nuns, one in the 1980s and one in the recent past, will demonstrate that the monuments' initiators did not share a single coherent evaluation of the nuns and the 'religious capital' of their charitable work in society.⁵ The process demonstrates how ecclesiastical and social power was exercised. The initiators made strategic use of the traditional narrative of Catholic charity and the social gratitude that it evoked, which they connected to new content.

As artefacts of cultural memory, monuments not only reflect how certain people and events are remembered, but actively install a specific kind of memory, because of the chosen pose, gestures and attributes. Here we retrace and analyse the process of designing and erecting two monuments to nuns, based upon interviews with the initiators and sources from local archives. A monument can be defined as «a cluster of intentional results, made concrete in the form of an artificial product which is visible through space and which maintains this visibility through time.»⁶ Attention will be paid to the 'intentional results' carried out by the agents of memory and to their 'artificial products', which were placed in the public domain. Of interest, too, are the underlying commemorative narratives – on Catholic faith, nuns, and the past of the two villages concerned – on which the initiators drew when envisioning their monuments. These narratives can be understood as «selective accounts with beginnings and endings, constructed to create meanings, interpret reality, organize events in time, establish coherency and continuity, construct identities, enable social action, and to construct the world and its moral and social order for its audience.»⁷ A third focus will be on the social power of agents of memory. How were the monuments financed? Whose view was decisive? What were the commemorative narratives which underpinned the erection of the monuments? Finally, we will discuss the types of cultural memory which the monuments prompt.

The politics of religious memory in Liempde: nuns in a nostalgic narrative

On 2 July 1983 in Liempde, a village in the south of the Netherlands with about five thousand inhabitants, the convent of the Sisters of Charity (SCMM) closed its doors after 95 years. The last five nuns left the village in 2003.⁸ From the very

⁵ Paul Post, Fields of the sacred: reframing identities of sacred places, in: P. Post/A. L. Molendijk/J. Kroesen (ed.), *Sacred places in modern western culture*, Louvain/Paris/Walpole 2011, 13–59, there 16.

⁶ Felipe Criado, The visibility of the archaeological record and the interpretation of social reality, in: I. Hodder/M. Shanks/A. Alexandri/V. Buchli/J. Carman/J. Last/G. Lucas (eds.), *Interpreting archaeology: Finding meaning in the past*, Oxford 1995, 194–204, there 199.

⁷ Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, Commemorating a difficult past: Yitzhak Rabin's memorials, in: *American Sociological Review*, 67 (2002), vol. 1, 30–51, there 34–35.

⁸ Inhabitants of Liempde on 1 January 2012 was 4840.

beginning of their activities in 1888, the sisters worked in a kindergarten and a primary school for girls. From 1931 on, one nun was provided to the district nursing service. In the 1970s, the educational work was transferred to lay professionals, and in 1984, the convent building was converted into a home and welfare centre for the elderly.

In July 1983 the inhabitants of Liempde said farewell to their Sisters of Charity. Appreciation and gratitude were expressed by the parish priest Petrus J. Klaasen, who prayed: «Lord our God, let us be grateful for everything the sisters in Liempde have done, in education, nursing, but especially as a binding element in our village [...] Sisters, thank you for all of this.»⁹ Two members of the local elite held a speech. The general practitioner, Roger van Laere, stressed the simplicity, humility, self-sacrifice, and obedience of the sisters, while the Mayor, Piet Smits, recalled the nuns' poverty, their silence and the strength of their faith, which had been important to the village.¹⁰

At the end of 1983, the local history group Look at Liempde («Kèk Liemt») was exploring a way to celebrate its second lustrum – the group was founded in 1974. Van Laere, the initiator and president of this foundation, presented four plans, including a project to commemorate Sister Charlotte. In this plan he referred to Petronella van Egmond (1867–1951), a nun who worked from 1891 to 1937 in the kindergarten. Generations of the inhabitants of Liempde were raised by her. Sculptor Niek van Leest was commissioned to design a bronze statue in which the elderly of Liempde would be able to recognize Sister Charlotte. Accordingly, Van Laere and the sculptor choose to portray the nun in her traditional habit (which the sisters wore from 1832 until 1956) and the children were dressed in clothes corresponding to the period 1920–1930.

On 2 December 1984 the monument was unveiled by the priest, Klaasen, and the general superior of the congregation of the sisters in the presence of the Mayor and Van Laere. The local paper highlighted the work of the nuns:

«In Sister Charlotte van Egmond, the commendable work of the Sisters of Charity of Liempde is honoured. [...] The active attitude in which (this) sister [...] is exemplified is typical of the care and compassion which the Sisters of Charity have deployed in Liempde.»¹¹

The text on the monument's pedestal read: «Zusters van Liefde (Sisters of Charity) 1888–1983» – but their place of origin, Tilburg, was missing. For some this might have been confusing, as there is another congregation named Sisters of Charity of Schijndel.¹² The elderly of Liempde knew which Sisters of Charity were meant but younger people, or those unfamiliar with the local history, would have had trouble in interpreting the name on the statue.

⁹ Archive of «Kèk Liemt»: Movie on the nuns' farewell (2 July 1983).

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Article in: Brabants centrum (6 December 1984).

¹² Their full name is: Zusters van Liefde van Jezus en Maria, Moeder van Goede Bijstand te Schijndel.



Picture 1: Monument for sister Charlotte, whose nickname was sister Slot, unveiled in Liempde in 1984. © Ricky van Oorschot.

Dr Van Laere was not merely an individual agent of memory; his activities and views fit into the context of local memory culture. He was the founder of Look at Liempde and one of the founders of The Farmers Market (*De Boere-mèrt*), a local history group which was founded in the early 1970s and named after the traditional market held in the village in the past. Every year, on the day after Easter Monday, the group organizes a pseudo historical event in the centre of the village (the most recent in 2012). The aim is to create an atmosphere of pleasure and nostalgia, so that the inhabitants can feel happy and proud to live in their village.



Picture 2: Easter Monday 2012 in Liempde: two pseudo nuns during the historical event. © Ricky van Oorschot.

On this occasion members of Back into Liempde's Past (‹Terug in den Tèd Liemt›) walk around in historical dress, for example, attired as a nun, a baker, or a clogmaker. The group was founded in 1989 and co-operates with other local history groups.

The total cost of the monument in Liempde was 15,265.42 Dutch guilders. A house-to-house collection was organized to raise the money and this brought in 2873.28 guilders. The parish board contributed a further 5000 guilders and the municipal administration added another 2000 guilders. With the help of a local bank, the two groups, The Farmers Market and Look at Liempde, contributed the remaining sum. This list of benefactors shows that Van Laere could rely on a significant commitment from both ecclesiastical and secular authorities, as well as from local institutions and the inhabitants of Liempde.

No conflicts occurred during the process of designing and erecting the monument. Was this because of Van Laere's strong social network or due to a widely-felt appreciation for the sisters? Or was it rather a shared longing for the village's past, that supported the consensus in this commemorative practice? The narratives which were expressed during the unveiling of the statue show gratitude, especially for the sisters' work, and apparently shared opinions about the virtues which make a good nun. Nonetheless, the underpinning narrative has overtones of nostalgia. The pupils of the old days, and the nuns and their religious values symbolized the village's past. They represented something good that had gone forever. Though absent from the social world, it was still there in the physical one, thanks to the monument.

*The politics of religious memory in Gemonde:
nuns in a narrative of religious revival*

Gemonde is a village seven kilometres north of Liempde, with about 2220 inhabitants.¹³ From 1863 until 1963, a community of the Sisters' Society of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph (usually: Sisters of JMJ) worked there in their kindergarten, in a primary school for girls and, from 1934 on, in a home for the elderly. In 1943, Sister Rosilda joined the convent to work as a district nurse.¹⁴ In 1951, she was succeeded by Sister Remacla Broeren. After the community closed its doors in 1965, Sister Remacla continued working in Gemonde until her retirement in 1975.

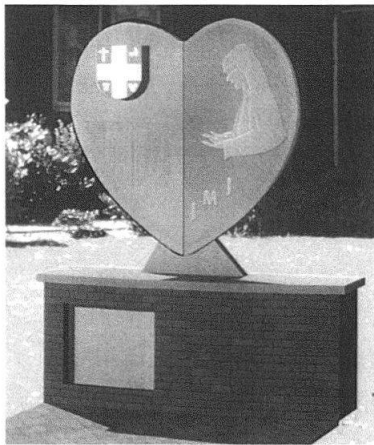
In 2006, the parish priest, Piet Goedhart, suggested organising a Week of Faith in 2007 to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the consecration of the parish church by the diocesan bishop, Arnold Diepen. A committee presided over by the parish priest pondered the example set by Jesus Christ and the Catholic values which were important for the parishioners, such as taking care of their

¹³ Ibidem.

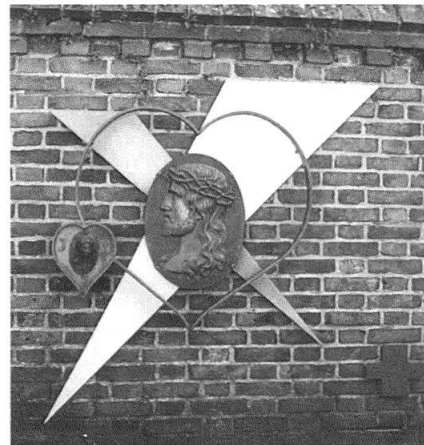
¹⁴ Annelies van Heijst/Marjet Derks/Marit Monteiro, *Ex caritate: Kloosterleven, apostolaat en nieuwe spirit van actieve vrouwelijke religieuzen in Nederland in de 19e en 20e eeuw*, Hilversum 2010, 409–410.

fellow man, humility, and service. In the committee's view, the Sisters of JMJ had excelled at imitating the example set by Christ. When the committee decided to place a monument in the front yard of the presbytery, they attributed a double meaning to it. Its main purpose would be to point to the Week of Faith, but it would also commemorate the work of the nuns.

Members of the committee contacted L.A.M. van Houtum, who had designed the local war monument, erected in 2004. Based on oral information he received, he came to believe that the new monument should commemorate one nun in particular, Sister Remacla. He designed a monument in the shape of a heart. On the right was a sister clothed in a habit and the letters JMJ; on the left he placed the former coat of arms of Gemonde, enhanced by four new symbols which evoked Sister Remacla: the cross was a symbol of her faith, the crib stood for her care for others from the cradle to the grave, a pullover recalled that she collected clothing and gave it to the needy, and a slice of bread symbolized her role in poor relief (see picture on the left hand side).



Picture 3: Van Houtum's design for the monument in Gemonde, which was not realized.
© L. Van Houtum.



Picture 4: The monument in Gemonde that was unveiled in 2007. © Ricky van Oorschot.

When this design was presented to the committee, however, the priest, Goedhart, rejected it. He thought it too pompous and expensive. Instead, he created a design of his own (see picture on the right hand side).

His monument expressed the anniversary of the church and the Week of Faith, to which end he used the memory of the sisters. He designed a heart in which a JMJ nun was the iconic merciful Christian.¹⁵ The nun was at the periphery of the image. In the centre, much larger, and highlighted by a blue and yellow background, was a portrait of Christ, centered in the heart, the symbol of love. Connected to Christ was a smaller heart. It included the letters JMJ, referring to Sister Remacla and her fellow sisters of the community. According to Goedhart, all Catholics were commanded to give to each other the love that radiates from

¹⁵ Interview with priest Goedhart by Ricky van Oorschot, on 8 November 2011.

Christ. Thus, Sister Remacla was reduced to only one of a great many nuns. Furthermore, she and her fellow sisters were represented as instrumental in passing on the great goodness of Christ.

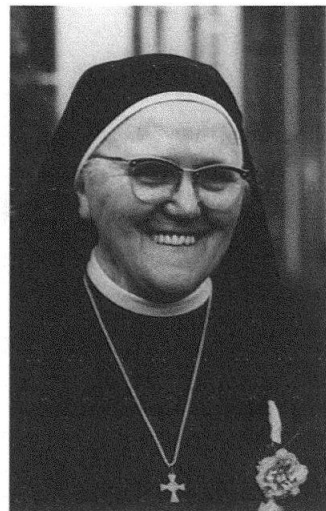
This second design was erected as a two-dimensional monument. It consisted of a medallion of Christ, which the priest had possessed since 2002, and a sculpture of a JMJ Sister cast from bronze and designed by the priest's brother. Like the first designer, the priest's brother claimed that it was Sister Remacla who was represented, but no picture of her was used. The other elements of the monument were forged and assembled by a member of the former committee, who also attached the composition to the wall between the church and presbytery. One man paid for the bronze and caster, the other for the steel and paint.

The first design reflected the memory of the older inhabitants of Gemonde, for whom Sister Remacla was a significant individual who did memorable charitable deeds. The second design mirrored the teaching of the Catholic Church and echoed a clerical view. The design aimed to revive the traditional religious hierarchy between God and humans, and to reintroduce the self-sacrificing values that run contrary to the spirit of late modernity.¹⁶

The fact that the committee did not object to the priest's design testifies to Goedhart's dominant position as the leader of the local church. When asked, the members of the committee attached a variety of meanings to the monument. The priest himself claimed that the monument did contain a portrait of Sister Remacla, in whom all sisters who lived and worked in Gemonde were honoured. Another member of the committee stated that in Sister Remacla, Sister Rosilda was portrayed, too, and through both of them the whole community of nuns. A third member denied that any sister in particular was portrayed and stated that the monument referred to the church.



Picture 5: Detail of the monument in Gemonde.
© Ricky van Oorschot.



Picture 6: Sister Remacla Broeren.

¹⁶ Edward Collins Vacek, *Love, Human and Divine*, Washington 1994.

Monuments as multiple meaning makers

The monuments in Liempde and Gemonde were erected for, or with reference to, active nuns. Monuments are centres in which political, cultural and ecclesiastical positions are intentionally deployed.¹⁷ The case studies reveal that certain agents of memory had the power to imprint their memory and scheme of values onto the monuments, which resulted in two different types of memory culture. In Liempde, the nuns were integrated into a narrative of local nostalgic cultural memory; in Gemonde, the nuns were part of a commemorative narrative of ecclesiastical and moral revival.

Agents of memory used their power and played a crucial role in shaping a commemorative practice.¹⁸ The Irish scholar on literature, Ann Rigney, has written that, where public space is scarce, the erection of a new monument is often the result of a process of negotiation and accommodation.¹⁹ However, in these case studies no tensions surfaced. This affirms the finding of Lorraine Leu, who noted that most of the time it is the elite which shapes commemoration.²⁰ Roger Chartier has argued that those who produce representations belong to the elite groups. They are people endowed with knowledge and often with power who present «a fragment of the reality in which *they* lived».²¹ This was indeed the case in the small villages of Liempde and Gemonde. There, a general practitioner and a priest, two men of the local elite, were the driving force behind the erection of a monument and its final design. It was their value systems which appeared to be decisive. Sociologist Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi has pointed at «agents of memory» who hold political, economic, social, cultural and/or symbolic power. The case studies show that religious and ecclesiastical power should be included here too, together with professional power (here medical) and financial capabilities.

Monuments are cultural objects that trigger the remembering mind. But the dynamics between «a remembering mind and a reminding object» are complex.²² People who erect monuments (and those who live close to monuments as they are part of the public space where they happen to live) are involved in an on-going process of adjusting their commemorative narratives. When the communities of nuns were no longer present in the social domain of Liempde and Gemonde, the inhabitants' recollections of the nuns began to fade, which allowed

¹⁷ Nuala Johnson, *Cast in stone: monuments, geography, and nationalism*, in: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 13 (1995), 51–65; Martin Auster, *Monument in a landscape: the question of «meaning»*, in: *Australian Geographer*, 28 (1997), vol. 2, 219–227.

¹⁸ Vinitzky-Seroussi, *Commemorating a difficult past* (cf. note 7), 30–51.

¹⁹ Ann Rigney, *Divided pasts: a premature memorial and the dynamics of collective remembrance*, in: *Memory Studies*, 1 (2008), 89–97.

²⁰ Lorraine Leu, *Spaces of remembrance & representation in the city: José Padilha's Ônibus 174*, in: *Luso-Brazilian Review*, 45 (2008), vol. 2, 177–189.

²¹ Roger Chartier, *Cultural history: Between practices and representations*, Cambridge 1988, 5.

²² Jan Assmann, *Communicative and cultural memory*, in: P. Meusbürger/M. Heffernan/E. Wunder (ed.), *Cultural memories: The geographical point of view*, Dordrecht/Heidelberg/London/New York 2011, 15–27, there 15.

room for new types of memory culture. New meanings could be attributed to the nuns of the past and the remembrance of nuns became integrated into newly woven narratives. One of these is that of local nostalgia; another is that of ecclesiastical and moral revival.

The case studies shed light on the view of Frank Ankersmit, who has emphasized that there is not a symmetrical relationship between the historical presence of our ancestors and the historical narratives about them; the historians' task is more than just describing and explaining the events of the past; in fact they take part in ongoing processes of interpretation.²³

The findings in this article stress the formative power of actors who create cultural representations (monuments), seeing them as interpreters of history as well. Although the monuments seem to represent absent nuns who are no longer there, the nuns function as a screen onto which others project their commemorative longing – whether for the village of their youth or the Church in its heyday.

Although the case studies deal with the politics of religion on a micro-scale, and cultural memory remains ambiguous rather than clear-cut, they do tell us something about the shifting place of religion in society. These monuments occupy space in the public domain. Initially, the significance of the nuns was connected to the local community in which the recollection of the Catholic Church, its societal institutions and its church workers held meaning. Now however, only the elderly and middle-aged people who were raised in that particular time remember the presence of nuns. Once the nuns were gone, the chain of religious memory was broken. Consequently, the commemorative substance (knowledge of nuns, their social and devotional activities, their way of dressing, speaking and behaving) has diminished. As a result, the monuments in Gemonde and Liempde are difficult to read for younger generations who did not know the nuns, or for non-Catholics. Remarkably, the local history groups in Liempde were founded in the 1970s and 80s, perhaps in response to the absence of groups characteristic of the past, like craftsmen, farmers and nuns.

In conclusion, it appears that there is no such thing as a single and coherent commemorative narrative on nuns and their religious and social meaning. Depending on how the public image of the Catholic Church develops in the future (influenced by the public debate on sexual abuse and corresponding changes in the memory culture) some monuments might become sites of *contestation*. It is also possible that these monuments will be appreciated as objects of art or beauty, or as symbols of religious devotion, or as identity markers of the local community or of a faith group. The two case studies demonstrate that the chain of memory was broken: honour was not bestowed on an individual nun with a distinctive name and face. It was merely a group that was evoked, and this was done in a rather functionalistic manner. The nuns were used to express some-

²³ F.R. Ankersmit, *De navel van de geschiedenis: Over interpretatie, representatie en historische realiteit*, Groningen 1990, 179–180.

thing valuable to those who erected the monument (in one case local nostalgia, in the other moral and ecclesiastical revival). In consequence, it cannot be maintained that these monuments for nuns were mere expressions of gratitude, as may be done in order to contrast this past with a present situation in which these monuments are sometimes damaged. A multiplicity of meanings is attached to nuns and the monuments for them. The politics of religious memory, therefore, complicate both the past and the present.

Monuments for Catholic nuns in public space and the politics of religious memory

Monuments for members of religious orders are present in the public space. Although they are religiously loaded sites of meaning, they are rarely researched as an integral part of today's memory culture. In 2011, when a fierce public debate on sexual abuse in the Catholic Church was raging, some of these monuments were damaged or removed. At this point they had become sites of contestation. This raises the question of the significance of this type of monument. Did the initiators create a public statement of gratitude for the religious devotion and charitable work of nuns, brothers and fathers? Or is it not that simple, especially when a monument is erected years after the members of religious orders have left the scene? Two Dutch case studies demonstrate that the politics of religion were operative when monuments to nuns were planned, designed, erected and unveiled. In the villages of Liempde and Gemonde, members of the local clerical and medical elite dominated the process. A medical doctor and a priest acted as the main agents of religious memory. They attributed new meanings to the history of the nuns, meanings that mirrored their own value schemes and their longing for the past. Based on these case studies, two types of local religious memory culture can be differentiated, that of local nostalgia, and that of moral and ecclesiastical revival. In these monuments the nuns of the past were used to convey a multiplicity of meanings.

Denkmäler für katholische Nonnen im öffentlichen Raum und die Politik religiöser Erinnerung

Denkmäler für religiöse Ordensmitglieder sind in der Öffentlichkeit präsent. Obwohl sie Orte mit religiöser Bedeutung sind, werden sie doch selten als ein integraler Bestandteil heutiger Memorialkultur untersucht. Als 2011 eine heftige öffentliche Debatte über sexuellen Missbrauch in der katholischen Kirche entflammte, wurden einige dieser Denkmäler beschädigt oder entfernt. Zu diesem Zeitpunkt wurden sie umkämpfte Stätten. Das alles wirft die Frage nach der Bedeutung dieses Typus von Denkmal auf. Gaben die Initiatoren eine öffentliche Dankbarkeitserklärung für die religiöse Devotion und das karitative Engagement der Nonnen, Brüder oder Väter ab? Oder ist es nicht so einfach, besonders dann, wenn ein Denkmal viele Jahre später errichtet wird, nachdem die Mitglieder religiöser Orden den Ort verlassen hatten? Zwei niederländische Fallbeispiele zeigen, dass die Politisierung von Religion eine Rolle spielte, als Denkmäler für Nonnen geplant, entworfen, errichtet und enthüllt wurden. In den Dörfern Liempde und Gemonde dominierten Personen aus dem Klerus und der Ärzteschaft diesen Prozess. Ein Arzt und ein Priester agierten darin als Hauptakteure religiöser Erinnerung. Sie schrieben der Geschichte der Nonnen neue Bedeutungen zu – Bedeutungen, welche ihre eigenen Werthaltungen spiegelten und ihre Sehnsucht nach der Vergangenheit. Auf diesen beiden Fällen aufbauend können zwei Typen lokaler Gedächtniskultur unterschieden werden, einerseits derjenige lokaler Nostalgie und andererseits der Typus moralischer und kirchlicher Erneuerung. In diesen Denkmälern wurden die Nonnen aus der Vergangenheit dazu herangezogen, ein Bündel von Bedeutungen zu vermitteln.

*Des mémoriaux pour nonnes catholiques sur la place publique
et la politique de la mémoire religieuse*

Des mémoriaux pour les membres d'un ordre religieux sont présents dans le domaine public. Bien que leur emplacement ait une signification religieuse, ils ne sont que rarement étudiés en tant que partie intégrante de la culture mémorielle d'aujourd'hui. Lorsqu'en 2011 des débats ont éclaté sur des abus sexuels au sein de l'Eglise catholique, certains de ces mémoriaux ont été abîmés ou ôtés. A cette occasion, on se disputait pour ces lieux. Tout ceci fait surgir la question de la signification de ce type de mémoriaux. Ceux qui sont à leur origine ont-ils déclaré publiquement leur reconnaissance pour la dévotion religieuse et l'engagement caritatif des nonnes, frères ou pères? Ou n'est-ce pas si facile, en particulier lorsqu'un mémorial est érigé de nombreuses années après que les membres d'un ordre religieux ont quitté les lieux? Deux exemples de cas aux Pays-Bas montrent que la politisation de la religion a joué un rôle lorsque des mémoriaux pour nonnes ont été planifiés, esquissés, érigés et inaugurés. Dans les villages de Liempde et Gemonde, des membres du clergé et du corps médical ont dominé ce processus. Un médecin et un prêtre ont ainsi agi en tant qu'acteurs principaux de la mémoire religieuse. Ils ont attribué de nouvelles significations à l'histoire des nonnes – des significations reflétant leurs propres valeurs et leur nostalgie du passé. Sur la base de ces deux cas, l'on peut distinguer deux types de culture mémorielle locale: d'une part, celui de la nostalgie locale et d'autre part, celui du renouvellement moral et ecclésiastique. Par ces mémoriaux, les nonnes du passé ont été utilisées pour transmettre un ensemble de significations.

Keywords – Schlüsselwörter – Mots clés

Religious monuments – religiöse Denkmäler – monuments religieux; nuns – Nonnen – nonnes; charity – Wöhlthatigkeit – charity; memory culture – Erinnerungskultur – culture de la mémoire; politics of religion – Politik der Religion – politique de la religion; nostalgia – Nostalgie – nostalgie; ecclesiastical revival – kirchliche Erneuerung – renouveau ecclésiastique.

Annelies van Heijst, Prof. Dr., School of Humanities, Tilburg University.

Ricky van Oorschot, BA, student Research Master Historical Studies, Radboud University, Nijmegen.

